Academic Program Review

Department of Marketing

J. Mack Robinson College of Business
Georgia State University
February 7-9, 2016

Conducted by External Review Committee:

- Rajdeep Grewal, The Townsend Family Distinguished Professor of Marketing, Kenan-Flagler Business School, Univ. of North Carolina
- (Chair) Mark Houston, Department Head, Professor, and Foreman R. and Ruby S. Bennett Chair in Business Administration, Mays Business School, Texas A&M Univ.
- Beth Walker, Dean, College of Business, Colorado State Univ.

1. Executive Summary

On February 7, 8, and 9, 2016, the External Review Committee met with University and College administrators, the marketing faculty, and marketing students (undergraduate and graduate) to develop a candid assessment of the Department of Marketing of the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University. In addition, the Committee reviewed the Department of Marketing’s Academic Program Review Self-Study Report, and the Strategic Plan for the Robinson College of Business, to develop a set of recommendations for the Department. On balance, the Committee was most impressed by the quality of the Department of Marketing, especially in terms of the (1) collegial culture of the marketing department that celebrates both teaching and research, (2) research-orientation of most marketing faculty that has resulted in a steep, positive trajectory in the rankings and enhanced placements for Ph.D. students, and (3) strength and thoughtfulness of the programs and academic experience that the faculty deliver to both the undergraduate and graduate students in the Robinson College of Business. While the Committee believes that the Department of Marketing is strong and on a positive trajectory, there are challenges. Specifically, (1) there is a bimodal distribution of the faculty in terms of research productivity in the top journals that has created some friction which needs to be thoughtfully addressed, (2) there are concerns regarding the quality and size of the MS program, and (3) there is the need to maintain and enhance the quality and currency of the undergraduate program given the diversity of the academic preparedness of its students.

The Committee is optimistic that the Robinson College of Business and GSU recognize the significance of key challenges, and can address the most pressing needs of the Department.

This report is organized according to the External Review Report Guide provided by the GSU Provost’s office. Following this Executive Summary, we examine the Department’s contributions to the discipline of Marketing. Next, we reflect on the quality of the Department’s undergraduate and graduate programs. We then turn to an evaluation of the quality of the research culture within the department. After assessing the department’s goals, we conclude with a summary of strengths and key challenges and offer a set of actionable recommendations for the Department of Marketing.
2. Contributions to the Discipline

a. To which subfields of the discipline does the department make the most significant scholarly, creative, or clinical contributions (as appropriate)?

The Marketing Department of the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University, has developed a strong reputation for the body of work that it contributes to the discipline of marketing in the area of marketing strategy (i.e., the study of strategic marketing decisions made by firms) with a particular strength in the development and use of quantitative analysis techniques, known as marketing science. In the limited set of top tier journals in which marketing science-oriented marketing strategy research is published (Journal of Marketing (JM), Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), and Marketing Science (MS)), the department’s ranking has risen from outside the top seventy to #5 among all U.S. universities (2012-2015, University of Texas-Dallas Research Rankings). Even including the other top tier journal (Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)), which does not publish marketing strategy scholarship, the department is in the top 15 in the U.S.

b. To what extent are the faculty number and composition sufficient to support the research and educational missions of the department?

At the time of the last Academic Program Review, the department was top-heavy in the tenure-track, with only full professors and long-term associate professors. The beginning of the current assessment period saw the hiring of a chaired, full professor, Dr. V. Kumar and, over the next few years, the systematic recruitment of high-caliber assistant professors from top-flight Ph.D. programs, almost all focused on marketing science-based marketing strategy research. As these young professors have been extremely productive, and the most senior has been promoted and granted tenure, the composition of the faculty is now excellent to support ongoing productivity in the research mission.

For the teaching mission, we believe that the low number of clinical faculty (among marketing, not among business communication) is a bit light given College norms, but the number of associate professors who have stepped up to cover a larger teaching load has taken up the slack.

c. Based on your knowledge of similar departments in the discipline, evaluate the overall strength of the department.

Overall, this is an impressively strong department. The research productivity is excellent and the department faculty has a strong culture of collegiality and of individuals who are deeply committed to the success of the department and its students.
3. Quality of the Department’s Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

a. For each of the department’s programs, evaluate the quality and currency of the curriculum in terms of disciplinary standards and trends.

Undergraduate. The faculty has been proactive in keeping the curriculum current and improving its quality. They continue to coordinate and improve the capstone (3010) course, have added courses in new and important areas, including a course in Marketing Metrics, a course in social media, and a creativity course. Recognizing the importance of analytical and critical thinking skills in the capstone course, the Marketing Metrics course is now a prerequisite. Further, because of a primary role for cases in the capstone, faculty in earlier marketing courses have agreed to include a case to expose students to the type of critical thinking required to succeed in a case-based course. Further, the department has recreated the sales and sales management program and has laid out tracks that guide students through a sequence of courses, depending upon interest, that build a sufficient core of knowledge and skills to enhance employment. An area for improvement is standardizing the experience of students who take the mega-section (100 students) of 3010 to make it consistent with the other sections which are smaller. Undergraduate students appreciate the quality of the faculty and were able to cite numerous examples of faculty members exhibiting general concern for and willingness to invest time in students. There are concerns in the area of business communications and how best to teach this course given the communications skills of the undergraduate business students.

MS (focused on Brand and Customer Management). For this new program, the faculty are soliciting and responding student feedback from the early cohorts. Among the 10 courses, they are reducing overlap in content and teaching materials and building upon synergies to continually refine this curriculum. The faculty have been disappointed with the quantitative abilities of the early cohorts and with the placements of those students – issues that commonly arise during the initial years of a new program.

Ph.D. This program is excellent. All of the students in recent years have been coauthors on top-tier journal publications. While this is a goal of students across all marketing PhD programs, few marketing departments can claim that almost all of their PhD students go on the job market with at least one premier marketing publication. The publication record of the doctoral students should increase placement in peer and aspirational peer schools. For students for whom English is not their native language, the department might consider programs to allow these students to build their communication skills to enhance their job placement prospects.

b. Evaluate the quality of both incoming and graduated students in the department’s programs, relative to discipline-specific norms.

Undergraduate. This program attracts many first-generation students who are hard-working and appreciative of the opportunities to gain a business degree, but are often academically unprepared, particularly in basic communication skills and business computer skills.

MS. This program is not yet attracting students who possess the desired level of quantitative skills relative to the goals of the program. Given the planned focus on
marketing analytics, quantitative ability will become even more important if the quantitative rigor of the program increases.

**Ph.D.** Highly qualified students are in the program now, and recent graduates are establishing strong scholarly records after being placed in good research schools, like Rutgers and Texas Christian University.

c. Based on your professional experience, are the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates appropriate? If not, what changes might the department make to improve them?

Undergraduate. These rates are very good, particularly given the diverse and first generation-nature of the undergraduate student body. We didn’t have the data to evaluate the retention and graduation rates of the nearly 800 pre-major students each year who hope to pursue but who are not academically qualified to pursue a marketing degree.

MS. Enrollment in the MS in Marketing program of 36 students this year is below college expectations of 50 students but is stronger than last year’s cohort (n=27). Building an alumni community that can share positive word of mouth, targeting GSU STEM students who might be interested in one year of business education to enhance job prospects, developing a 3+1+1 program for international students, aligning graduates from this program with the needs of corporate partners, and developing the track around social media/analytics are all possible avenues to increase enrollment.

Ph.D. Faculty to student ratios are aligned with discipline norms.

d. Are there appropriate resources and support structures for the department’s educational programs?

Resources seem to be adequate. However, the faculty shared deep concerns over the undergraduate students’ lack of business communication skills and basic computer literacy. Despite a required business communication course, the faculty felt that stronger, richer, and more frequent support structures to help develop and refine these skills were needed. This contrasts with faculty concerns that business communication training would be decreased instead of increased. Although this likely involves remediation at the university level, the department should continue to be sensitive for opportunities to build these essential skills in students.

Students also struggle with quantitative/analytical coursework. Given the non-trivial proportion of students who struggle in the critical Marketing Metrics course, one specific support structure that is entirely under the department’s control would be to put in place more supplemental instruction for this specific course. This is a course in which students ideally need to thrive, not just survive.

Because Ph.D. students typically teach an occasional undergraduate class, we probed undergraduate students’ perceptions of instructors who were Ph.D. students. While many experience were strongly positive, the reactions were mixed. The department has an effective mentorship model in place to help prepare Ph.D. students for teaching, but we would encourage the department to insure that Ph.D. take advantage of GSU resources, such as CII and CIE, to learn more about class structure and management. Further, the
department could consider pairing a Ph.D. student with a top-flight full-time faculty member for the specific course the student will be teaching; besides general mentoring/coaching, the senior faculty should share specific exercises and course materials to aid the Ph.D. student in delivering an effective course.

e. Evaluate the potential for growth of the department’s graduate programs.

To grow, we believe that the MS program needs to be more strongly branded and better differentiated from the MBA program and from the offerings of other universities. Further, better placements of students are needed to aid in the recruitment of new students. We believe that the MS program could leverage program alumni to aid in recruiting and, after a few more years in which alumni advance in their careers, for placement.

The Ph.D. program is the right size for the current faculty (roughly one PhD student per research-active faculty, which is typical for the discipline of Marketing). Any growth would need to follow growth in the number of research active faculty.

4. Quality of the Department’s Research Culture

a. Based on your knowledge of the discipline, what is your assessment of the quality of the department’s faculty?

There are strong senior faculty (such as V. Kumar and Naveen Donthu) and strong junior faculty (one associate professor and six assistants who are research active and highly accomplished). Despite this level of strength, which has caused the department to rise significantly in research rankings, the department faculty is highly heterogeneous in their productivity. There are research active senior faculty (full and associate) who are working in more specialized areas and no longer regularly hitting top tier journals, but also a significant number of associate professors who no longer appear to be pursuing impactful research.

b. From a disciplinary perspective, what is your assessment of the research areas in which the department is already strong, and areas with the potential for further growth?

The department’s primary area of strength is research in Marketing Strategy that develops and employs the quantitative methods of Marketing Science. They have a strong set of senior and junior faculty who focus in these areas and appear to be poised for long-term productivity.

The department faculty also contribute to the sub-areas of Business-to-Business marketing and Consumer Behavior.

We believe it is most appropriate to stay focused in these areas while allowing faculty to pursue other topics of personal interest.
c. What is your assessment of the support structures for faculty and student research (e.g., grant-writing support, travel grants, laboratories, student funding, administrative support, etc.)?

Overall, the support structures are adequate. Faculty report being able to get funding to present research at national conferences and to buy data and/or equipment as needed. However, there are some limitations.

First, and most notable, is a relative limitation. Given the increasing expectations for the research productivity required by assistant professors to earn tenure and promotion, the support (particularly summer research support) does not match these expectations. Specifically, summer support is only guaranteed during the first three years of the probationary period; after this time, faculty must teach summer classes or choose to live with a reduction in income. The incentives result in most faculty choosing to teach – we believe they would be better served to continue to focus on research during the entire probationary period.

Second, there is no behavioral laboratory for use by scholars who are interested in conducting consumer behavior research.

Third, there some perceptions among non-research active faculty of uneven access to Ph.D. students, both to serve as research assistants and to mentor and with whom to collaborate. However, although the vast majority of Ph.D. students are based in the CEBCM’s Buckhead location, the mentorship model described in the department Self-Study Report appears to be working well, enhancing the research productivity of the entire department. The Ph.D students work with multiple research active faculty (and faculty work with multiple Ph.D. students) on research projects that result in journal publications, benefitting the Ph.D. students. It appears to us that this model benefits the research active faculty as evidenced through their publications and working papers, as well, particularly non-tenured junior faculty who are not allowed by department standards to chair dissertations, but who need to work on many projects at a time.

d. Do you have any recommendations for improvements in the department’s research culture, productivity, and results?

First, as noted in our comment on 3c, enhanced summer funding is needed, particularly for junior faculty during the last three years of their probationary period.

Second, the faculty desire more clarity from the dean and the RCB promotion and tenure committee regarding the research standards of the college, such as “what counts” at various tiers of journals. This sentiment was shared across all levels of the faculty.

Third, the department should continue their focus on nurturing and supporting the young associate and assistant professors who promise a bright future for the department’s productivity and reputation.

Finally, although there is no simple solution, the department should continue to seek ways to show appreciation for and to incentivize high-ability career associate professors who have the desire to re-engage in the department’s research mission. Academic qualification is important. Though all faculty are not publishing in top-tier journals, there should be some reward for retaining academic qualification as recognized by AACSB.
5. Goals

a. Are the goals the department has outlined in its self-study appropriate for the unit?

Yes. The eight goals address key issues in each area of the department’s mission.

- **Research Mission** supported by: Goal 1 (Maintain current level of research productivity in A-Level Marketing journals).

- **Ph.D. Mission** supported by: Goal 2 (Maintain and enhance our Ph.D. program).

- **MS Mission** supported by: Goal 3 (Introduce an analytics track in the MS program), Goal 4 (Increase enrollment in MS Program), and Goal 7 (Gather and document MS graduate placement and career data).

- **Undergraduate Mission** supported by: Goal 5 (Strengthen our undergraduate curriculum) and Goal 6 (Actively support the RCB’s Catalyst Program).

- Integration with RCB is also enhanced by Goal 6.

- Enhancement of the department’s longevity and culture is supported by: Goal 8 (Develop a plan related to faculty demographics).

b. Are they in accord with disciplinary trends?

In our opinion, these goals align with disciplinary trends in that they emphasize (i) a focus on A-level journal productivity, (ii) alignment of the structure of the Ph.D. program with the realities of the Ph.D. placement market (which requires publications), and (iii) a focus on analytics at all levels of programs.

c. Are the priorities reasonable?

The stated goals are reasonable. However, we would point out that at a high level, the MS quality goals and the A-journal focus are good, but may be challenging in the context of GSU’s larger mission of serving a broad and diverse student market.

d. Are the resource needs realistic?

The main resources needed are faculty lines – these will be critical for building the MS program in marketing and for diversifying the senior faculty who are currently involved in the Center. Regarding the teaching and research mission, faculty are needed with the ability to teach courses in analytics (these can be research scholars or talented NTT faculty) and/or with social/digital media expertise (again, TT or NTT).

Adding faculty with these skills is reasonable because of the high number of retirements that should occur over the next decade, given the number of faculty who are over the age of 60.

e. Are any changes or additions warranted?

See recommendations.
6. Summary and Recommendations

a. Summarize the department’s major strengths and challenges.

In this section, we identify four major strengths and four major challenges. We then provide recommendations that are organized around the challenges.

Major Strengths:

- Strong research active faculty who are also passionate educators.
- Research productivity (steep, positive trajectory), along with high visibility, given that the department houses the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Marketing*, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Business Research*, and the Editor of the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*.
- A collegial faculty who genuinely like each other and are deeply proud of and committed to their department, college, and students.
- Top-notch Ph.D. training and placement.

Major Challenges:

- **Challenge 1: A bimodal faculty.** A slight minority of the faculty are young, highly research-active (led by V. Kumar), while a majority are professors who no longer target top-tier publications, many of whom have been at the rank of associate professor for more than 15 years. As standards have escalated, people who had been promoted in the past do not have the skill set and/or the interest to pursue top-tier journal publications. Current incentives (e.g., merit pay, course releases) reinforce this bimodal nature.

- **Challenge 2: Continue the research progress/trajectory and institutionalize it.** A few key faculty members drive the data access and resources that make the department such an attractive and productive place to junior faculty and top-flight Ph.D students. If the most productive senior faculty member leaves GSU, the impact on productivity and departmental trajectory would be potentially devastating, even if an additional senior-level faculty member is hired to broaden the Center.

- **Challenge 3: Concerns with the size and quality of the MS program.** The university and college desire growth (perhaps 50 students per year versus the current 35), but the quality of existing students has been lower than desired, particularly in terms of quantitative ability. Although still young, the program is not yet delivering on its promise.

- **Challenge 4: Continue to make strides in enhancing the quality and currency of the Undergraduate program.** Because of the variation in academic preparation among its students, the Department needs to work especially hard in helping the students succeed.
b. List your recommendations.

Recommendation 1 (Bimodal faculty): This is a tough one. After lengthy discussion the External Review Team came to the conclusion that the department has three potential options and it is unclear which is optimal and if either of the latter two would be effective (the first would not).

- Option 1: Let the career associates fade away over time and live with the discontent in the meantime until they retire. Increasing teaching loads is a common strategy for those faculty who are not research productive.

- Option 2: Proactively identify ways for non-research-active faculty to contribute to the mission of the department, and find ways to incentivize/reward this behavior. Whether running programs, certificates, or competitions, or advising student clubs, faculty could be selected, given responsibility and at least some level of meaningful reward (e.g., a $5,000 annual stipend) that couples the intrinsic satisfaction of contributing to the department’s mission and enhancing the lives of students with the extrinsic satisfaction of some token of financial payment as a tangible signal of appreciation. Some incentive (reduction in teaching load) could be offered for faculty who remain academically qualified per AACSB standards. Awards for teaching is another way to recognize the value of exceptional classroom performance.

- Option 3: Do something more dramatic such as create a Department of Strategic Marketing Science to house the research-active faculty who focus in this area, and a Department of Marketing Communication to house the faculty who focus in other areas. This would have the strategic benefit of allowing each group to choose their focus, determine their standards (e.g., target journals, expectations), and move forward strategically. Alternatively, this second department could be some type of “General Business” department that would house business communication and other domains (e.g., ethics, law) that service the college, not just the Department of Marketing. (University of Texas and Ohio State University have structures something like this). A word of caution is that this option would require careful vetting vis-à-vis AACSB accreditation standards (e.g., would the Marketing Science group have enough teaching capacity; would the Marketing Communication group have sufficient research productivity).

Recommendation 2 (Research productivity): Retaining and hiring the right faculty and protecting them are the core elements of our recommendations.

- Work hard to retain key faculty to avoid disruption of the department’s current growth and trajectory.

- Hire one more senior faculty with expertise in Strategic Marketing Science to provide research leadership and mentorship for junior faculty and Ph.D. students (ideally with interest in Business-to-Business Marketing and/or Sales Management). This would solidify the unique position of the department (given the CMO Roundtable and the Sales Roundtable) while providing more capacity for chairing dissertations and would broaden the skill set and substantive
knowledge within this subdomain of Marketing. To hire the quality of faculty who could step into this role and compete alongside of current faculty, it is likely that the Pennebaker Chair would be required to attract a suitable high-ability / high-profile candidate.

- Extend the summer funding (2/10 guaranteed) from three years to the full probationary period for high-potential rookie hires. The department has successfully recruited a powerful team of young professors from the very best Ph.D. programs, but is also increasing expectations regarding number of top-tier publications accordingly. In the current situation, after year 3, an untenured assistant loses 20% of their salary. They can gain 10% back through a competitive grant process, but must teach a summer class to earn the other 10% back (or they can elect not to teach, but they forego the 10% pay). For young professors, particularly those with student loan debt or young children, this is a tough situation where financial incentives do not align with desired allocation of effort.

Recommendation 3 (MS size and quality): We recommend patience (giving new MS Director, Denish Shah, time to learn and implement insights from his open-house and town-hall meetings with current students), building the size and quality simultaneously with enhanced recruiting practices and enhanced placements, and better integration with RCB Graduate Admissions team. Retain the current quantitative Brand and Customer Management focus. To fill 50 seats in the short term, standards would have to be lowered even further, which would damage the quality of the program and reduce the satisfaction of the stronger students on whose success the future of the program rests. We encourage the department to consider several specific alternatives for quality growth:

- Form an alumni advisory board to help with recruiting, to provide systematic feedback on the content and structure of the program, and – as alumni are successfully placed and advance in their own careers – to hire or recommend new graduates, enhancing placement.

- Consider cherry-picking a small set of highest potential undergraduate students from the business school and from STEM programs for enrollment in the MS. A 4+1 structure could be explored for GSU students, and a 3+1+1 could be explored to attract strong international students who would come to GSU to finish their undergraduate degree and then stay an additional year to complete the MS. For STEM students, many of whom hope to be hired by companies, the STEM undergraduate would combine powerfully with a one year business degree.

- Explore partnerships with a few key corporate partners for whom the curriculum could be slightly customized to insure that graduates have a needed skill set and whom, in turn, would agree to hire a given number of those graduates each year.

- Enhance current student satisfaction by finding ways to avoid combining MS students with MBA students in electives (which creates tension and leads to disappointment for both groups). Perhaps growth in the MS program will make this less of an issue. Alternatively, a select elective or two could be identified that could be shared across platforms. However, differences in program cost, accompanying services, as well as pre-requisite knowledge should be considered.
Recommendation 4 (enhance UG program): We recommend that the department look for ways to address the needs for better and more instruction in the Social Media/Digital Marketing space by the short-term identification of Ph.D. students or NTT faculty who have the currency and passion for this topical domain. Longer term, as current senior faculty retire, tenure-track faculty with these skill sets should be targeted. Further, because of the importance of analytical skills in undergrads and a need to better prepare students for the more rigorous capstone course, we recommend that the Marketing Metrics course offer students more supplemental instruction to help them thrive in this key course. Finally, written and verbal communication skills are an important issue within the marketing department, as well as the RCB, in general. There are changes underway to improve this by restructuring how Business Communication is taught. Another approach is to develop different types of business communication training based on student competency, as indicated by test scores (e.g., entrance exams). While lower scoring students may enroll in business communication classes with small enrollments, other higher-performing students can enroll larger class sections.