

Dialogue III

A Response to “Marketing in the New Millennium: Motivational Differences Between Traditional and Non-Traditional Christian Business Students”

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The research of Andrews, Roller, and Baker has provided a very insightful profile of the different motivations of traditional and non-traditional students at Christian colleges. Their findings conclude that “Traditional students were significantly more motivated than non-traditional students in four general areas—the spiritual aspects of the university, social reasons, career preparation, and the opportunity to pursue academic or athletic extracurricular activities. Non-traditional students were more significantly motivated for work/career-related reasons as well as program availability.”

Surely these insights will assist discerning administrators in developing academic programs which will meet the needs of these two student groups more effectively. However, with regard to marketing programs, one should exercise a measure of

caution since it is unlikely that the student profiles are independent of existing marketing programs. Rather, it is likely that differences in current programs to recruit traditional and non-traditional students account for some of the more interesting motivational differences. In particular I would argue that traditional students are more concerned about the “spiritual aspects of the university” than non-traditional students because of intentional differences in the selection/self-selection processes used for the two groups.

Many of the differences noted in the study can be reasonably attributed to underlying demographic and community factors. For example, young people resident on campus could be expected to be much more concerned about social structure and extracurricular activities than older commuting students who are resident in off-campus family

structures and existing non-academic communities. Further, as recognized in the paper, older students with existing careers would be expected to have rather specific concrete goals with regard to skill acquisition and career enhancement as compared to younger students with limited work experience.

However, the significantly greater importance of Christian values and community to traditional students can only be explained by differential marketing programs.

Most Christian universities and colleges work hard to recruit traditional students who appreciate the Christian distinctives of the school and who are most likely to benefit from them. Regional/national advertising spelling out the Christian distinctives of the school is targeted to the Christian community using Christian media, denominational networks, visits to Christian high schools, and use of selective mailing lists. Contrariwise, non-traditional students are of necessity drawn from a limited pool of local prospects, and the marketing approach is largely secularized to attract the broader range of students required to meet enrollment objectives.

Statements of faith, community covenants, and mandatory chapel frequently required of traditional students are often waived for non-traditional students. Hence, different selection criteria and more Christian vs. more secular programmatic postures leading to differential self-selection would seem to account for the differences in spiritual motives.

In conclusion then, I would argue that one must carefully distinguish between cause and effect. Differential marketing programs *cause* many of the differences noted in the Andrews, Roller, and Baker paper. Hence, one should not use the differences in motives to justify differential marketing programs which have already produced the differences in spiritual motives. In fact, I suspect that most Christian schools with non-traditional programs have intentionally used a multi-segment approach with different marketing mixes because they have concluded that the pool of non-traditional students who would respond positively to the Christian distinctives of the school lacks the substantiality required to make the programs successful. Andrews, Roller, and Baker are correct when they argue against a “one-size-fits-all marketing plan”

based upon those differential motives which result from the underlying demographic, community, and life experience factors which distinguish traditional and non-traditional student groups. However, it is hard to see how differences in Christian commitment could be inherent traits of the two groups except through the discrimination of differential marketing filters. The authors seem to have ignored this point.

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