



IS WHAT STUDENTS WANT WHAT THEY REALLY NEED? A VALUES VIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING ELECTIVE COURSE OFFERINGS

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ABSTRACT

Prior research on marketing curriculum design suggests that new course offerings are driven by inputs from faculty resources and interests, student demand and willingness to enroll in the course, and feedback from alumni and employers regarding the skills students need to be successful in the workplace. In the face of the rising costs of higher education and declining enrollments, it is critical that curriculum be developed that strikes a balance between the values and needs of faculty, students, and employers. The current study explores the disconnect between courses students most desire to take and courses business professionals most recommend they take for career success. Utilizing Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) and the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) as lenses to explore student choice in regard to marketing elective course selection, this study offers empirical data on courses preferred by marketing students and recommended by employers. Findings elucidate similarities and differences between these two stakeholders, which faculty making curriculum decisions will need to navigate. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, including recommendations for curriculum design and strategies for balancing the preferences of students with the recommendations and demands of potential employers.

Introduction

An ongoing challenge marketing educators face is the gap between what courses are offered in a marketing curriculum and the skills and knowledge required by employers in the field (Bacon, 2017; Ellen & Pilling, 2002; Hartley, Routon, & Torres, 2019; Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Boyt, 2002). Today this problem is exacerbated by the rapid evolution of technology and its increased use in marketing decision-making. Growth in big data and artificial intelligence (AI) are driving innovations in the areas of customer experience marketing, personalization of marketing communications, chatbots and virtual assistants, live video marketing, content marketing, and predictive analytics (Melin, 2019). While Mayo and Miciak (1991) advised universities to pursue a market-oriented approach to curriculum design “to ensure the vitality of marketing programs and secure good relationships with the business community” (p. 29), other factors may be prioritized. For example, Mayo and Miciak (1991) find that faculty resources, areas of expertise, and passions are among the strongest predictors of new coursework added to curriculum programs. Thus, it may be incumbent on the university to have a professor on staff

interested in and able to teach in these emerging areas. This involves either ensuring an existing professor is willing and able to develop these courses or hiring a new faculty member to take on the challenge. However, hiring a new faculty member is dependent upon having staffing resources available. Furthermore, often multiple schools are looking to hire individuals knowledgeable in these areas (e.g., digital marketing and analytics). Universities offering higher salaries, lower teaching loads, etc., may have an advantage in recruiting these new faculty members. In some instances, it may not be possible to hire a new faculty member either due to lack of position availability or lack of competitive recruitment ability.

Additionally, two decades of reductions in state and federal funding for higher education have increased financial pressure on universities (Pew, 2019) and pushed educators to maximize course enrollments by designing curricula that are attractive to prospective students and that will increase retention among current students as well as attract undeclared majors, encourage students to change majors and enhance recruitment of students from other institutions (Dillingham, Breffle, & Kelly, 2018). This increased financial pressure is intensified by the looming “demographic cliff” – an anticipated 15% decline

in college enrollments between 2025 and 2029 resulting from a decline in birthrates following the 2008 financial crisis (Conley, 2019; Grawe, 2018). However, the practice of catering to student desires may be at odds with what best suits the needs of prospective employers and what is best for students' career success. Often appealing to students involves providing several attractive elective course offerings to entice students. Research finds that the impact of choice on students' likelihood of selecting courses is dependent upon their level of interest in the courses available (Ackerman & Gross, 2006) and the flexibility in course delivery method, such as face-to-face or online courses (Marquis & Ghosh, 2017). However, despite efforts to design curricula that meet student preferences, Bacon (2017) argues that due to the breadth of jobs in the marketing discipline many students likely do not know what area of marketing they may pursue after graduation; thus, coursework taken may not be relevant to the skills they need to be successful in their first jobs post-graduation. This suggests that students may not know which courses are best for their career success and implies that even if those courses are offered, students may not take them in favor of more "interesting" courses.

Such course selection can lead to students not possessing the skills desired by potential employers (Aistrich, Saghafi, & Sciglimpaglia, 2006). Even though marketing students exhibit positive perceptions of their skill development upon graduation, employers find these graduates to be underqualified (Hartley, Routon, & Torres, 2018). For example, a study by The Creative Group finds that more than 70% of marketing professionals are disappointed with the technical skills new marketing graduates possess in the areas of data analytics, web and user experience design, content creation, content marketing, and digital marketing (Domeyer, 2019). Therefore, this discussion drives the following research question:

RQ1: From marketing elective course offerings, do the courses marketing students indicate they are most interested in taking differ from the courses business professionals most recommend as being necessary for success as a marketing professional?

To address this question, we turn to expectancy-value theory (EVT) and the theory of consumption values (TCV) to help us understand the values students place on certain course offerings as compared to the course offerings most recommended by employers and business professionals.

Theoretical Background

Expectancy-Value Theory

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) posits, in part,

that student achievement and achievement-related choices are determined by the student's performance expectations and subjective task values. Performance expectations are operationalized as one's perceived domain-specific abilities relative to perceived task difficulty, which is used to predict task success (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). Subjective task value is the "degree to which a particular task is able to fulfill needs, confirm central aspects of one's self-schema, facilitate reaching goals, affirm personal values, and/or elicit positive versus negative affective associations and anticipated states is assumed to influence the value a person attaches to engaging in that task," (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995, p. 216). Put simply, a student's academic choices are driven by how confident the student is in their ability to succeed at a given task and how important, useful, or enjoyable they determine the task to be. EVT has been widely used and applied in the education literature to examine various aspects of student motivation, behaviors, perceptions, and achievement. Of interest to this study is a student's *efficacy expectations*, or their individual belief that they can succeed in a given course or curriculum (Wigfield, 1994).

According to EVT, expectancies are shaped by the individual's past experiences and are linked to their self-concept (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For example, a student may feel that they are not good at taking standardized tests based on previous experience. Therefore, they may expect that they will perform poorly on the GMAT exam. This belief then negatively impacts their performance on the GMAT. Gaspard, Wille, Wormington, and Hulleman (2019) find EVT useful in predicting student choice for college majors and their level of achievement in that major. Their study followed more than 2,000 students from their last year of high school through their second year in college. Students were grouped by their expectancy-value profiles based on their perceptions of their Math and English achievement at the onset of the study. Their results showed that students with a High Math/Low English profile were significantly more likely to choose a STEM major over any other profile combination. Furthermore, the results found that the students' EV profiles predicted choice of a STEM major better than any demographic characteristic and achievement. EVT has also been shown in the literature to be predictive of academic achievement. Priess-Groben and Hyde (2017) find that students' "self-concept of ability and expectancy of success" (p. 1330) are predictive of motivation and achievement in mathematics. Likewise, Johnson, Taasoobshirazi, Clark, Howell, and Breen (2016) find that ability-attribution are predictive of higher GPAs. Therefore, it stands that when choosing marketing elective courses, students are likely to select courses in which they have a belief that they can succeed in the course and for which their subjective values are positive.

Theory of Consumption Values

Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) was developed to provide insights into why consumers make the decisions they make (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). The theory outlines five distinct consumption values of consumers: functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. Functional value describes the utility derived from a choice alternative's functional, utilitarian, or physical attributes. Social value describes the utility a choice alternative provides through its positive or negative association with one or more specific social groups. Emotional value describes the choice alternative's capacity to elicit feelings or affective states. Epistemic value is defined by a choice alternative's capacity to stimulate curiosity, exhibit novelty, or to satisfy a desire for new knowledge. Finally, conditional value is the perceived utility of a choice alternative that results from a specific situation or set of criteria that the consumer faces.

The theory posits that the consumption values are independent, and that consumer consumption choices are a function of one or more of these values in combination given a specific choice situation (Sheth et al., 1991). Stafford (1994) first used TCV as a framework for understanding values considered by students when evaluating course choices. Results showed that student choice was largely driven by a desire for variety (epistemic value) and scheduling imperatives (conditional value). Building on this research, Van Anandel, Bótas, Charles, and Huisman (2012) find that student choice is similarly driven by how interesting a course seems to be (epistemic value), by the course experience or perceived fun it might deliver (emotional value), and by students' future career goals, but "only if you are aware of what you want to be" (p. 71; functional values).

Hypothesis Development

The gap between the skills employers need and those new marketing graduates possess becomes more pronounced in the face of a globally competitive marketplace. As technology proliferates within the marketing discipline, the trend toward more analytical and interactive activities means employers will need employees with greater quantitative skills (Tengesdal & Griffin, 2014). Indeed, Sicar (2009) calls for a greater focus on quantitative literacy in business education. However, research suggests that marketing majors may be less capable relative to other business majors. Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan, and Rochford (2007) find in their analysis of student performance on standardized college entrance

exams (SAT, ACT, GMAT) from a nationwide sample that marketing majors were the lowest performers among their peers in other business majors in both the quantitative and verbal portions of the exams. Thus, according to EVT, students given a choice of which courses to take within the marketing curriculum, would likely avoid taking courses in which they expect to perform poorly or if they do not see the value of the course to their career success.

Likewise, according to TCV, marketing students would likely find greater epistemic and emotional value in courses that focus on novel marketing topics or topics that "seem fun" (e.g., fashion marketing, music marketing, graphic design, social media marketing) versus courses with greater functional value (e.g., data analytics, market research, marketing strategy, supply chain management), despite these courses being identified as areas of increasing need by employers. Thus, this discussion suggests that students' interests in course offerings may differ from those business professionals would recommend. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: Marketing elective courses students are most interested in taking will significantly differ from marketing elective courses recommended by business professionals.

Research suggests that among business students, marketing majors tend to be weaker students with regard to their quantitative skills (Bacon, 2017). Further, EVT finds that students' expectancy and subjective task beliefs about mathematics (Lauermaann, Tsai, & Eccles, 2017) or "hard" subjects (Davies & Ercolani, 2019) is predictive of their willingness to take quantitative courses or choose careers that require a high quantitative literacy. Indeed, analytical skills and quantitative analysis are among the competencies ranked by marketing practitioners as being important for career success (Honea, Castro, & Peter, 2017). Similarly, marketing practitioners highly rank customer relationship management technology training and skills (Harrison & Ajjan, 2019), technical skills and knowledge with regard to interpretation of customer data (Nunan & Di Domenico, 2019), digital marketing (Rohm, Stefl, & Saint Clair, 2019), and forecasting techniques and methods (Wilson & Spralls, 2018) as necessary for careers in marketing. These recommended courses are illustrative of courses that would provide students with functional value however, TCV suggests that students are less likely to focus on functional values when selecting courses, unless they have a clear picture of their career path (Van Anandel et al., 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Marketing students will be less likely than business professionals to value elective courses with a strong quantitative component.

As highlighted in the prior discussion, extant literature shows students are more inclined to select courses that offer epistemic and emotional value, whereas practitioners are more inclined to recommend courses that have functional value. Stafford (1994) finds that students have greater interest in taking courses that are new and/or unique; thus, given a choice, students would be less likely to choose a more traditional marketing course (e.g., business-to-business marketing) in favor of a unique course (e.g., sports marketing). Conversely, practitioners would be more inclined to recommend courses that offer functional value and build foundational marketing knowledge that will be useful in a student's future career (e.g., professional selling). In addition, in most marketing curricula foundational courses are more likely to be part of compulsory core courses, whereas students have some autonomy in selecting elective courses to complete their program. Van Andel et al. (2012) find that epistemic and emotional consumption values are directly related to students' sense of empowerment and control over their course selections. Thus, it is likely students would find greater value in courses that differed from courses that are foundational or similar to compulsory or traditional marketing courses. In this study, we define traditional courses as courses commonly offered in marketing curricula across AACSB accredited programs (Achenreiner, 2018; Borin, Metcalf, & Tietje, 2007). Consistent with extant literature, we include in this group Integrated Marketing Communications, Professional Selling, Business Marketing, Product & Brand Strategy, Services Marketing and Sales Management (Borin et al., 2007; Malhotra, 2002). Merriam-Webster defines *novel* as "new and not resembling something formerly known or used;" thus, we define novel courses as unique courses infrequently offered that focus on a marketing specialization or a narrowly focused content area within the marketing discipline. In this group we include Sustainable Marketing, Sports Marketing, Music Marketing, Fashion Marketing, Consumer Culture Theory and Graphic Design. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H3: (a) Students will value "novel" marketing elective courses more than "traditional" marketing elective courses, while (b) business professionals will value "traditional" marketing elective courses more than "novel" marketing elective courses.

Method

In the Spring of 2019, online surveys were distributed by a Midwestern regional comprehensive, AACSB accredited, university to Marketing students and business professionals. The purpose for the survey was to inform recommendations regarding future marketing elective course offerings, as well as to analyze the agreement between students and business professionals. Links to the survey were distributed via e-mail using Qualtrics. An initial e-mail was sent to all potential respondents with a follow-up e-mail sent one week later to non-respondents. The e-mail announced that the university's marketing department was in the process of revising its curriculum and solicited the recipient's feedback on current elective courses as well as on prospective elective courses that would address growing trends in business, technology, and marketing practice. E-Mail copy was modified to appropriately address the different sample pools.

Respondents were provided a list of 20 course titles along with a brief course description for each. The course list was drawn from existing elective courses in the marketing curriculum as well as prospective elective courses current marketing faculty identified as courses they would be interested in developing. Course descriptions were gleaned from course offerings at various institutions with AACSB accredited programs. The list included courses commonly taught in Marketing programs, such as Professional Sales or Integrated Marketing Communications, along with potential elective courses that are not as common in Marketing programs, such as Fashion Marketing or Marketing Analytics.

Business professionals were asked to identify which courses, from the list of proposed courses, they would most recommend students take based on the skills businesses need from new graduates. They were also asked to rate the importance to student career advancement for half of the courses on a 5-point scale (1 *not important* – 5 *very important*). Marketing students were asked to identify which courses they would be most likely to enroll in and to rate their interest in half of the proposed courses on a 5-point scale. The scaled questions served as a validity check and were limited to half of the proposed courses to minimize respondent fatigue and increase response rates.

Sample

The sample of business professionals consisted of alumni who graduated between 1999 and 2018 and business professionals at companies who regularly engage with the

College of Business Administration. A link to the survey was distributed via e-mail to 1,024 e-mails, with a follow up e-mail distributed one week later. There were 82 undeliverable e-mails and 124 completed responses, resulting in an effective response rate of 13.2%. The response rate is similar to other large-scale surveys of business professionals (e.g. Gatignon & Robertson, 1989; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). The time since college graduation ranged from 1978–2018, with the average being 9 years. Roughly 40.5% graduated college in the last 3 years, 30.5% graduated 4–10 years ago, and 29% graduated more than 10 years ago. The average time in current position is 1.7 years.

A link to the survey was also distributed to 501 marketing student e-mails with a follow up e-mail distributed one week later. There were 172 student responses in total, with 39 being incomplete and 133 responses being usable, resulting in a 26.5% student response rate.

Stimuli

The list of possible courses included 20 courses, ranging from frequently offered (e.g., Integrated Marketing Communications) to infrequently offered (e.g., Fashion Marketing) across AACSB accredited programs. Courses commonly required such as Marketing Management, Market Research and Consumer Behavior were not included in the study. The list of proposed courses is shown in Table 1.

Findings

Of the courses studied, the courses selected most often by students and business professionals are shown in Table 1.

The classes most commonly selected by students and recommended by business professionals included: Product & Brand Strategy, Digital Marketing, Graphic Design, Professional Selling, and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). Classes least likely to be selected included Neuromarketing, Applied Marketing & Advanced Research, Fashion Marketing, Qualitative Research, Music Marketing, and Comparative Marketing Systems.

Of interest in this study is not so much which courses are selected, but rather the agreement between courses business professionals recommend and courses students would likely choose. Hypothesis 1 posits that classes desired by students to prepare for a Marketing career will differ from those recommended by business professionals. Table 2 shows the degree of agreement in courses recommended by business professionals and those selected by students.

Table 1. Courses selected across respondents.

<i>Proposed Courses</i>	<i>Percent of Respondents Selecting</i>
Product & Brand Strategy	83.2
Digital Marketing	77.7
Graphic Design	68.0
Professional Selling	57.4
Integrated Marketing Communications	57.0
Consumer Culture Theory	45.7
Sales Management	44.9
Marketing Analytics	42.2
Business Marketing & Distribution	35.5
Services Marketing	33.6
Sustainable Marketing	30.1
Sports Marketing	29.3
International Marketing Strategy	28.5
Advanced Sales	28.1
Neuromarketing	27.7
Applied Marketing & Advanced Research	27.0
Fashion Marketing	26.2
Qualitative Research	23.4
Music Marketing	16.4
Comparative Marketing Systems	10.5

In support of Hypothesis 1, students' selection of courses is significantly different from business professionals' recommendation across 14 of the 20 courses (see Table 2), making curriculum decisions that satisfy both constituent groups difficult. Students and business professionals both agree that courses in Product & Brand Strategy ($\chi^2 = 2.432$, $p > .05$), Digital Marketing ($\chi^2 = 2.624$, $p > .05$), and Integrated Marketing Communications ($\chi^2 = 2.998$, $p > .05$) are highly important. Further, both groups agree that courses in Business Marketing & Distribution ($\chi^2 = 0.734$, $p > .05$), Neuromarketing ($\chi^2 = 1.180$, $p > .05$), and Sustainable Marketing ($\chi^2 = 3.624$, $p > .05$) are moderately important. Business professionals were significantly more likely to recommend courses in Professional Selling ($\chi^2 = 9.7964$, $p = .002$), Advanced Sales ($\chi^2 = 10.072$, $p = .002$) and Marketing Analytics ($\chi^2 = 21.042$, $p = .000$) than students were of selecting these courses; whereas students were significantly more likely to select courses in Graphic Design ($\chi^2 = 17.496$, $p = .000$), Consumer Culture Theory ($\chi^2 = 11.013$, $p = .000$), Sports Marketing ($\chi^2 = 77.531$, $p = .000$) and Fashion Marketing ($\chi^2 = 51.396$, $p = .000$) than business professionals were to recommend them.

Given limitations associated with nominal data, scaled questions were also used to assess students' likelihood of selecting a course and business professionals' rating of course importance for ten of the courses. The mean ratings are shown in Table 3.

The scaled data validates the findings presented previously showing that students' likelihood of taking a course, in most cases, is significantly different from professionals' ratings of course importance, further supporting Hypothesis 1. Using scaled data, student judgments varied significantly from professionals' judgments for 8 of the 10 courses, with agreement only on

Table 2. Agreement between students and professionals.

<i>Proposed Courses</i>	<i>Percent of Students Selecting Course</i>	<i>Percent of Bus Professionals Recommending</i>	<i>Degree of Difference</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Business Marketing & Distribution	33.1	38.2	5.1	0.734	1	0.392
Neuromarketing	24.8	30.9	6.1	1.180	1	0.277
Product & Brand Strategy	79.7	87.0	7.3	2.432	1	0.119
Digital Marketing	73.7	82.1	8.4	2.624	1	0.105
Integrated Marketing Communications	51.9	62.6	10.7	2.998	1	0.083
Sustainable Marketing	35.3	24.4	10.9	3.642	1	0.056
Professional Selling*	48.1	67.5	19.4	9.796	1	0.002
Advanced Sales*	19.5	37.4	17.9	10.072	1	0.002
Consumer Culture Theory*	55.6	35.0	20.6	11.013	1	0.001
Services Marketing*	24.1	43.9	19.8	11.278	1	0.001
Comparative Marketing Systems*	18.0	2.4	15.6	16.496	1	0.000
Graphic Design*	79.7	55.3	24.4	17.496	1	0.000
International Marketing Strategy*	40.6	15.4	25.2	19.836	1	0.000
Marketing Analytics*	28.6	56.9	28.3	21.042	1	0.000
Applied Marketing & Advanced Research*	14.3	40.7	26.4	22.561	1	0.000
Qualitative Research*	11.3	36.6	25.3	22.807	1	0.000
Music Marketing*	28.6	3.3	25.3	29.870	1	0.000
Sales Management*	26.3	65.0	38.7	38.731	1	0.000
Fashion Marketing*	45.1	5.7	39.4	51.396	1	0.000
Sports Marketing*	53.4	3.3	50.1	77.531	1	0.000

Table 3. Agreement between students and professionals using scaled data.

<i>Proposed Courses</i>	<i>Mean Student Likelihood Score</i>	<i>Mean Bus Professionals Importance Score</i>	<i>Degree of Difference</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Product & Brand Strategy	4.31	4.25	0.1	0.530	254	0.595
Services Marketing	3.48	3.60	0.1	-0.980	254	0.328
Neuromarketing*	3.12	3.54	0.4	-3.290	253	0.001
Graphic Design*	4.21	3.73	0.5	3.660	251	0.000
Consumer Culture Theory*	3.80	3.26	0.5	4.330	254	0.000
Music Marketing*	2.83	2.05	0.8	5.190	253	0.000
Sales Management*	3.41	4.24	0.8	-6.990	252	0.000
Qualitative Research*	2.90	3.68	0.8	-6.060	250	0.000
Advanced Sales*	3.05	3.86	0.8	-6.110	253	0.000
Fashion Marketing*	3.34	2.46	0.9	5.340	254	0.000

the Product & Brand Strategy and Services Marketing courses.

Hypothesis 2 posits that students will be less likely than business professionals to value electives with a strong quantitative component. To test this hypothesis, the researchers designated two courses as “quantitative” courses: Applied Marketing & Advanced Research and Marketing Analytics. The findings relative to both of these courses show that students are significantly less likely to select these two quantitative courses than they are recommended by business professionals, with the difference being 26.4 percentage points ($p = .000$) and 28.3 percentage points lower ($p = .000$), respectively (see Table 2). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported by these data.

Hypothesis 3 posits that students will favor novel courses over traditional courses and that business professionals will value traditional course more than novel courses (see Table 4). To test the hypothesis, independent sample t-tests were used to compare the means between groups. H3a was not supported by these data,

Table 4. Hypothesis 3 independent sample t-tests.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Traditional Course Mean</i>	<i>Novel Course Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Students	43.867	49.617	-0.511	0.621
Business Professionals	60.70	21.167	3.516	0.006

as a significant difference in student preference for traditional courses (mean = 43.87) and novel courses (mean = 49.62) was not observed. However, a significant difference was observed between business professionals’ recommendation of traditional courses (mean = 60.70) versus novel courses (mean = 21.17), thus supporting H3b. Post hoc tests compared means between students and business professionals for both traditional and novel courses. There was not a significant difference between students (mean = 43.87) and business professionals (mean = 60.70) in their choice of traditional courses. However, a significant difference was observed between student (mean = 49.62) and business professionals (mean = 21.17) choice of novel courses. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported by these data.

Post Hoc Analyses

The findings show that there are significant differences between courses students prefer and business professionals recommend. Of further interest, is whether business professionals are consistent in their recommendations based on time since college graduation. While there is agreement across professionals on many of the courses, the findings show a disconnect between those just starting out and those who have been in their careers for some time for the Advanced Sales and Graphic Design courses.

Based on a 5-point scale, business professionals graduating within the last 3 years rated the importance of having an advanced sales course significantly lower than business professionals graduating 4 or more years ago ($p = .004$), suggesting young professionals may not recognize the importance of sales until a little later in their career. Business professionals graduating within the last 3 years also rated the importance of graphic design significantly higher than business professionals graduating 10 or more years ago ($p = .007$). This could mean graphic design is more important in the early stages of one's career and less important later on. Or, it could mean that younger business professionals value graphic design more, possibly due to more involvement with digital media, than business professionals who have been in industry longer.

Discussion

Prior research on curriculum innovation suggests the inputs to new curriculum come from faculty resources and interests, student demand and willingness to enroll, and anecdotal comments from alumni and employers. In the face of rising higher education costs and declining enrollments, it is critical that curriculum offerings strike a balance between the values and needs of faculty, students, and employers.

This study examines the courses employers and students most value and the degree to which their values align. The findings across 20 proposed courses suggest there are, indeed, differences between the courses students prefer, and the courses employers recommend to best prepare students for the workforce. In support of extant research, results find that business professionals place more importance on courses that deliver functional value, including sales-related and quantitative courses, while students favor courses that provide more epistemic and emotional value, including graphic design, sports marketing, or fashion marketing. This creates a difficult situation for marketing faculty charged with curriculum decisions given the various

stakeholders' outlooks. On the one hand, faculty need to develop and offer classes that are interesting and in turn drive student demand, yet on the other hand faculty need to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for future success that is informed by industry.

This study is interesting from multiple perspectives. First the study applies Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) and Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) to student choice in regard to course selection. Second, the study provides empirical data on courses preferred by students and recommended by employers, which may be valuable for faculty charged with making curriculum decisions. It also highlights similarities and differences between these two stakeholders, which will need to be navigated. Finally, it provides curriculum design suggestions to balance the preferences of students with the recommendations and demands of potential employers.

Implications for Theory and Practice

In support of Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), the results of this study suggest that students do, in part, base their course selections on courses they expect to perform well in and believe have subjective task value. One way to address this is to introduce content areas valued by industry early in students' academic career. Students could then make stronger connections between the content and its usefulness to their careers; thus, increasing subjective task value. For example, by inviting an industry guest speaker to highlight the importance of sales management and impact on their own career trajectory, students may develop a new understanding and desire for additional knowledge. Having a practitioner reinforce the importance may increase both student interest and task value (Nielson & Cummins, 2019). Guest speakers from industry also provide a tangible bridge between concepts students learn in the classroom and application of those concepts in the working world (Fawcett & Fawcett, 2011).

Similarly, scaffolding content valued by industry across the curriculum may be helpful to progressively move students toward greater understanding and bridge learning gaps. This could be particularly relevant to improving confidence in quantitative skills. For example, if students are introduced to marketing analytics in Principles of Marketing and complete an analytics assignment in an upper-level required course (e.g., Consumer Behavior), students will have increased and iterative exposure and thus, increased confidence in their understanding. This confidence could translate into students seeking additional quantitative courses based on beliefs they can succeed in the course.

Another strategy is to minimize risk for students enrolling in courses perceived to be challenging. Students may be interested, but not confident in, quantitative courses and thus not want to risk negative impacts on their GPA. Offering quantitative electives as a pass/fail option would be one approach to address this.

In addition, this study's findings are consistent with the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV), but also supports the work of Stafford (1994) and Van Andel et al. (2012). It is evident that course offerings that have epistemic and emotional value are inherently more interesting to students than those that offer functional value. Strategies for communicating and providing the epistemic and emotional values students seek in coursework, while simultaneously delivering the functional value employers recommend for career success, should be employed.

Recent scholarship suggests that the inclusion of high-impact practices (HIPs) – experiential learning opportunities such as undergraduate research, internships, and collaborative and applied projects – in undergraduate curriculum is related to increases in achievement of learning outcomes and in students' "expectations, faculty interaction, and real-world application" (Zilvinskis, 2019, p. 687). The inclusion of HIPs has a positive impact on student learning and engagement; thus, incorporating HIPs into courses that students might otherwise perceive as less attractive would be one strategy faculty could explore (LeClair, 2018). Another option, to increase the emotional value (fun), is to build in unique and novel opportunities within courses valued by employers but not highly sought out by students. Onsite visits to local companies, client projects and competitions are just some of the ways to create a more enticing and fun learning environment (Laverie, 2006; Saber & Foster, 2011).

Attention should also be given to the role faculty play in the design and delivery of courses deemed valuable by business professionals. Several of the noted high impact practices focus on increased engagement between faculty and the business community. Yet these connections take both time and knowledge of industry partners to implement. One strategy for facilitating the inclusion of high impact practices into course designs is to develop a faculty-industry partnership database to connect faculty with guest speakers, client projects, internships, etc. Alumni and Career offices may also be helpful resources for identifying industry partners. In addition, due to the shortage of probationary/tenured marketing professionals in some content areas such as research and analytics, creative staffing solutions and/or professional development may be important long-term considerations. The use of, or

partnering with, practitioners may help a department stay current with offerings and trends in industry. Likewise, identifying professional development opportunities for existing faculty may be needed (Ferrell, 1995). Another strategy might include making "traditional" courses valued more by employers required coursework to ensure all graduates get this content. Faculty can also embed topics employers note as important into classes more desired by students. For example, in a Product and Brand Strategy class (something both students and professionals value), a focus on services marketing (something employers valued more than students) could be implemented. Another strategy would be to bundle courses that are less attractive to students with a more attractive course through the prerequisite structure, such as Integrated Marketing Communications being a prerequisite for Digital Marketing, a course that students rate highly.

Content tracks, certificates and minor programs offer another unique bundling strategy. The certificate or minor curriculum can be a strategy for attracting students to "less attractive" courses that employers rate as important. For example, a promotion certificate might include: Graphic Design (a course students highly desire), Digital Marketing (a course both students and professionals value) and Integrated Marketing Communications (a course professionals evaluate more highly than students). Advising serves an important role to help guide students toward tracks, certificates or minors, resulting in more industry-relevant course selection.

In conclusion, faculty trying to navigate the conundrum between student course preferences and employer recommendations might consider adding more HIPs to classes viewed as less attractive by students; facilitating faculty connections with industry professionals or supporting professional development to increase faculty engagement; including these courses as required program coursework; or encouraging enrollment by making these courses prerequisites to more attractive courses or including them in track, certificate or minor programs.

Limitations

First, while the findings suggest a lack of agreement between student course interests and employer course recommendations, this research should be expanded across students in other business programs, regions, and types of institutions. The sample was limited to students at one institution, with many of the business professionals also being alumni of the university. In addition, this study examined only 20 possible courses. If different courses had been studied, perhaps the findings would be different. Finally, students were asked to select courses they would

be likely to take, whereas business professionals were asked to select courses they would *recommend* taking. The findings suggest the courses students are likely to select are often not the courses business professionals recommend. If students had been asked which courses they perceive to be most important for a career in Marketing, there may be more agreement between the two segments.

While this study did not collect additional qualitative data to capture students' specific motivations for selecting one class over another, findings are consistent with prior research, especially with regard to quantitative course selection (Davies & Ercolani, 2019; Lauermann et al., 2017). Thus, future research should include a qualitative component to fully capture student thoughts and emotions at the time of course selection.

This study suggests, though, that regardless of students' perceptions of course importance, many will select courses that do not align with the recommendations of business professionals. Thus, faculty making curriculum decisions need to consider the wants and needs of all stakeholders and strategically drive students toward courses having the most value for their future and long-term satisfaction.

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