Tracking the Career Paths of Marketing and Business Education Graduates

By Carol Mooney, Urs Haltinner and Debbie Stanislawski

Marketing and business education faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout) recently conducted a longitudinal study, spanning the entire 35 years of the program’s existence, describing and analyzing its graduates’ career paths. The UW-Stout Marketing and Business Education (MBE) program originated as a distributive education teacher education program. The program transitioned through the years to Marketing and Distributive Education, Marketing Education, and finally to Marketing and Business Education in the year 2003, reflecting an optional business education certification.

Respondents of this study all completed the program prior to its current program name. It should be pointed out that all of the research study’s respondents elected to pursue a program preparing them to teach distributive and/or marketing education. Respondents who indicate teaching business education either graduated from the program since 1997 or earned their certifications after initial licensure through UW-Stout or another institution.

Marketing and business education remain significant content areas offered in United States comprehensive public schools (Stone, Kowski, & Alfeld, 2004). Marketing and business educators tend to see themselves as serving the learning community by bringing rigor and relevance to learners by teaching academic and industry knowledge, skills and dispositions through a business-like teaching and learning philosophy (Kazis, 2005). Their teaching strategies are generally hands-on and contextual based.

Within the current political, economic, and social environment, attracting and retaining quality marketing and business educators is a critical issue (Ruhland & Bremer, 2003). In addition, it is projected that retirements will add significant pressure to staffing programs with highly qualified career and technical education teachers (Szuminski, 2002).

In an effort to design teacher education programs to meet the impending teacher demand, teacher preparation programs must understand their graduates’ career paths and motivations.

This research study sought to conduct a longitudinal study defining career paths of UW-Stout MBE program graduates and to provide the UW-Stout MBE program faculty with insight into its graduates career journeys.

Since the program’s inception, one- and three-year graduate follow-up studies have been conducted on a regular basis. While these studies go a long way toward continuous improvement of the program’s design, curriculum and effectiveness at transitioning graduates into productive life-work contexts, they do not provide adequate data relative to how the program served its graduates beyond their initial employment. Therefore, the study will contribute to the knowledge base needed by the program director and faculty in their quest to better prepare graduates for their careers and gauge the program’s impact on its graduates over time.

Methods and Procedures

Data was collected through a questionnaire that utilized a combination of Likert-type responses, open-ended questions with defined response criteria, and a chronological career journey chart that required respondents to map their individual career journeys. In addition, demographic responses were requested in an effort to enhance data analysis for the purpose of reporting findings by similar and dissimilar characteristics.

Respondents were mailed a program newsletter that included an invitation to take part in the research study. The newsletter served several purposes. It encouraged respondents to reflect on their undergraduate program, provided them with an update on the program’s current status, explained the research project, invited them to participate in the study, and welcomed them to receive a summary of the research findings.

Demographic Profile

Responses were received in nearly equal distributions from every year in each decade of the program’s existence (1970 through 2004). The researchers determined that all 882 program graduates would be surveyed. Once the database was purged of deceased candidates and those that the UW-Stout Alumni Association had not been able to reach, 750 subjects remained in the survey population. Seven hundred and fifty surveys were sent, of which 21 were determined undeliverable. Overall, 205 valid responses were received by the predeterminated cutoff date, July 15, 2005. This yielded a 28 percent response rate. Of the respondents, 53.2 percent were male, and 46.8 percent were female.

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sin Technical College System. Typically, 25-30 percent of the enrollment in the MBE program has been up of transfer students. Demographic data of the survey respondents revealed an even greater percentage of technical college transfers. Fifty-one percent of the respondents indicated that they transferred to UW-Stout with an associate degree. Of those, 89 percent transferred in from a technical college and 12 percent from a community college. The most commonly transferred degree reported was marketing—32 percent of the 205 respondents.

The MBE program has traditionally served Wisconsin and Minnesota students, given its close proximity to major population centers in Minnesota. It was interesting to find that 65.4 percent of the program graduates reported working in Wisconsin and 18.5 percent in Minnesota. The balance of the respondents were employed and resided in 19 states throughout the country.

The Findings

Education or Business Careers: When asked about their current employment assignment, 55 percent of the respondents reported that they were currently employed in education, while 44 percent were employed in business and industry. Of those respondents indicating that they were teaching, 18 percent held administrative positions (school-to-work coordinator, vocational education coordinator, principal or district administrator/superintendent), 4 percent reported being school counselors, and 6 percent of those teaching also reported a concurrent involvement in a business venture or owning a business. Twenty-eight percent considered themselves marketing teachers, 12 percent as business teachers, and 14 percent as both business and marketing teachers.

Career Journey: Respondents were asked to provide a description of their career journeys since graduating from UW-Stout’s MBE program. Of the respondents, 54 percent had moved between education and business during their careers. A little less than half of the respondents—46 percent—had not moved between education and business careers.

Of the respondents, 28 percent indicated they had been teaching marketing and business education since graduating from UW-Stout. An equal percentage of 28 indicated they had been employed in business since graduating. About 13 percent indicated they had moved from teaching to business, and 9 percent indicated that they had moved from business to teaching. Other respondents indicated movement between teaching, business and other related positions throughout their career histories.

Respondents were asked to cite the major reason for changing career direction. More than 15 percent indicated earning potential as the major reason for changing career direction. Other
reasons for changing careers included family and life circumstances, needing a new challenge, declining enrollment and administrative decisions.

Of the respondents employed in business-related occupations, 24 percent described their positions as primarily marketing, 11 percent cited business administration, 18 percent cited management, and 10 percent cited training- and development-related positions. Almost 15 percent of the respondents identified themselves as entrepreneurs and business owners. The remainder of the respondents cited positions in production/manufacturing and consulting.

**Further Education:** More than 72 percent of the respondents indicated that they had furthered their education beyond their undergraduate degrees. Forty-two percent had earned master’s degrees, while 14 percent were currently enrolled in master’s degree programs. A master’s degree in training and development was the most popular degree attained by almost 40 percent of the respondents who had completed a graduate program. Thirty-three percent of the respondents who had earned a master’s degree did so in education. Other named degrees included business and “other.”

Degree-granting institutions identified by those having earned graduate degrees revealed that 40 percent had earned their master’s degrees from public/state universities, and 43 percent had earned their master’s degrees from private institutions. Fifty-five percent of those earning a graduate degree had enrolled in a traditional educational program, while 12 percent had enrolled in a program delivered online. Twenty percent of those earning master’s degrees had enrolled in a program that was delivered utilizing both traditional and online course delivery.

Further data revealed that 2 percent of the respondents had earned education specialist degrees, and four of the respondents had earned doctoral degrees. All but one had earned their degrees from public/state universities.

The most common reason for enrolling in a program and attaining a graduate degree was for personal growth and development—31 percent of the respondents. This was followed by employment/licensure requirements by 17 percent of the respondents. Other reasons for attaining a graduate degree included additional and further certifications.

**Conclusions**

UW-Stout’s MBE program enrollment has been gender balanced throughout its history, and more than 50 percent have articulated associate degrees from technical colleges and earned bachelor of science degrees. Hence, the technical college system is a key program stakeholder and provider of student enrollment.

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The program has been recognized as providing graduates with tremendous career flexibility, and initial employment rates have been consistently high. Graduates of the MBE program at UW-Stout have pursued education and business positions in almost equal numbers: approximately 50 percent of graduates are employed in teaching positions and about 50 percent in business and industry.

Graduates are able to move in and out of education and business-related careers. A significant number of graduates begin their career in business and move into education later. Offering both marketing and business education certification has proved to be essential for many graduates to become employed in the public school setting. A significant percentage of graduates are employed in education-related positions that include training, counseling, educational leadership and private for-profit educational ventures. About 18 percent of the graduates are serving school districts in leadership and administrative positions.

The number-one reason for changing careers indicated by the respondents was earning potential. Marketing and business education graduates utilize their professional expertise to pursue careers in industry that allow for greater earning potential than traditional education careers. A significant number of graduates own their own businesses.

Finally, an impressive number of UW-Stout's MBE graduates pursue master's degrees. More than 70 percent of the respondents indicated enrollment in graduate studies, and 42 percent of the respondents had earned graduate degrees.

Implications for the Profession
Graduates of the MBE program at UW-Stout are successful in obtaining meaningful employment in education and in industry. Many continue their education to prepare for leadership positions in education and in industry. It is likely that other career and technical education (CTE) graduates experience similar career opportunities. Leaders in CTE need to realize that teacher education graduates have opportunities in both arenas, thereby affecting teacher supply. Recruiting students who share a passion for subject matter, in this case marketing and business, with a desire to teach will be essential in filling vacant positions in the public school setting.

From a marketing perspective, teacher education programs have to devise strategies that attract quality candidates through insights gained about graduates' career paths. Program leaders can devise promotional strategies and curricula that are consistent with becoming a marketing and business educator.

In addition, the technical college system is a significant feeder for CTE teacher education programs. Developing articulation agreements to ease transition between the postsecondary level and university systems have proven to be an effective means to encourage transfer. Marketing and business education teacher preparation programs have an opportunity to leverage these relationships and potentially work toward early identification of prospective marketing and business teacher candidates.

When designing teacher education programs, leaders need to be attentive to the needs of their program's graduates. It should be acknowledged that these individuals are uniquely credentialed with technical expertise and pedagogical skills.

Understanding the utility sought or found by these program graduates provides them with options to trade off teaching for business and industry careers as well as cycle between teaching and business and industry employment. In doing so, the future of career and technical education can be assured of adequately prepared candidates for teaching.

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