CONSUMERISM AND CONSUMER COMPLEXITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY
TEACHING AND TEACHING EVALUATION

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Background

Local, national, and international education has significantly shifted as a result of academic management in universities elevating economic and consumer interests (Gumport, 2000). Market forces have been reflected in quality assurance initiatives with students becoming customers and academic units being reorganized to reflect market demands (Johnson and Hirt, 2011). Vasilescu and colleagues (2010) refer to the corporatization of higher education, with an emphasis on business activity. The trend has included commodification of learning and knowledge wherein activities and outcomes are primarily viewed by governments in terms of economic benefits (White, 2007) and by students in terms of instrumental effects (Delucchi and Korgen, 2002). The adoption of business values for higher education (Johnson and Hirt, 2011) contrasts with the traditional enlightenment university with its values of broad scholarship and disinterested pursuit of knowledge (Rolfe, 2012). Having stakeholders who view learning as a commodity does not position learners as scholars to be developed; rather, they become entities in an industrial process (White, 2007).

Public universities are expected to improve access, enhance quality, and cut costs while embracing new information and technologies (Gumport, 2000). Organizational and individual performance metrics have emphasized efficiency, with internalized quality indicators (Morley, 2005), and indicators of customer satisfaction (Gumport, 2000). Adopting a customer-oriented perspective as a course of competitive advantage makes universities' success dependent on the delivery of satisfaction to student markets more effectively and efficiently than competitors.

Students; therefore, are a focal point for university planning, strategy setting, and marketing activities (Fry and Polonsky, 2004). Faculty members are motivated to be more productive through incentives and sanctions. In such settings, neither educators nor students are

buffered from market forces; student consumers are actively recruited through various forms of communication by universities (Sung and Yang, 2008). Similarly to consumers in general, students search for education services based on diverse emotional needs, such as power and belonging (Sung and Yang, 2008). Health science programs are competing for top students and messages conveyed to students by university administration have implications for recruitment. For example, in choosing programs, Australian medical students and American nursing students considered academic reputation as a key factor (D'Antonio et al., 2010; Krahe et al., 2010).

Consumer expectations are informed by explicit promises from universities through advertising and formal communication and implicit promises from image and reputation, including university ranking systems (Sung and Yang, 2008). Such communication elevates consumers' expectations about quality, convenience, service, and low cost (Devlin et al., 2002; White, 2007). For example, some Australian medical students were attracted to programs by subsidized housing, low transport costs, and better extracurricular activities (Krahe et al., 2010).

Despite claims that health sciences students, including nursing students, are viewed as a varied group of learners, studies of students' expectations generally incorporate discussions of implications for teaching that refer to students as 'adult learners', and describe teaching approaches that mostly respond to students' similarities rather than highlighting differences (D'Antonio et al., 2010; Davis and Schroder, 2009; Krahe et al., 2010; Pettigrew et al., 2011). In this paper, I argue there are implications for teaching and teaching evaluations arising from responding to students as a homogenous group versus a group holding a variety of consumer preferences for particular kinds of engagement with teachers.

Theoretical Perspective

Dagevos (2005) argued that consumer complexity includes socio-cultural and socio-psychological influences, with expectations shaped by personal needs, past experiences, personalities, and relationships. For example, nursing students with high social needs may have higher expectations for support and relationships with nursing faculty (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

Dagevos (2005) places consumers on continua from individualistic to collectivistic and materialistic to non-materialistic. The individualistic end of one continuum is self-oriented (instrumental satisfaction of personal needs) while the collectivistic end is other-oriented (accounting for social and physical environments). The materialistic end of the other continuum emphasizes intrinsic value (price-centered, product-oriented, high expectations) versus the non-materialistic end that emphasizes extrinsic value (emotional, ethical, or ecological considerations). The continua create four types of consumer images: calculating, traditional, unique, and responsible.

Calculating consumers are late adopters who are individualistic, rational, efficient, effective, competitive, and focused on easy and quick (Dagevos, 2005). Dagevos describes traditional consumers as conformist, conservative, cost-conscious, disciplined, and community-oriented, with late adopters' preferences for stability. Unique consumers are in the minority and value fun, creativity, status and distinction; they are impulsive and rebellious, and want product quality and high technology (Dagevos, 2005). Also in the minority are responsible consumers who are non-competitive, informed, and idealistically engaged, with an emphasis on ethics in terms of family, community, and global issues. They want balance in work and leisure (Dagevos, 2005).

Purpose

Because I argue students do not represent a uniform group of consumers, with regards to teaching expectations, the purpose of my paper is to use Dagevos' (2005) theoretical approach to categorizing consumers (calculating, traditional, unique, and responsible), to describe implications of varying student expectations for university teaching and evaluation of teaching.

Implications for University Teaching

Viewing all students as holding the same consumer expectations sets the stage for high levels of student and faculty member disaffection and anxiety (White, 2007). Assumptions about uniform consumer groups can reduce faculty members' perceptions of the richness of teaching and learning relationships and mentoring. Thus, it is important to consider expectations each consumer group can bring to teaching (See Figure 1).

Calculating consumers define efficient and effective from their standpoints. They will seek education for instrumental reasons; in other words, activities and outcomes are primarily viewed in terms of job acquisition (Delucchi and Korgen, 2002). For example, American medical students selecting pediatric subspecialties placed more value on prestige, research, and future income than students choosing general pediatrics (Newton et al., 2010). Calculating consumers will be attracted by implicit promises associated with university image and reputation (Devlin et al. 2002). Their efficiency and effectiveness focus makes them more likely to expect clear evaluation criteria, for example, marking templates. For example, 94% of accelerated baccalaureate nursing students placed high value on course and assignment grading criteria but only 49% placed high value on advice from faculty members about how to succeed (Davis and Schrader, 2009). Calculating consumers' lack of interest in innovation and trust for the person

delivering the message increases their likelihood of valuing professors who are easy markers and accommodating. They are unlikely to value innovation and creative, self-expressive aesthetic oriented teaching styles that emphasize internal motivation for learning rather than rewards and marks (Caranfa, 2010). Calculating consumers will have a better fit with professors who do not regard teaching as central to their job descriptions.

Calculating consumers are also less likely to be influenced by state of the art classroom facilities; they tend to equate service quality with efficient and effective delivery of what they need to get ahead. Leadership behavior and organizational control that limit resources for novel and high quality teaching are less likely to influence these consumers' evaluations of teaching quality. Calculating consumers may be more likely to negatively evaluate less experienced instructors (Fries and McNinch, 2003), who they can regard as less trustworthy. These students may be averse to being exposed to new ideas and challenging ways of approaching problems. Students' resistance to new ways of thinking has implications for job satisfaction for professors who value that kind of engagement with students.

Because unique consumers value originality, novelty, and innovation Dagevos (2005) describes them as a trend-setting vanguard that expects high product quality and value for money, along with originality, authenticity, sincerity, and integrity. Fun, excitement and novelty are important but they remain competitive. Unique consumers are more likely influenced by a university's explicit promises in the form of advertising and formal communication (Devlin et al. 2002).

Teaching would be evaluated positively if it fulfills unique consumers' expectations about quality, service, and low cost. They are susceptible to message delivery but are more likely

to award high ranks to enthusiastic, entertaining, accommodating and easy instructors (Delucchi, 2000). Unfortunately, students' ratings of high levels of professor enthusiasm and entertainment have not predicted learning (Williams and Ceci, 1997); they actually measure customer satisfaction rather than teaching effectiveness (Delucchi, 2000). Professors with creative, self-expressive aesthetic oriented teaching styles will meet these students' expectations about novelty in education and technology. For example, significantly more accelerated nursing students valued online chats and problem-based learning when compared with baccalaureate students who valued lectures (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Professors who regard teaching as peripheral to their job descriptions may receive negative evaluations from unique consumer students, and those who are limited by classroom facilities in terms of developing creative and high-technology teaching styles could also encounter negative evaluations from this group due to systemic factors. Unique student consumer's competitive approaches place marks at the forefront.

Traditional consumers are positioned by Dagevos (2005) as conformist, cost-conscious, disciplined, and appreciating continuity, with habits and tastes that are conservative. Their self-discipline and productivity increase the likelihood they will engage with learning rather than viewing education as a consumable commodity to be packaged and delivered by teachers in motivating ways (Delucchi and Korgen, 2002). Nonetheless, they will be likely to view grades as part of the service and indicators of their time and effort which should be rewarded (White, 2007). Viewing education as achieving economic advantage may contribute to their belief that simply putting in time is enough to guarantee high marks. For example, significantly more baccalaureate nursing students selected earning an A as more important than retaining content when compared with accelerated students (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Traditional consumers are unlikely to value experimentation or grappling with local or global issues.

Traditional student consumers' cost conscious approach makes them less likely to value frills, such as high technology learning approaches. These students' conservative attitudes may bias their teaching evaluations against instructors whom they perceive to hold different values and politics from their own (Kemmelmeyer et al. 2005). Altruistic and idealistic professors who situate themselves in a community of scholars and invest heavily in teaching may receive minimal benefit from traditional consumers' teaching evaluations and neglect other activities that are important for job security.

Responsible consumers are in the vanguard (Dagevos, 2005) because they expect high value and product quality and prize integrity and idealism. This student consumer group is more likely to view themselves as part of a community of scholars (Rolfe, 2012); however, they can challenge professors' expertise in the classroom because they see themselves as occupying the moral high ground (White, 2007). That position poses challenges when students are not fully apprised of the complexities of university systems. Experiences, such as community-based learning, fit their emphases on ethics and engaging with community and global issues, but their interest in balancing work and leisure makes commitment to long hours outside of regular class hours unlikely. As an example, medical students who selected general pediatric practice rated lifestyle balance and working with the poor as important to selecting their careers, in contrast to those selecting specialty areas (Newton et al., 2010).

There may be a good fit between professors and responsible consumers where both groups are concerned with process over product, are idealistic in terms of their engagement in the learning process, and take high levels of responsibility. Faculty members who offer cooperative, open, and outward looking teaching styles are more likely to be positively evaluated by responsible consumer students. Outward looking teaching styles emphasize global and

unfamiliar perspectives (Sinclair, 1997). Limited resources or administrative discouragement from idealistic engagement may result in limited job satisfaction for professors and students' negative perceptions of teaching. These students may be more likely to define instructors' teaching as effective when they are caring, understanding, innovative, and idealistic as opposed to easy markers (Davison and Price, 2009).

Notwithstanding claims that students are shopping for professors (Davison and Price, 2009), teaching approaches and learning facilities students view as desirable vary. In relation to students' biases against instructors anticipated to issue lower grades (Sinclair and Kunda 2000), of the four images of consumers, only responsible consumers are unlikely to be mark-oriented. In illustration, the majority, almost 85%, of American nursing students responding to one survey indicated achieving an A was important or very important (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

Despite their limitations, student evaluations of instructors have taken on great importance in university environments; they are used by universities as primary measures of teaching effectiveness (Lucal et al., 2003) and can determine rewards, e.g., retention, promotion and compensation (Titus, 2008). Easiness in marking is rarely measured on institutional evaluations so student, professor and administrative expectations for teaching scholarship can be disconnected.

While many students in these consumer groups perceive themselves primarily as customers purchasing a degree product, they vary in their emphasis on process. My analysis suggests variations in consumer thinking affect students' expectations about teaching and teaching evaluations. Thus, university administrators need to protect faculty members from poor teaching evaluations resulting from student backlash for 'low grades' and areas, such as access to

high technology, that are out of professors' control. For example, Nowell and colleagues (2010) reported instructors' grading practices and class size negatively influenced teaching evaluations. To acknowledge differing consumer expectations, teaching evaluations can be reframed to ask whether the course was demanding, performance standards were high, the workload was challenging, the grading was tough, and the student learned a lot (Delucchi and Korgen, 2002).

Teaching evaluations tend to be individually focused rather than taking structural features in the workplace into consideration (Nowell et al., 2010). By incorporating questions about student consumers' views of the acceptability of the available technology in classrooms and factors that could influence their engagement with their course work, such as lack of subsidized housing and transport that requires part-time work, more nuanced understanding of students' evaluations of teaching would be obtained.

Future research could be aimed at testing new forms of teaching evaluations, taking into account differing consumer images, so that responses could be interpreted in the context of the complexity of students' expectations. Research could also focus on determining which consumer image groups are more likely to participate in online teaching evaluations so that generally low response rates (Stowell et al., 2012) could be put into context. For example, non-response bias has been reported around grading (Adams and Umbach, 2012) and students' ratings provided online have been significantly lower than in-class ratings (Norwell et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Concerns have been raised about education becoming a consumable commodity for which teachers rather than students have primary responsibility (Regan, 2012; White, 2007). White (2007) refers to the loss of core educational issues: the importance of being exposed to

new ideas, learning new ways of approaching problems and questions, and being challenged. My analysis using Dagevos' (2005) theoretical approach suggests that university administrators and professors will be faced with significantly more challenges as students represent less homogenous consumer groups. Rather than relying on generic 'adult-oriented' teaching approaches and simplistic evaluation forms as primary measures of teaching effectiveness (Lucal et al. 2003), professors and university administrators need to rise to the challenge of confronting new consumer attitudes and designing different ways of approaching and evaluating teaching that take into account fit between consumer images and university professors as well as structural features influencing teaching.

Keywords: consumerism; education; teaching; university

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Figure 1: Consumer Images and Student Characteristics

<p>Calculating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek education for instrumental reasons - Attracted by university image and reputation - Expect clear evaluation criteria - Value easy, experienced, and accommodating professors 	<p>Unique</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expect quality, service, and low cost - Attracted by university advertising and formal communication - Prefer novelty in education and technology - Value enthusiastic, entertaining and easy professors
<p>Traditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with learning - View grades as part of the service and indicators of time and effort - Prefer tradition in education - Value professors who hold similar values -Value low frill and basic services 	<p>Responsible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel part of a community of scholars - View themselves as experts occupying moral high ground - Prefer community-based education - Value professors who offer cooperative and outward teaching styles -Value innovative and idealistic