Perceptions of administrative and academic support

Services by StudentPerceptions of Students in MSA Courses

" Perceptions of Administrative and Academic Support Services by Students Taking Courses in the Master of Science in Administration Program"

Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of empirical data relating to the perceptions of students currently enrolled in courses offered in the Masters of Science in Administration (MSA) program at Saint Michael's College (SMC) in Winooski, Vermont. A survey was designed and administered to 95 students in an effort to capture their perception of the quality of academic and administrative support services available to graduate students. Specific attention was given to the areas of enrollment services, financial services, library services and advising. The subjects generally rated these services somewhere between " average" and " excellent". Comments written-in by subjects provide information that can be used to improve the students' experience with various MSA Program services.

Perceptions of Administrative and Academic Support Services by Students Taking Courses in the Master of Science in Administration Program at Saint Michaels College

Customer perception surveys are a means of measuring how customers rate their experience with products or services. The result is a quantitative measure of their levels of satisfaction. By repeating the survey at regular intervals, it can be determined whether customers' perceptions are improving or deteriorating. Based on this information, changes can be made

in services and marketing strategies. By later repeating the study, it can be determined how effective the changes have been in improving how a customer rates their experience.

In an interview with Paul Olsen, Associate Director, Master of Science in Administration Program, we learned that the MSA program has not conducted a survey of students enrolled in the program to identify levels of satisfaction with services and programs offered. There has been one formal survey of alumni, completed in the spring of 1996 by SMC undergraduates in a Research Methods class (See Appendix D). This survey was conducted to gather information pertaining to overall satisfaction with the graduate program, whether the alumni's goals and objectives had been met, and demographic data on program alumni.

Our team believes that a survey of students currently taking MSA program course could provide information that would be tremendously helpful in assisting the college to assess the efficiency and quality of its services. Our operating premise is that an individual's

first experience with an organization has a direct impact on their long-term impressions and overall senses of connectedness. Therefore, as part of our survey we chose to investigate the experience graduate students have during their first interactions with Saint Michael's College, specifically logistics such as enrolling, scheduling, paying tuition, and obtaining parking permits and student ID cards. Further, we wished to investigate the accessibility, relevance, and usefulness of services such as the library, information technology, and academic advising that are likely to be

encountered by the student over the length of their time as a student in the MSA Program.

Method

Participants

Participants were 95 students enrolled in 10 of the 18 GSA (Graduate Studies in Administration) courses in session during the last week of March and first week of April 2002.

Materials

The tool used was a three-page survey consisting of 7 sections and containing 25 questions (see Appendix C). Sections contained the following categorical headings, " Demographic Information", " Course/Program Choice Information", " Enrollment Services", " Financial Issues", " Library Services", " Advisory Issues", and " Feedback".

Design and Procedure

In designing the survey, the first step was to identify the type of information we were seeking, from whom would it be obtained, how would it be gathered, and finally, how would it be most easily analyzed. Our next step was to decide on specific questions. Members of our team interviewed fellow graduate students, recent alumni, and faculty/advisors, in person and via email to assist us in identifying the program as services most likely to be experienced by the majority of students taking even a single MSA course.

A survey was designed which incorporates a variety of formats, including open-ended questions; close ended questions, and a five-point scale.

A schedule of class schedules for the current semester (Spring 2002) was reviewed, and assignments to administer the surveys to students in these classes were divided among the team. Each member of our team conveyed the same request and purpose to each class in which the survey was administered.

Results

Table one summarizes the demographic data and program status of 92 of the 95 students who completed the survey. Three surveys were classified as not relevant to the study because the respondents were undergraduates or enrolled in another graduate program.

Table 1

Demographic Data and Program Status (N= 92)

%Mean Std dev

Sex

Male43. 48

Female56. 52

Age34. 21+8. 27

Years since attaining first BS/BA10. 62+7. 83

Employment status

Full time84. 78

Part-time 7. 60

Not employed 7. 60

International student

Yes10. 87

No89. 13

Student status

Just taking a course 5. 43

Pursuing advanced certificate 1. 09

Planning to enroll in MSA20. 65

Enrolled in MSA Program72. 83

Credits Completed18. 73+13. 43

<1343. 48

13 to 2418. 48

25 to 3621. 74

37 and more11. 96

Unknown 4. 35

Respondents were given 5 options to indicate the reason(s) they selected the Saint Michaels College MSA program over other programs, as well as a write in " other" section. They were asked to select all applicable reasons. A total of 176 reasons were selected. Table 2 shows these responses. Table 3 details the written-in responses of the students who selected the " other" category.

Table 2

Reasons for selecting St. Michaels MSA program over other programs (N= 92)

Reason Percent of students selecting this choice

Convenience 50. 00

Quality of program 45. 65

Reputation 31. 52

Personal referral28. 26

Other 20. 65

Tuition reimbursement15. 22

Table 3

Responses written-in by Students selecting " other" as a reason for choosing

Saint Michaels MSA

Program Over Other Programs (N= 20)

ReasonNumber of students

Work at SMC 5

No GRE 4

Night classes 2

Type of degree offered 2

Completed Undergraduate at SMC 2

UVM cancelled MPA 1

Friendly environment 1

Parking 1

Small classes 1

Classes in Rutland 1

In the next section of the survey, students were given an opportunity to indicate whether they used various services, and to rate their experience. A five-point scale was used, with 1 being poor, 2 being fair, 3 being average, 4 being excellent, and 5 being outstanding. The same scale was used in all subsequent sections.

These results were tabulated for the sample as a whole, and also broken out for students enrolled in the MSA Program, men, women, students over the median age of 32, students age 32 and younger, and students under 32 who are not international students. This data is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Responses broken out by demographic and category (N= 92)

TotalSDenrolled in MSA ProgramSDMaleSDFemSD> 32 yrSD < 32 yrSD < 32 – int'l studSD

Demographics

n= 92674052474539

% male43. 4741. 79100048. 9335. 5535. 13

% female56. 5258. 12010051. 0662. 2262. 16

mean age 34. 218. 2735. 148. 4134. 648. 533. 887. 9941. 135. 6427. 132. 4627. 362. 57

mean yrs from BA10. 527. 8311. 298. 1111. 028. 349. 977. 2116. 167. 285. 022. 995. 682. 85

%employed FT84. 7883. 589084. 6189. 368091. 89

% employed PT7. 65. 977. 57. 698. 56. 665. 4

% not employed7. 610. 457. 57. 692. 1217. 140

Student Status

% int'l 10. 8613. 4312. 59. 612. 12200

% not int'l 89. 1386. 5787. 590. 3897. 8780100

%just taking course5. 43012. 504. 256. 668. 1

Table 4

TotalSDenrolled in MSA ProgramSDMaleSDFemSD; 32 yrSD; 32 yrSD; 32 – int'l studSD

% pursuing adv cert1. 08001. 922. 1200

% plan to enroll MSA20. 6502023. 0714. 8926. 6628. 21

% Enrolled in MSA72. 83100807578. 7266. 6659. 45

credts completed18. 7313. 423. 5512. 519. 1813. 618. 6313. 521. 7314. 115. 7212. 113. 5611. 2

Academic/Support Services

enrollment/sched3. 680. 893. 720. 883. 531. 093. 80. 683. 740. 93. 620. 893. 730. 73

obtaining ID3. 341. 083. 491. 063. 60. 993. 141. 133. 551. 023. 111. 043. 051. 08

Obtaining park perm3. 411. 013. 380. 963. 61. 013. 260. 993. 530. 993. 281. 033. 121. 05

obtain computer acct2. 951. 073. 070. 9931. 172. 910. 982. 931. 082. 971. 062. 811. 09

statement3. 691. 053. 660. 983. 681. 043. 691. 073. 751. 083. 621. 033. 650. 94

bursar's office3. 60. 943. 50. 993. 471. 023. 70. 873. 621. 023. 570. 853. 760. 85

tuition reimbursement3. 750. 953. 810. 913. 711. 033. 790. 893. 721. 073. 780. 833. 640. 78

% used library79. 3580. 59857578. 728078. 38

% not used library20. 6519. 4152521. 272021. 62

library hours3. 660. 883. 660. 883. 740. 993. 610. 753. 810. 773. 510. 953. 640. 78

staff availability3. 730. 83. 90. 693. 850. 823. 630. 763. 830. 773. 650. 813. 590. 84

ease of use3. 690. 673. 790. 633. 820. 723. 570. 63. 70. 73. 690. 633. 640. 62

library overall3. 70. 693. 780. 73. 850. 713. 580. 653. 860. 63. 560. 753. 510. 75

% have advisor56. 5273. 136053. 8557. 4453. 3345. 95

do not have advisor43. 4826. 864046. 1542. 5546. 6754. 05

advisor helpful3. 860. 843. 860. 843. 710. 9940. 663. 920. 93. 790. 7840. 7

advisor relevant3. 90. 93. 910. 863. 711. 044. 070. 713. 960. 993. 830. 764. 050. 65

career plan help3. 31. 073. 321. 043. 251. 113. 41. 043. 461. 063. 191. 083. 60. 91

advising overall3. 780. 923. 790. 893. 581. 013. 960. 793. 821. 023. 750. 7940. 7

The final section had two questions allowing for written responses. In the first, students were asked if there were any additional services they would like. Responses were written in by 23. 91% of students in the sample. The responses can be generally broken down into three categories: Academic, Support services, and Communication. These responses are shown in table 5 (See Appendix A).

The second question asked students if they had any additional comments. This section was completed by 30. 43% of the respondents. These remarks could be broken down into three categories: compliments about the program, complaints about the program, and recommendations. These comments are listed in table 6 (See Appendix B). There were also three comments pertaining to the survey itself, and two comments about the program that were ambiguous and are not included in the table.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that 84. 78% of students taking St. Michael's MSA Program courses are adults in the full time workforce, with an average of 10. 62 years since attaining a Bachelor's degree. This audience is attracted to Saint Michaels MSA Program both by convenience, selected by 50% of the respondents, and quality of the programs, selected by 45. 65% of the sample.

Respondents rate their experience with 14 of the 15 student services between average (3) and excellent (4) on the five-point scale, except obtaining a computer account, which was rated 2. 95, between poor and average. The two services which were rated next lowest by the entire sample were obtaining a student ID, and advising on career planning. In examining whether different subsets of the sample rated services differently, we found that every category of respondent gave the experience of obtaining a computer account the lowest score, and all groups but women rated career-planning assistance second lowest. Women rated the experience of obtaining an ID s second lowest. Overall, the only subset of the sample identifiable as rating services consistently higher or lower than the other subsets was the students age 32 and younger. We looked across subsets to see which group scored a particular service highest; the age 32 and younger group did not contain a single highest score. Since 9 of the 10 respondents who identified themselves as international students are age 32 or younger, we then looked at the 32 and younger subset without international students. It is reasonable to assume that international students are coming to the MSA Program with a different set of experiences and needs, for example, none of them identified themselves as being employed full time. Therefore, we wanted to see how

this affected the scores. Once the international students were removed from the group, satisfaction with career planning services in the age group increased, while the scores for obtaining a computer account and a student ID decreased.

It is interesting to note that a significant number of students are not making use of available services. Of the entire sample, 20. 65% of the students have not used the library, and 43. 48% have not met with an advisor. Of students enrolled in the MSA program, 19. 4% have not used the library, and 26. 86% have not met with an advisor.

In the section where students could write about desired services, 33% of the comments requested more opportunities for communication between students and faculty, students and the MSA program staff, and students with other MSA students.

In the comments section, 35. 71% of the comments were complimentary about some aspect of the program, or the MSA program as a whole, while 10. 71% of the remarks could be regarded as complaints.

Given these findings, we feel equipped to recommend some simple steps that MSA program administrators can take to improve students' experience with the program. The procedures for obtaining an ID card and a computer account should be reviewed, and these services should be more widely promoted to graduate students through mailings, in-class announcements, and through outreach and technical assistance during occasional evening hours in St. Edmunds and Jeanne Marie Hall. Regarding information on advising and career development, it may be important to ask MSA students

what kinds of services and assistance they are seeking. This area appears to be of particular importance to International students, conducting a survey specific to identification of their needs seems relevant.

To meet the need expressed by a number of survey respondents for more contact with other students, administrators, faculty, and with program services, it makes sense to promote those communication tools that already exist, such as the MSA student listserv, the student advisory group, and the existing advising services. The program could also conduct additional survey in this area to more clearly define what, if any, additional communication tools are desired.

Saint Michael's College MSA program is a graduate business school, with a wealth of expertise from both students and faculty. It could be said that enhancing student perceptions of the programs from above average to excellent would be an exciting challenge for the program's faculty and administrators. Further exploration of students perceptions and desires, and creating programs that address student desires could be done as a MSA program-wide " learning lab" which would give students an opportunity for research and problem solving, while enhancing students academic and emotional investment in the program. What better way for the MSA program to build satisfaction and loyalty than by demonstrating that learning about and improving the students' experience is literally built into the curriculum?

Appendix A

Table 5

Responses written in describing additional services/programs desired (N= 22)

Academic

More offerings

Certain courses should be 3 credits or 4 credits depending on the work. The nonprofit course should be 3 credits

Study abroad options with scholarships

More online MSA courses, commuting is expensive

More time variety in when required subjects are offered- e. g.- financial management is only offered in spring

Some classes too easy for students with engineering and science degree; optional advanced courses

Design your own concentration

Support Services

Better support for weekend class times; i. e. grad office open, snack bar, cafeteria, etc.

Open up an advisors office with new employees

Equal availability of gym/fitness area

Excel class for grad students"

Set up a meeting with an advisor when admitted to the program

Library hours seemed geared to residential undergraduates

More scholarships.

Longer evening hours at office for student ID – closes at 4: 30. Evening classes start at 5PM, so it should be open till 5: 30

Communication

Better follow-through with potential students

Email notification of upcoming academic events – short and to the point.

More help being informed about all the courses offered

There doesn't seem to be much communication with students thinking of enrolling in the program

MSA communication chat room with greater communication with MSA students. I have felt disconnected from the institution"

Electronic bulletin board for MSA only

A kind of day long " networking" conference

More meetings with advisors or as students to discuss the program

When registering, getting a confirmation that we actually got into the courses or if they were filled up

Appendix B

Table 6

Comments written in by students in the sample (N= 30)

Compliments about the MSA program

I have truly enjoyed this program and recommend it to colleagues whenever possible.

Fairly new to the program and so far so good

I am enjoying coming up to campus from Rutland – the drive is long but the diversity is worth it.

On a whole the program has met all of my needs

Outstanding personalized assistance available

Great school!

I like the flexibility of the class schedules (evening, weekends. I have taken two courses and have very much enjoyed them both. (Public Administration and Legal Issues in Administration.) I am enrolling in the program on the strength of these two courses.

Good people and teachers

Highly reputable program. Enjoy high expectations of professor and classmates

I like the flexibility in class scheduling, i. e., weekend classes

Complaints

The billing has been awful – the worst I have ever experienced in school. After paying my tuition I was harassed for months by the school claiming I had not paid my tuition.

I feel there are too many qualifying and core courses and too many credits to take for the program

I do not like the advisor

Recommendations

Change from MSA to MBS

There is no provision to get an ID or other administrative services right before or after evening classes

It would be nice if library was open on Sunday mornings

I believe the MSA program should be structured in such a manner that presentations and writing classes are taken early in the program

How about a PhD Program?

I hope they provide academic internships (most of student are working so they do not provide internship now)

More care should be taken in scheduling classes, Nonprofit overlapped with Grant Writing.

Need more visitors parking.

Need more PhDs to teach in MSA program.

If APA is the format used in the MSA program then it should be implemented and expected in almost all courses.

Appendix C

SURVEY of Students Enrolled in St. Michael's College Graduate Courses, Spring 2002

Demographic InformationCourse/Program Choice Information

Enrollment Services

Financial IssuesHow do you pay your bill? ___Direct Pay___Employer Reimbursement

Library ServicesHave you used the St. Michael's library? ____yes_____no

Advisory IssuesHave you met with an advisor? ____yes_____no

Feedback

If there is an addition l service or program for MSA students that you would like, please describe:

Is there anything we have forgotten to ask that we should have, please

explain:

Appendix D

Attached