

From Research to Program Development

One of the major consumers of research is the educator. Collaboration and consultation between the researcher and educators representing a variety of educational specializations has the potential for maximizing the capacity of research efforts to inform education at many levels.

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In the keynote address, Skip Humphrey made the point that the research done by the members of ACCI was essential to informing government officials as they consider policies which impact American consumers. He further noted how important consumer education is to a well functioning economy -- the tremendous impact there would be if consumers had the facts they need to make important financial decisions. One of the major purposes of research in our field is to inform the process of education. Indeed, we might go so far as to say that the educator is one of the primary consumers of our research. Classroom teachers make every effort to inform their teaching efforts with the latest in research findings and extension educators are mandated to base the programs they develop on research.

Ideally then, the educator and the researcher are not working in isolation of each other. We would encourage collaboration, or at least consultation, between the researcher and the educator throughout the research process. Especially important to the usability of the research findings by the educator is collaboration at the point of framing the research questions. Most times, the researcher is also an educator, but in the enthusiasm to get published, the researcher sometimes forgets to examine his/her research questions from the perspective of their role as educator. Because educators are often specialized in either undergraduate, graduate, or extension education, when they develop research questions, they do not always solicit input from individuals representing the other educational specializations. Using a variety of educators to inform the research process from the very beginning will go far in producing research with the greatest potential for informing the educational process.

Looking at the three papers presented in this panel, there are several applications for using the research findings to enrich the educational process:

1. Any educational program on credit use or debt

management would be informed by the data concerning debt level of households and how it is distributed across the various debt categories.

2. The Potential Level variable, which was quantified in the first paper, could also be used in a discussion of the persuasive aspects of advertising, especially the current aggressive advertising related to home equity loans and lines of credit.

3. The study which examines credit and debt by family type would inform any classroom discussion of family composition and the relationship between family composition and financial well-being.

4. Certainly the findings from the family type study would serve extension educators in targeting audiences for credit education and debt management programs.

5. The findings from the study which compared credit and debt portfolios of younger and older households illustrates that education about consumer credit need not be limited to only younger audiences. The results of that study indicate that a discussion of credit use and debt management could be a component of any program on financial management in retirement.

6. The higher level of non-qualified credit available to the group age 65+ and a shifting in attitudes about credit as each new cohort moves toward retirement alerts educators to the need for some pre-retirement education directed to the impact of tapping into assets which represent financial security for the retirement years.

The papers presented today were just a beginning of the research efforts directed to the topic of household credit and debt. As this topic is explored in more depth, there is great potential to do an even better job of targeting credit/debt educational programs to

audiences with the most need and to inform any discussion of credit use and current debt level with sound research findings. The collaboration between researchers and educators representing a variety of educational specializations will continue as these topics are explored in the future.

Endnote

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