

Successful Undergraduate Consumer Programs

Abstract

This study surveyed undergraduate academic programs throughout the United States to determine if they offered a curriculum in consumer studies. University approved official consumer studies programs exist at 21 colleges and universities, and the number of undergraduate students with an academic focus in Consumer Studies ranges from 10 to 488; the median is approximately 100.

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to conduct a census of undergraduate programs in Consumer Studies and report the findings. The aforementioned purpose is accurate, however, the survey was actually undertaken to identify schools that might be suitable for scholarship funding should financial support become available.

Methodology

This study sought to (1) identify academic programs in Consumer Studies and contact information for the responsible administrative person, and (2) ascertain by mail and e-mail details about the program and number of students enrolled. All persons listed in the membership list of the American Council on Consumer Interests who taught at academic institutions likely to have an undergraduate program in Consumer Studies were e-mailed in March 2005. Thirty schools were contacted. Follow-up e-mails with the ACCI members and/or others at the institutions resulted in obtaining printed curriculum information from 30 colleges and universities.

Findings

Five criteria were established to identify undergraduate curricula in Consumer Studies: (1) Program must be offered by a 4-year accredited college or university in the United States; (2) Program could be either an official curriculum of the institution or a concentration or emphasis made available to guide student selection of courses, and if the latter, the form of that guidance must be made with the official permission of an administrative unit (not just a faculty member); (3) Program must have already had students graduate with a selection of the appropriate courses; (4) Majors excluded were in business (e.g., marketing, management), family and consumer sciences, personal finance, family finance and personal financial planning; and (5) Program major or minor had to offer a minimum of two specific courses in consumer studies (not primarily in economics, consumer behavior, family law, housing, marketing, or retailing). Twenty-one schools met the criteria and have identifiable Consumer Studies programs.

Course Titles in Consumer Studies

Illustrative course titles are: consumer economics, consumer affairs, consumer rights, consumer issues, consumer advocacy, consumer policy, consumer protection, consumer law, consumer technology, consumer life skills, consumers in the marketplace, consumer communications, consumer marketing management, consumer decision-making, consumer information, consumer credit problems, customer assurance, consumer and family law, consumer movement, consumer and household economics, conflict resolution, customer service and consumer voice, consumer welfare and employee benefits, consumer and the environment, customer service management, advanced consumer affairs, debtor-creditor relationships, family economic behavior and policy, family savings and investments, issues in consumer affairs, global consumer issues, early experience in consumer affairs, leadership and power, professionalism in consumer affairs, and strategies for consumer affairs professionals.

College and Universities Offering Undergraduate Programs in Consumer Studies

Twenty-one colleges and universities offer undergraduate academic program in Consumer Studies. The names of those institutions follow along with the contact persons' estimates of student enrollment.

College or University	Name of Consumer Program(s) and Number of Majors	Contact Person
California State University at Northridge	Corporate Consumer Affairs (51) and Consumer Education and Advocacy (33); 84 total majors	Allen Martin
California State University at Long Beach	Consumer Affairs (30 majors)	Wendy L. Reiboldt
California State University at Sacramento	Consumer Studies (15 majors)	Y. Lakshmi Malroutu
Cornell University	Public Policy Analysis and Management (320)	Francille Firebaugh
Minnesota State University Mankato	Consumer Studies (10 minors)	Betty Young
Mississippi State University	Consumer Studies (15 minors)	Sheri Lokken Worthy
Montana State University	Consumer Science (40 majors)	Deborah C. Haynes
Ohio State University	Consumer Affairs (470)	Loren Geistfeld
South Dakota State University	Consumer Affairs (110 majors)	Rui Yao
Southwest Texas State University	Consumer Science/Business Administration Consumer Science/Mass Communication (23 majors)	Judy Allen
University of Alabama	Consumer Affairs (39 majors)	Milla Borchung
University of Delaware	Leadership and Consumer Economics (200 majors)	Karen Stein
University of Georgia	Consumer Economics (427); Consumer Journalism (61); 488 total majors	Anne Sweaney
University of Illinois	Consumer Economics and Finance (122 majors)	Angela Lyons
University of Massachusetts	Consumer and Family Economics (10 majors)	Musaddak J. Alhabeeb
University of Missouri	Consumer Studies; Personal Finance Services (106 majors)	Michael S. Finke
University of Nebraska-Omaha	Journalism and Mass Communication (10 majors)	Sheran Cramer
University of Utah	Consumer and Community Studies (90 majors)	Rob Mayer
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Consumer Affairs in Business; Personal Finance; Consumer Relations (200 majors)	Cynthia Jasper
Utah State University	Consumer Sciences/Family Finance (72 majors)	Jean M. Lown
Virginia Tech	Consumer Studies (105)	Irene Leech

Recommendations

The contact persons were invited to participate in a roundtable discussion at the 2005 ACCI conference where the primary question for discussion was "Word of wisdom about successful consumer programs." Those present offered the ideas on: (1) recruitment (e.g., use students-talking-to-other-students approach, utilize slick promotional materials, promote accurate job titles); (2) curriculum (e.g., meet student needs with flexible curriculum, apply subject matter to student concerns, make sure courses fit well into other curricula [like human development, communications and journalism]); and (3) instruction (e.g., excellent teaching is a must, use citizen participation activities in classes, require comparison shopping projects, have group in-class presentations, use group

in-class presentations, require oral reports on news, get students to attend professional meetings, require research reports, have consumer advocates and corporate consumer professionals as classroom guest speakers).

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