

# Marketing Climate: New Considerations for Target Marketing in Graduate Student Enrollment Management

## Introduction

Lewis and Hawes (1997) discuss target marketing strategies of differentiated, concentrated or orchestrated marketing in their article “Student Marketing Strategies for Universities.” While we agree with some of the suggested strategies and reasons behind them, our perspective as faculty teaching in a graduate education program offers some different nuances to ponder in the realm of student college selection and choice, which ultimately recommend that universities consider marketing in a broader sense than the current literature would suggest (Cavanagh 2002, Rindfleisch 2003). Our intention in expanding this conversation is to offer a small, but critical component to their suggested model. This component offers an opportunity to include issues related to climate (such as graduate student support) outlined in more detail throughout this discussion.

As we begin to respond to Lewis and Hawes’s (1997) article, it is important to address why education faculty should be involved in a marketing conversation. The simple answer relates to the fact that our role in teaching and supporting student success begins with student selection, and, as Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) state, selection is simply “information gathering and information-processing” (p. 153). The more complex answer is grounded in a multi-level response that views all of the various departments within the institution as interdependent on each other’s observations and experiences, with the ultimate goal of supporting student access, persistence and success.

Certainly the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) concept and framework adopted by some public and private institutions of higher education that “have integrated customers into their IMC

planning and development process” (Schultz 1998, p. 20) is worthy of further consideration. It broadens our understanding of best practices that help “to integrate marketing and communication systems, not just functions” (p. 20). The advances in electronic marketing have shown us that faculty in various disciplines cannot afford to be outside of these marketing activities. In accepting this broader responsibility, we do not see a marketing discussion as a “challenge to intellectual integrity” (Lewis and Hawes 1997, p. 15). To the contrary, those of us engaged in leadership education are compelled to address dimensions of access, social justice and economic realities. We have chosen to define this intersection of access, social justice and economics as Climate-ASE.

Acknowledging and engaging this intersection is integral to the students who enter our institutions of learning. Indeed, ignoring

Figure 1. Lewison and Hawes Model (2007)

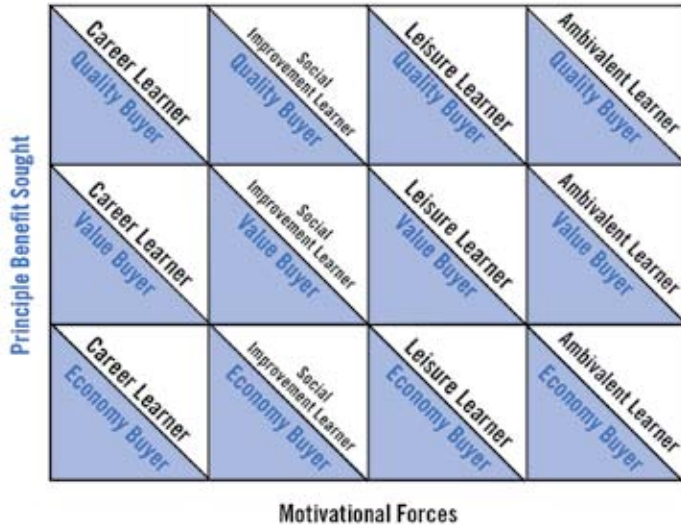
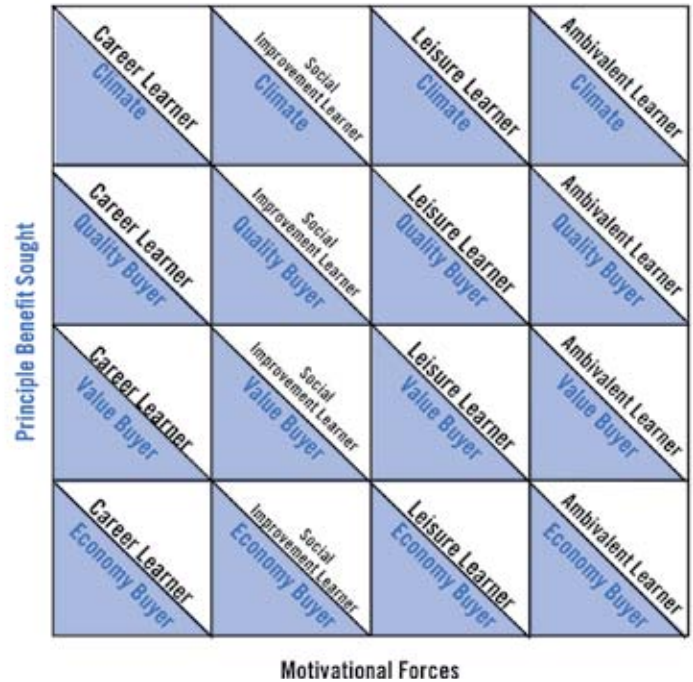


Figure 2. Climate-ASE Model



Climate-ASE calls into question our capacity to fulfill our academic missions and responsibilities. We posit that all faculty and administrators in postsecondary institutions function in a leadership role, whether or not it is explicit. Within this framework and ideology, we propose an extension to the Lewison and Hawes (1997) model (see Figure 1). This extension is grounded in the Climate-ASE model (see Figure 2), which has the potential to build bridges that span both the marketing and academic discourse and ultimately impact sustainability for both.

### Discussion

The current model developed by Lewison and Hawes (1997) is a three by four matrix. The horizontal axis represents the motivational forces that impact the behavior of consumers defined as: career learner, socio-improvement learner and ambivalent learner. The vertical axis is characterized by the principal benefit sought and defines the buyer as one of quality, value or economy.

As mentioned earlier, we appreciate the direction they propose in terms of understanding the limitations of the mass marketing approach, and their desire to move the discourse towards a more meaningful and cost effective approach. In this context, their model is sufficient; however, upon analysis and reflection, we are compelled to suggest an extension to the current matrix.

Our extension adds a fourth principle benefit sought, labeled Climate-ASE or the intersection of access, social justice and economics. We have maintained the integrity of the remainder of

the matrix. In developing this model, we recommend, as Lewison and Hawes (1997) suggest, that it is imperative to consider specific populations of students when marketing plans are developed. Those who fall into the fourth principle benefit sought as Climate-ASE are the key individuals who have informed our model.

Scholars write about how student language can be a window into feelings and experiences, saying, “Individuals in specific social contexts act on community feelings, attitudes and perceptions through language and other symbolic forms that researchers can pursue” (Kretchmar and Memory 2010, p. 145). Based on this premise, we find the context for choosing Climate as our component descriptor in a comment from one of our current doctoral students. “It’s [coming to a particular institution] just like entering a room that is too hot or too cold and then entering one that is just right, and you say—yes, I belong here.” For these students, it goes beyond institutional fit. It encompasses an environment where the student can participate in higher education in a way that honors their life choices and existing commitments.

While in the role of student, non-traditional students also function as citizens, employees and oftentimes spouses and/or parents (Spellman 2007). Classmates in similar roles and with similar responsibilities serve as important support systems, and

environments that allow these students to connect help students feel a sense of loyalty to peers and their institutions. Peer support and community, although not thoroughly researched in education, is an area of importance for these students (Gardner 2009, Kasworm 2010), supporting our extension of the Hawes model with the addition of fourth principal benefit sought.

### Access

Although the intersection and intertwining of access, social justice and climate (Climate ASE) is the critical discussion presently, looking individually at the elements of Climate ASE, provides an important grounding to making sense of the extension of the model. In terms of access, there are many factors that can inhibit the ability of a student to pursue graduate education. They include caps, which limit the number of students to a particular college, school or program, grade point average, standardized test score requirements, course scheduling (Spellman 2007), and residency requirements.

From taking standardized tests and completing admission paperwork to impossible scheduling demands, many students feel they cannot meet the rigors of graduate work. Although testing does not appear to provide an accurate measure of ability (Croizet and Dutrévis 2004) and certain populations routinely do not score well on standardized tests (Ruha 2004), many programs continue to require them.

Even if a student is successful on a standardized test, schools and departments requiring graduate residency requirements (often characterized by three semesters of full-time graduate enrollment) can unintentionally dissuade potential students with scheduling demands. Similarly, when programs offer courses only during daytime hours, they discourage applicants with family responsibilities. Even if assistantships or moderate financial aid is available, most full-time students with families to support (especially single parents) find moderate stipends insufficient.

### Social Justice

Social justice is a complex dialogue beyond the scope of thorough investigation for this paper, but for our purposes, social justice can be viewed as grounded in the principle of inclusion and equity. Through the social justice lens, perceived power and influence (as well as real structures) can impose student limitations. For many students, the proper institutional “fit” is found at the institution where students sense inclusion (rather than just being told they are included). Brennan and Naidoo (2008) note, “While there is

extensive research literature on social justice and equity in the social sciences, in general this is not fully engaged with by higher education researchers” (p. 298). Enrollment management may be the area in which it is most appropriately discussed, considering the current political agenda and changing sources of financing.

### Economics

Our society tends to focus on the visible economic factors as hindrances to educational access and success. Less visible but equally powerful is lack of social capital (see Bourdieu 1996). In our practice, we have come to recognize it as a powerful factor in gate-keeping, particularly for first-generation graduate students. These students frequently reveal a silent lack of confidence that has daily repercussions. Their sense of self is skewed by their perception that they do not belong in the graduate environment. Climate-ASE excavates this paradox of learner-impostor, broadening the marketing lens.

### Student Support

The ability of proprietary institutions to remove these gates and barriers, while maintaining academic integrity, has made this sector economically successful in the last decade. The challenge for these institutions is to not take advantage of second-chance learners. Hopefully, regional and/or other accreditation processes will provide significant monitoring vehicles; however, these institutions must be mindful, as they balance integrity and tuition dollars, that accreditation bodies are not final ethical guides.

As institutions both nationally and internationally, proprietary and non-profit struggle with decreasing government support or shifts in funding sources, issues of ethicality and academic integrity cannot be pushed aside (Guthrie and Newman 2007). With thoughtful intention and strong leadership, institutions can make ethical decisions even in the difficult financial times (Murphy and Gibbs 2009).

Population-specific supports are essential success-levers. Supports should not erroneously be taken for handholding and a heightened sense of the workload necessary for success must remain. Institutions that deprive students of these supports may close the gate, but certain students may not even recognize the gate. In the access discussion, students may perceive the cause as beyond their control; but in this situation, the students are more likely to attribute failure to themselves.

“Unfortunately, few institutions seem willing to make the obvious point that their marketplace of ideas is enriched by the diversity of

the people at their institution and to link that educational outcome with the larger ongoing work of our country in terms of race relations and preparing for an ever more global economy” (Hartley 2008, p. 687). Even institutions that aggressively recruit a diverse student body can fall short of truly embracing the above concept when the concern is enrolling students, rather than student success won by helping students reach beyond their perceived potential.

For those facing issues of access and social justice, purchasing only for quality, value or economy (Lewison and Hawes 1997) is insufficient. These second-chance learners value climate (Climate-ASE) in spite of high cost because for many, it is their only path to postsecondary education and the successes and opportunities it promises. This is shown in the analysis of Gladioux, King and Corrigan (2005) who, in their 1999–2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, discovered federal student aid use is significantly higher at proprietary institutions than it is at nonprofit colleges.

Our examination’s population rose above the usual financial concerns that burden the second-chance learner, those unsuccessful in a previous postsecondary attempt, single parents and low-income earners. These concerns, which manifest themselves during student advising, are often barriers to continuing education; however, when extensive supports are in place, the financial realities fade in importance compared to the privileges associated with earning the degree.



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## Concluding Thoughts

Lewison and Hawes (2007) likely intended readers to consider the target marketing approaches in light of traditional undergraduate populations. Our recommended extension of their model grew out of understanding our particular population, graduate education students. Further research investigating undergraduate populations in light of our proposed extension could contribute to the research in this area. Attention to climate has dual benefit potential; it can increase the number of institutional enrollments and improve student success and retention. The cycle begins and ends with the recognition of the interdependence between enrollment management, and student and academic affairs. We in academic affairs continue to be involved in this important conversation and we hope that others will join us.

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