Dialogue III

Marketing in the New Millennium: Motivational Differences Between Traditional and Non-Traditional Christian Business Students

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The authors present their study on the motivations of traditional and non-traditional Christian business students and discuss their findings.

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Abstract

An understanding of the different motivations of traditional and non-traditional business students is critical for marketing the Christian university in the new millennium.
This research used a stratified sample of undergraduate business students from three different universities with a Christian educational philosophy in an attempt to differentiate between traditional and non-traditional students as to their motivations for pursuing a college degree at a Christian college or university. Using means testing and factor analysis, it was shown that non-traditional student motivations are more career/job-related than traditional student motivations. Traditional students are more likely to be motivated by a university's spiritual focus than

non-traditional students, who put more emphasis on academic programming and convenience. A variety of factors account for a fragmented picture of the major motivational differences between the two groups.

Introduction

With the new millennium will come changes in the work force. As technological advances fuel the economy at breakneck speed, employee skills will become obsolete at an equally fast pace. More and more employees are finding themselves out of work and forced to accept lower-paying jobs or return to school to upgrade their skills (Munk, 1999). This is only one of the many reasons college professors have been witnessing the growing trend of adult students returning to the classroom. But are university administrators properly positioning their programs to capitalize on the changing demographics of the student population? An understanding of the different motivations of both traditional and non-traditional business students will be critical for the future marketing of the Christian university in the new millennium.

Most professors understand that there are differences between adult students and the traditional 18 to 24-year-old students. Non-traditional students are typically older than traditional students and possess several more years of full-time work experience. Mishler (1983) implies that these older students have a more valid perception of the benefits of a college degree. In contrast, Jaffe & Adams (1969) state that traditional students seem to be "unrealistic about the relationship between educational attainment and future employment."

Traditional students are those that can be described as being 18 to 24 years of age and who have proceeded directly to college after the conclusion of their high school education. Most traditional students have little or no full-time work experience. Non-traditional students, however, are somewhat more difficult to define since there is not a consensus as to a defining variable or set of variables. These students have been referred to as "non-traditional" (Ashe & Buell, 1998; Bers & Smith-Bandy, 1986; Borsari, 1999; Kimbrough & Weaver, 1999; McAlister, 1998; Sewall, 1986; Sinha, 1998), "older" (Chene & Sigouin, 1997; McNeely, 1991), "mature" (Blaxter, Dodd, & Tight, 1996; Challis, 1976; Gammon, 1997; Hodgins & Kelleher, 1998; Patterson & Blank, 1985; Wilson, 1997), and "adult" (Amos & White, 1998; Bee, 1995; Bowden & Merritt, 1995; Ceschi-Smith & Waldron, 1983; Cooper, 1995; Graham, 1987; Iovacchini, Hall, & Hengstler, 1985; Matthews, 1995; Mishler, 1983; Rogers, Gilleland, & Dixon, 1988; Sewall, 1984; Wagschal, 1997). The majority of previous studies regarding these students attempt to define this category of student by the age at which a student ceases to be a traditional student and becomes a non-traditional student. Previous research has set that age level at 22 (Harju & Eppler, 1997; Iovacchini et al., 1985), 23 (Graham, 1987; Richter-Antion, 1986), 24 (Devlin & Gallagher, 1982; Kinsella, 1998; Waltman, 1997), 25 (Donohue & Wong, 1997; Howard & Henney, 1998; Senter & Senter, 1998; Bowden & Merritt, 1995), 26 (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1998), 27 (Barker, Felstehausen, & Couch, 1997), 29 (Robson, Ryan, & Veltman, 1997), 30 (Gerson, 1985), and 36 years (Epstein, 1984). In the end, however, a common goal of these previous studies has been to distinguish between students who have matured (non-traditional, adult, older) in their commitment to their own education from those students who have not matured (traditional). Since individuals mature at different rates, a firm consensus of an age-only typology may never be reached. Therefore, an age-only typology has become outdated in light of the growing popularity of emerging educational delivery methods.

The advent of technology in higher educational programs has increased the usage of television, two-way interactive television, videotape, satellite television, e-mail, and the internet/intranet as alternative delivery methods (Alley, 1996; Bailey & Cotlar, 1994; Gubernick & Ebeling, 1997; Lord, 1995; Mayor, 1996; Milone, 1997; Young, 1995). These non-traditional educational delivery methods are rapidly growing in their appeal with professors.

The emergence of these technologies has revolutionized our ways of thinking and living in recent years and opened up heady prospects for creating worldwide links between universities, institutes of higher education and research, libraries, laboratories, and hospitals; disseminating knowledge; promoting

personalized teaching; education tailored to the needs of individuals and groups; the exchange of ideas and data; and the implementation of collective projects (Mayor, 1996, p. 38).

Currently, 55 percent of 2,215 four-year colleges and universities in the United States are offering some type of non-traditional educational format (Gubernick & Ebeling, 1997).

For purposes of this research, students were categorized based upon age and teaching methodology. Students classified as "traditional" were less than 25 years old and educated using the traditional classroom/lecture format. Students classified as "non-traditional" were 25 years old or older and educated using a non-traditional format (e.g., compressed programming, online, interactive television). The age limit of 25 as the break between traditional and non-traditional was chosen because it is the minimum age requirement to be admitted into the different non-traditional degree completion programs at the universities from which the sample was taken. As expected, the two variables were closely related ($t = -25.55$; $p = .000$).

Student Motivations

Popular literature has shown that the number of non-traditional students obtaining a bachelor's degree is steadily increasing (Gose, 1996). A review of literature revealed no consensus as to the motivational forces challenging non-traditional students to pursue a degree. However, several motivations were found to be significant in previous studies: to facilitate social relationships such as to make new friends (Rogers, Gilleland, & Dixon, 1988), to meet personal expectations/goals such as to achieve independence (Sewall, 1984, 1986), satisfaction of obtaining the degree (Furst & Steele, 1986; Graham, 1987; Mishler, 1983; Sewall, 1984, 1986), personal development (Backes, 1997; Ceschi-Smith & Waldron, 1983; Challis, 1976; Epstein, 1984; Furst & Steele, 1986; Graham, 1987; Rogers, Gilleland, & Dixon, 1988; Sewall, 1984, 1986), to increase self-esteem (Mishler, 1983); work/career-related goals such as to change jobs (Bers & Smith-Bandy, 1986; Mishler, 1983; Rogers, Gilleland, & Dixon, 1988; Sewall, 1984, 1986), to develop new skills (Backes, 1997), to advance in present job (Bers & Smith-Bandy, 1986; Challis, 1976; Henry, 1985; Keller, 1982; Rogers, Gilleland, & Dixon, 1988; Sewall, 1984, 1986), to receive required job training (Backes, 1997), to increase job security (Mishler, 1983), to increase income/earning power (Iovacchini, Hall, & Hengstler, 1985; Graham, 1987); social welfare reasons such as to become better informed, to become more educated (Graham, 1987), and just for the sake of learning—curiosity (Cross, 1981).

In contrast, traditional students have been motivated to seek a college degree for such reasons as to satisfy their parents, to increase their intellectual development, for vocational preparation, for economic gains, to build leadership skills, to serve society (Cohen & Guthrie, 1966), to satisfy their friends or peers, to take advantage of extracurricular activities (Spady, 1970), because of convenient academic facilities (Iovacchini, Hall, & Hengstler, 1985; Medsker & Trent, 1965), to be affiliated with the high status of the school (Meyer, 1970), and to take advantage of low tuition costs (Iovacchini, Hall, & Hengstler, 1985). An adequate summation of previous research is provided by Cross (1981) who stated, "Young people are primarily interested in education for upward mobility; adults with a good job want a better one, and those without a job want new career options" (Cross, 1981, p. 96).

However, all of these aforementioned studies used student samples taken from secular institutions in which respondents may or may not have been Christians. None of these studies attempted to identify the motivational impact of spirituality in context with other motivational bases. The Holy Bible (John 16:13, Acts 10:19-20, Acts 16:6, Romans 8:14) is quite clear that the power of the Holy Spirit to guide believers who submit to Its will is great. Thus, spirit-related motivations should be measured in context with secular motivations as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of higher education delivery methods. To this end, the following research questions were developed to guide the research project: (1) Do spiritual motivations differ between traditional and non-traditional students? (2) Do secular motivations differ between traditional and non-traditional students?

Research Design and Methodology

The objective was to measure and identify the differences

between traditional and non-traditional Christian business students' self-reported motivations for seeking a four-year college degree. A stratified sample of undergraduate business students was taken via anonymous questionnaire from three Christian universities that differed theologically (Evangelical/Free Methodist, non-denominational/charismatic, non-denominational/non-charismatic) and were geographically dispersed (midwestern, south central, and eastern United States). Each university had both a traditional business program and a non-traditional business program. The age of respondents and the educational delivery method defined the strata to ensure adequate representation of traditional and non-traditional students within the sample. Data were gathered via questionnaires. Participating students were given verbal instructions in addition to the printed instructions on the questionnaire. A total of 572 questionnaires were distributed with 18 questionnaires disqualified due to overlap, resulting in 554 usable questionnaires.

The questionnaire contained two parts. Part I was designed to obtain demographic information on age and educational delivery method. Part I also contained a qualifying question as to whether the respondent had previously completed the questionnaire. Part II was designed to measure the respondent's level of motivation to seek a college degree. Thirty-three motivational variables were developed from the literature as well as from focus groups of both traditional and non-traditional Christian business students. Motivation for each item was self-reported by the respondent using a Likert-type scale (1 = not motivating, 5 = very motivating).

The data were examined for outliers and errors and then were statistically analyzed. Measures of central tendency were calculated for both student groups, and the mean score of each motivation item was calculated. A t-test procedure was performed to determine if significant differences existed between the respondent groups for each motivational item. A factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to interpret the underlying structure of the data set.

Findings

Analysis of the 554 surveys revealed 341 traditional students and 213 non-traditional students. The traditional students reported a mean age of 19.67 years vs. 36.47 years for the non-traditional students. By calculating the mean score for each motivational item, it became possible to identify the top motivations for each respondent group (Table 1). From this, both differences and similarities begin to appear. Although both student groups exhibit job-related aspects in their motivations, traditional student motivations tended to be more

Table 1
Highest-Rated Motivations By Respondent Group

Traditional Students	
Motive	M/SD*
To prepare for a career	4.54/.83
Because of the Christian environment	4.37/.99
To become more educated	4.36/.89
To increase earning power	4.33/1.05
For the satisfaction of finishing	4.26/1.04
Leading of the Holy Spirit	4.15/1.16
To prepare for leadership	4.13/1.13
Because of the Christian faculty	4.10/1.03
To increase job prospects	4.07/1.29
Because of the Christian students	3.93/1.08
Non-Traditional Students	
Motive	M/SD*
For the satisfaction of finishing	4.51/.79
To be qualified to change jobs	4.51/.89
To develop a new skill	4.50/.89
To increase job prospects	4.48/.86
To become more educated	4.29/1.01
To increase earning power	4.28/1.11
To prepare for leadership	4.19/1.08
To advance in present job	4.09/1.26
Convenient class times	3.91/1.27
To become more informed	3.84/1.19

*Mean/Standard Deviation

Table 2

Results of T-test for the Difference Between Means of Traditional & Non-Traditional Students

Motive	M^1	M^2	P
1. Leading of the Spirit	4.15	3.26	.000*
2. Christian learning environment	4.36	3.39	.000*
3. Christian worship services available	3.68	2.08	.000*
4. Degree from Christian university	3.73	2.92	.000*
5. Fellow students are Christian	3.93	2.78	.000*
6. Faculty are Christians	4.10	3.17	.000*
7. Opportunity to make new friends	3.45	2.75	.000*
8. To achieve independence	3.52	3.33	.224
9. To be qualified to change jobs	3.53	4.50	.000*
10. To develop a new skill	3.92	4.50	.000*
11. To advance in present job	2.27	4.08	.000*
12. To increase job security	2.02	3.70	.000*
13. Dissatisfied with present job	2.33	3.04	.000*
14. To improve job prospects	4.06	4.47	.002*
15. Satisfaction of obtaining degree	4.26	4.51	.013**
16. To increase earning power	4.32	4.28	.720
17. To increase self-esteem	3.31	3.81	.001*
18. Degree is required by employer	1.66	1.54	.337
19. To prepare for community service	2.63	2.31	.036**
20. To become better informed	3.83	3.83	.969
21. To become more educated	4.35	4.29	.561
22. Just for the sake of learning	2.94	3.18	.116
23. Personal interest in subject matter	3.74	3.70	.762
24. To be with friends	2.41	1.94	.001*
25. To satisfy parents	2.47	1.53	.000*
26. To prepare for a career	4.54	3.58	.000*
27. To develop leadership qualities	4.12	4.19	.577
28. Because university is convenient	2.08	3.39	.000*
29. Because class times are convenient	1.82	3.91	.000*
30. Participate in extracurricular activities	2.50	1.66	.000*
31. Specific type of program is available	2.87	3.76	.000*
32. Tuition is affordable	2.02	2.30	.081
33. Scholarships are available	2.77	1.59	.000*

M^1 - Mean response of traditional students

M^2 - Mean response of non-traditional students

** - Significant at the .05 level

* - Significant at the .01 level

vague and career preparatory, whereas non-traditional student motivations tended to be more job-specific. In addition, traditional students tend to be more motivated by the spiritual profile of the university than non-traditional students.

Independent t-tests were used to test for significant differences between the respondent groups (Table 2). Traditional students were significantly more motivated than non-traditional students in four general areas—the spiritual aspects of the university (motives 1-6), social reasons (motives 7, 24, 25), career preparation (motives 19, 26), and the opportunity to pursue academic or athletic extracurricular activities (motive 30, 33). Non-traditional students were more significantly motivated for work/career-related reasons (motives 9-15, 17) as well as program availability (motives 28, 29, 31). Thus, enough evidence is present to reject both the hypothesis that secular motivations do not differ across student groups and the hypothesis that spiritual motivations do not differ across student groups.

A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to interpret the underlying structure of the data set. This type of analysis looks for correlations between the motivation questions and then classifies or groups together those questions which are highly correlated. The resulting classes of questions are then combined into individual factors.
This reduces the data set to a smaller number of motivational factors which are named to broadly describe the questions which make up the class.
The importance of a factor in explaining the motivations of students is determined by the amount of variability in the data that is explained by the factor (i.e., the more variability explained by a factor, the better that factor is in explaining the motivation of students). Table 3 (on following page) shows that among the non-traditional students (n = 212), the analysis identified 10 distinct factors that accounted for 74.8 percent of the variance.

The Spiritual Development factor accounted for the largest percent of the variance (22.4 percent), which shows that spiritual motivations have a significant impact on non-traditional students. This finding is significant in that while this accounts for the largest percent of

the variance, spiritual motivations were not ranked as high when looking at overall mean scores (Table 1). We believe this may be the effect of the denominational differences among the university samples. That is, while respondents from one university rated spiritual motivations highly, the others did not rate those motivations as highly. The net effect is a factor emerges, but it is not significantly large enough to skew the mean scores.

The second factor, Family/Social Structure, describes those respondents who have a dual motivation. First, they seek to fulfill their delayed obligation to their parent to complete college.

Table 3
Factor Loadings for Non-Traditional Student Motivations

Factor (Percent of variance)	Load	Factor (Percent of variance)	Load
Spiritual Development (22.4)		Second College Career (6.0)	
Christian Environment	.91	Extracurricular Activities	.74
Christian Faculty	.90	Scholarships are Available	.79
Leading of the Spirit	.75	Increase Self-Esteem	.51
Christian Students	.78		
Christian University	.85	Convenience Learner (5.1)	
Worship Services	.58	Convenient Class Times	.89
		Convenient Location	.85
Social Structure (10.9)			
Community Service	.58	Career Track Development (4.1)	
To Make New Friends	.67	To Advance in Present Job	.83
To Satisfy Parents	.85	To Increase Job Security	.91
To Be With Friends	.60		
		Skill Development (3.8)	
Job Dissatisfaction (9.7)		To Learn a New Skill	.74
To Change Jobs	.67	Develop Leadership Qualities	.57
Dissatisfied with Job	.73		
To Increase Earning Power	.78	Because it was Cheap (3.3)	
To Increase Job Prospects	.85	Tuition was Affordable	.72
		Satisfaction of Finishing	-.56
Lifetime Learner (6.5)			
To Become More Educated	.85	To be Independent (3.1)	
To Become More Informed	.80	To Become Independent	.73
Personal Interest in Subject	.59	Just for the Sake of Learning	-.51
Just for the Sake of Learning	.62		

NOTE: Variables that did not significantly load were omitted from this table.

Second, they are motivated to be with their peers in a similar situation. The third factor, Job Dissatisfaction, describes those respondents who have such a high level of dissatisfaction in their current job as to want to obtain a degree in order to be qualified to change jobs. The Lifetime Learners are represented in factor four. These respondents value education and learning just for the sake of learning. The fifth factor describes those students who for various reasons are seeking to live a second college career. These students (such as divorcees or work force reentrants) place a high value on scholarship opportunities and extracurricular activities, as well as the potential to increase their self-esteem. Respondents who pursue a degree simply because it is offered at convenient times or places are described by factor six, Convenience Learners. Factor seven, Career Track Development, describes respondents who wish to increase their job security and promote career advancement by completing a degree. Closely related to Career Track Development is factor eight, Skill Development. These respondents wish to increase their leadership abilities by increasing their skill base. Factor nine, Cost-Oriented Learners, seek to complete a degree simply because the cost is affordable. These students may be receiving tuition subsidies from family members or their employers. The final factor represents those students who seek the independence that a college degree provides, but they are negatively disposed to learning.

The results of a factor analysis performed on the responses of traditional students again showed 10 distinct factors (Table 4 on following page) accounting for 71.3 percent of the variance.

The factor accounting for the largest percentage of the variance was again Spiritual Development. An interesting finding is that, while this is the largest factor in both student groups, the mean ratings of spiritual motivations were very different across both groups. Traditional students rated spiritual motivations high, while non-traditional students rated spiritual motivations low. This may be an effect of the interuniversity sample. That is, one campus' non-traditional students rated spiritual motivations significantly higher than parallel students on other campuses. The rating was high

enough to produce a factor, but not so high as to positively skew the overall mean.

The second factor, Renaissance Individual, describes those students who put a high intrinsic value on the education itself. This value is shared by many Christian colleges and universities that emphasize a "whole person" educational philosophy. Respondents in this area place a high value on being educated and well-informed and learning for the sake of learning. The third factor, Employed Traditionals/Extrinsic, represents students who are employed and seek to gain a degree because they are extrinsically motivated by potential career advancement or job security offers from their company. A fourth factor, Value Justified, represents those respondents who, in their struggle to define themselves, are beginning to perceive the value that society places on a college degree. Thus, they perceive that if they want to be valued in society, they need to get a degree in order to get a job, earn more, and feel good about themselves. The next factor, Employed Traditionals/ Intrinsic, is similar to Employed Traditionals/Extrinsic. However, whereas Employed Traditionals/ Extrinsic are extrinsically motivated by employer enrichments, Employed Traditionals/Intrinsic seem to have a much stronger internal locus of control. They feel that if they learn a new skill, they will become more independent, thus increasing their ability to actively manage their job prospects. The sixth factor represents Local Residents. These respondents attend because of the convenience of the campus and/or the class times. The seventh factor, Academic All-Stars, represents students who are on academic scholarship because of a high GPA or a high score on the entrance exam (ACT, SAT). The eighth factor, Social Stars, represents the common social need prevalent among students. They seek the community and social structure that a college atmosphere provides in order to feel fulfilled. The ninth factor, Parent/Student Partners, are attending because of both parental influence and individual interest in their particular academic program. There is likely a high degree of interaction between the student and his/her parents as to the appropriate major, course load, and grades. The final factor, Future Leaders, had only one factor loading—to prepare for leadership. This represents those students who attend because they want to use the college experience as a pathway to maturity. In essence, they want to "grow up." They look to the structured, demanding atmosphere of the college classroom as a transformation process that increases their ability to handle life's situations.

Table 4
Factor Loadings for Traditional Student Motivations

Factor (Percent of variance)	Load	Factor (Percent of variance)	Load
Spiritual Development (17.3)		Employed/Intrinsic (5.6)	
Christian Environment	.81	To Change Jobs	.75
Christian Faculty	.79	To Achieve Independence	.51
Leading of the Spirit	.65	Develop a New Skill	.55
Christian Students	.73		
Christian University	.84	Local Residents (4.8)	
Worship Services	.74	Convenient Class Times	.65
		Convenient Location	.77
Renaissance Individual (13.3)			
Community Service	.61	Academic All-Stars (4.0)	
Become Educated	.73	Academic Program Offered	.60
Become Informed	.83	Affordable Tuition	.70
Personal Interest	.64	Scholarship Available	.74
Sake of Learning	.65		
		Social Stars (3.4)	
Employed/Extrinsic (9.5)		To Make New Friends	.85
Advance in Present Job	.87	To Be With Friends	.65
Increase Job Security	.85		
Required by Employer	.61	Parent/Student Agreement (3.2)	
		Academic Program Offered	.55
Value Justified (7.3)		Interest in Subject	.50
Increase Earning Power	.66	To Satisfy Parents	.77
Increase Job Prospects	.74		
Satisfaction of Finishing	.79	Future Leaders (3.0)	
Increase Self-Esteem	.60	Develop Leadership Qualities	.68

NOTE: Variables that did not significantly load were omitted from this table.

Discussion

This research shows that traditional and non-traditional student groups have different motives that challenge them in their pursuit of a college degree at a Christian college or university.

Further, the groups are not homogeneous. Each group contains several factors of students that have unique motivations. Therefore, it is impossible to create a specific, standardized profile of the needs of the "typical" traditional or non-traditional student. However, when speaking in generalities, the findings of Cross (1981) seem to be confirmed in that traditional students seem to be generally interested in education for career preparation or upward career mobility. In contrast, non-traditional students with a good job want to obtain a degree because of the increased job security and advancement opportunities the degree can provide. Non-traditional students without a good job are motivated toward education as a way to expand their career options. Both a means test and a factor analysis revealed that non-traditional students have a more well-defined motivational base for pursuing a degree in that they want to apply the degree to their respective career path. Thus, it becomes incumbent on the professor to adopt a pragmatic andrologogical approach when instructing non-traditional students.

Both traditional and non-traditional Christian business students seem likely to pursue a college degree for multiple reasons rather than just one. However, a Christian college or university with a one-size-fits-all marketing plan will neither maximize their marketing dollars nor effectively capitalize on the rapidly-growing non-traditional educational trend. Traditional students will best be recruited by emphasizing the spiritual focus/activities the college provides, the Christian learning atmosphere, and the applicability of the business program to a future career path. Non-traditional students, however, will best be recruited by emphasizing the spiritual value-oriented educational atmosphere in which students interact both personally and professionally. Also, non-traditional students will react favorably to a skill-building (pragmatic) educational approach that directly meets their needs. Colleges which offer non-traditional programs can further differentiate themselves from the competition by offering a convenient format for both classes (e.g., compressed, online, satellite classroom centers) and class times.

In conclusion, the new millennium will bring continual change and paradigm shifts in the field of higher education. The target market for Christian colleges and universities will become more fragmented with the passage of time. These institutions have a unique opportunity to proactively design programs and curricula that meet the needs of a changing market in order to maximize the number of people they encourage and win for Christ.

Limitations and Recommendations

The generalizability of this study may be limited due to the religious background of the schools from which the sample was taken. There is a broad diversity of denominational backgrounds within the membership of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Therefore, definitive conclusions reached about the spiritual motivations of all CCCU students would be further validated via further research that utilizes a sample that is representative of the denominational diversity of the CCCU. Also, sex of the respondent, as a demographic variable, was neither gathered nor tested. Therefore, differences based upon the sex of respondents cannot be determined.

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