An analysis of the marketability of University academic programs in public Universities: a case of Kenyatta University

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Abstract:

Higher education around the world has experienced rapid growth and along with the pressure of obtaining sufficient funding and student numbers. In certain cases an increase in competition, resulting in institutions identifying new market segments and expanding target markets to post graduate and part-time segments. Traditionally, when higher education institutions integrate the marketing concepts into their overall planning process, they use a product/market model, taking into account the complexity of their package of products. These packages consist of a combination of academic programs, research outputs, staffing and the overall learning experiences of the students. Kotler and Fox (1985), however, also emphasize the importance of developing long-term relationships with target students. They see marketing planning as a response to meet and anticipate the needs of individual students in a changing environment. In this aggressive marketing environment that Kenyatta University is currently operating, competition is strong and it is essential to discover each "buyer's" personal needs in order to fulfill their requirements. Institutions should, therefore, re-evaluate their overall marketing strategies in highly fragmented market segments in order to compete in a fast changing environment. The research aimed at identifying ways through which Kenyatta University can gain competitive advantage through marketing, examining whether Kenyatta University is sufficiently responsive to the needs of customers and to find out effective ways through which the university can communicating with its potential consumers/students. The research focused on Kenyatta university students, employers, parents of secondary students and secondary students. From the findings it emerged that most, secondary students and parents were aware of courses offered in Kenyatta University. However most of them had learned about these courses through Word of mouth that is through the school career teacher, Kenyatta university students, Kenyatta university employees, and peers as opposed to newspaper advertisement and other forms of marketing communication carried out by the university. Good quality educational services, university facilities, the fee costs and the public image of the university were the main factors considered by parents and students while choosing universities. It was also found out that poor educational facilities and student unrest in public university had negatively affected parents and students preference of public universities. This Coupled with the belief held by most parents' that foreign universities offered superior education to local ones and greater variety of educational programs than the local universities. Have resulted to high preference of universities abroad to Kenyan universities by most parents and students. Contrary to most parents, employers seemed to be satisfied with Kenyatta University and other public university graduates. However most employers felt there was need for Kenyatta University to inculcate leadership skills, and discipline in its students. Most employers felt they should be involved in the university course curriculum development and more innovative methods of instruction such as work attachment, should be used in training the students.