Customer Perceptions Matter

Is higher education worth its cost? Lifetime earnings, one popular measure of value, seem to suggest the answer is increasingly, "Yes." But that doesn't end the debate. For many the real question is, are we paying too much for a good thing? Much of the public debate has been over how well courses and programs offered or required lead to successful employment. Given the nebulous definition of "successful employment," maybe a better yardstick would be how efficiently/effectively institutions provide the educational services their customers seek, its cost-benefit ratio. To do that, we'll have to agree on a way to measure the value of the benefit to balance the knowable, dollar-cost on the other side. But value is perception-based and difficult to measure in absolute terms. Maybe we can't define value very well but we probably can sharpen perceptions, if we provide our customers with better information. And that's what our posting this month is all about.
Who Are Our Customers and What Do They Think?

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016
Perhaps the editorial brass at the New York Times thought their readers had wearied of the seemingly endless presidential election dogfight when they turned to higher education for momentary relief on behalf of their writers and readers. The June 23, 2016 special section labeled, “Educational Innovation,” was probably an effort to take a fresh look at a list of topics that have been around for some time. On the cover page, the question setting the agenda was “Student or Customer” and the half-page, bright-red “C” being rolled out suggests the paper had made its call.

**Students are Customers**

With the help of my five siblings, and the next generation or two, the Markee clan has produced enough spouses, nephews, nieces and grandchildren to fill a school bus. The pipeline is full. Those who have graduated with four, five, or six figure loans to pay, reasonably see themselves as having been customers. I can recall when such thinking was seen as heresy on campus, and that may still be the case at some institutions. But paying for a medical, law or business school degree can be a sobering experiences that may alter your outlook, as will examining the way money is allocated/invested by some institutions to attract students via upgraded creature comforts.

How we allocate our money and how effective procurement functions influences the cost of providing educational services and the perception of graduates and their parents as to the cost-benefit ratio of the education they have acquired. Expanded to nationwide, similar groups of customers account for a significant fraction of American taxpayers.

Another headline was, “Sex Ed on Campus,” and the protest sign in the picture read “Stanford.” No, it wasn’t about the birds and bees. It was about how to avoid unwelcome sexual encounters. Sexual assault prevention is close to the top on every institution’s agenda. I can’t point to one event as a turning point, but early legal involvement has become an established trend. From what I read, Columbia University, my alma mater, provides legal assistance for both/all sides and I’m sure those handling the situation on behalf of the institution either have legal backgrounds or professional help close to hand.

There are many reasons why institutions in the recent past chose to handle sexual assault in a manner very different from other serious felonies. Why is complicated. Privacy and Legal Cost may be a consideration for some, until a multimillion-dollar judgment is awarded to a student at another institution whose case was legally mishandled in the view of a jury. Avoiding bad publicity may be another with substantial backfire potential. I suspect trying to handle sexual assault issues without comprehensive legal assistance is an unwise unacceptable risk and may prove unfair to all involved and most of the sane sober folks I know agree.

**Tax Payers are Customers, Too**

Another headline read, “Collegiate Customers: Students Set the Terms.” Pictures showed students relaxing in a serpentine leisure pool at a Texas institution and in a large pool at the indoor Aquatic Center of a Missouri University. That pool was large enough to accommodate three small boats, full of student/customers. Reality is more complicated. Like most big businesses, higher education has a variety of customers. Students, parents, donors and the taxpayers who ultimately “pay the piper” are among them. What makes them comfortable may vary significantly. Students are customers, as I see it, and entitled to participate in related decision making. But, clearly, students are not our only customers.

Yet another headline was “Meeting of Minds,” and the subject seemed to be how to reduce the cost of higher education and increase graduation rates. More output at lower unit-cost in industrial terms. Apparently those on hand at the Times-sponsored gathering had concluded computerization had not proven able to provide an across the board answer to cost reduction/accessibility/retention/completion. And online learning is not likely to be suitable in many areas. In either case, though, all have stated need to make improvements.
industrial terms. Apparently those on hand at the Times-sponsored gathering had concluded computerization had not proven able to provide an across the board answer to cost reduction/accessibility/retention/completion. And online learning is not likely to be suitable in many areas, in any case. In the end, the talk was not so much about computerization, cutting costs or innovation as it was about acquiring more financial support from various levels of government. Unfortunately, there was nothing much new there.

Tax-weary New York State voters capped local school-tax increases some years ago, in reflection of a sour national-taxpayer mood. Mention of increasing costs within higher education in many settings is likely to draw comments related to how student life has been upgraded since we were undergraduates. Our children and grandchildren experience a much different environment. Perhaps the competition for enrollment has induced many institutions to embrace commitments they can’t afford to maintain without new income. The “Meeting of the Minds” here seems to have concluded the only solution is more tax money. But that well isn’t bottomless and living within your means is seen as a virtue among many taxpayers. I don’t sense much sympathy for increased taxes. If we want government to provide more resources, we will have to convince them of the need, detail how we will use the new resources provided effectively to address the problem, and establish a reputation for candid reporting back on the outcome.

Government is a Customer, Too

Years ago, one time NAEP and NACUBO president James J. Ritterskamp told me that eventually there would be two kinds of institutions, state and federal. For the most part, private institutions would find it all but impossible to continue relying predominantly on tuition income and the generosity of their alumni. They would inevitably need government assistance and support from the feds seemed the most promising. Much earlier, some seer had observed, “he who pays the piper calls the tune”. “Uncle” has found a prominent place in our chain of command. I’m not sure Jim saw it coming. But it turns out state-supported educational institutions have become increasingly dependent on federal support of one sort or another as well. I suspect most of you would agree that purchasing works directly for the institution’s end-users and reports to its chief business officer directly or otherwise, but in many areas “uncle” calls the tune. This customer requires transparency and timely information.

Useful Transparency

Since I left the work-a-day world of higher education, I have better understood the challenge to comprehend what is going on within the business side of the house, even if you know where to look. Anyone can read the Chronicle of Higher Education, which is mostly about academic affairs, or NACUBO’s Business Officer—but few do. And there are a host of special-interest journals and other publications available from the professional associations supporting the business side of higher education. However, I have never heard anyone who wasn’t part of the higher education community refer to any of those publications.

I don’t think higher education’s business leaders are communicating with taxpayers very well. How often have you read an article in the national media explaining how, or better yet how effectively, we are using the financial support provided? The tax money comes from the government but it’s no secret it originates with individuals, my neighbors and yours. Many are wondering what we do with it. Does your institution regularly publish/post informational material describing what it has done with the funds received or even publish a summary budget? Stewardship matters. Does purchasing make an effort to tell its story? Maybe one potential role for purchasing is to provide information and urge the CBO “to take pen in hand.”

Just saying the information is available isn’t enough. We read about success in sporting areas and many readers are convinced that the millions paid famous coaches have been well spent, if the team wins. Although his/her record has little to do with the core mission of the institution, fans know every big-time coach’s nickname, individual style and won/loss record. But does the man on the street have any idea of what we do with the money we are asking them to provide? Do they know what is planned and who will call the plays on your campus? I subscribe to the notion that the sender is responsible for delivery and believe it is in our best interests to be the sender.
Do with the money we are asking them to provide? Do they know what is planned and who will call the plays on your campus? I subscribe to the notion that the sender is responsible for delivery and believe it is in our best interests to be the sender.

Feedback

Every other Friday Susan and I join a dozen or so friends for lunch where we will discuss just about anything at two roundtables overlooking the first tee at a private country club where none of us are members but where I caddied occasionally as a youngster. The group has been meeting at the same time and club for close to a century. Although the names involved have changed over the decades, the purpose is much different and the building has burned down at least once, the format has remained the same.

The opening topic could be anything from football to the price of home-delivered heating oil to international or domestic terrorism. Where it goes from there is anybody’s guess. In essence, this is an informal meeting of friends where you can learn what each thinks about a variety of subjects, including higher education. We gather for lunch in sight of a large university’s medical complex and across a four-lane road from its related academic campus. Close as we are geographically, I think it’s fair to say that many around my table see higher education in general as an opaque big business and, if they are or have been paying the bills lately, they see themselves as customers. What they and their peers around the country think about how well higher education is led and managed matters. The article in the Times probably provided the most current partial summary they will see for some time. And that doesn’t tell our story very well.

What’s happening on your campus?

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Obituary: Earl K. Whitman

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016

The email note was from Oklahoma’s Burr Millsap and it said, “Just thought you’d like to know.” The obituary enclosed, and provided below, was for Earl Whitman, a personal friend and one of the most influential NAEB board members and presidents during my 25-year tenure as the Association’s CEO. I first met Earl at a Texas-Oklahoma-Arkansas regional meeting in 1975. He was still dressed in his USN dress-blue commander’s uniform when he was introduced as the next chief procurement officer at the University of Oklahoma, succeeding D. R. Kimrey, who had been the Association’s president in 1955. Burr was Earl’s successor.

Speaking with Earl at the meeting, I made a note to recruit him for our Purchasing Institute faculty as soon as he had settled in. He was that sharp and articulate. Every once in a while, someone comes along who can explain something you thought you knew well in a manner that brings fresh understanding. He took the assignment and instantly became one of our ablest faculty members—with the experience, knowledge, and ability to clearly explain problems and solutions in an insightful way that made many of us rethink what we thought we knew well. He was always open to new ideas and a pleasure to work with.

With Wes Donaldson, Earl led the transformation of TOA into a regional professional development power house. In 1985 he was elected president of the then-NAEB, having served the previous three years as vice-president. Paired with Virginia’s Dolly Prenzel and Texas A&M’s Wes Donaldson, he helped restructure NAEB. Later, he received the Bert C. Ahrens Award, the Association’s highest form of recognition, for his service to NAEB and the branch of the purchasing profession serving higher education.

One of the highlights of my career was a purchasing workshop we held for the University of Hawaii, at their request. Earl was teamed with Jim Ritterskamp and Gerald Evans, a blue-ribbon panel. All three served as president of the Association during their stellar careers on campus. Both Ritterskamp and Evans had also served as president of E&I Cooperative Services.
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Earl’s life-long partner was his wife, Gerri. Perhaps because of their experience with moving from place to place, courtesy of the navy, they had learned to meet people and all but instantly become friends. The two could add warmth to a room just by being there. The Whitmans and Markees stayed in touch after retirement. My wife, Susan, and I are going to miss Earl Whitman.

Neil Markee

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**Earl Kenneth Whitman, 1931-2016**

Earl Whitman of Norman, 85, died on Saturday, July 23, 2016. A funeral mass will be held at St. Thomas More Church at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, July 27, 2016 with Rev. James Goins presiding.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1931 to Carroll and Jean Whitman, he graduated from Somerville High School, where he played on championship baseball and basketball teams. He graduated from Northeastern University in 1955 with honors, and was commissioned as an Ensign in the US Navy. In June of 1956, he married Geraldine St. Cyr, with whom he recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. They had five children in six years and lived in nine states over their 20 years of naval service. During this time, he received his MBA with distinction from the University of Michigan in 1964 and graduated from the Naval War College in 1967.

In 1975 the Whitmans moved to Norman, where he served as Director of Purchasing for the University of Oklahoma, a position he held until his retirement in 1996. He served as President of the National Association of Educational Buyers, as well as regional president for the Purchasing Management Association.

As an active member of St. Thomas More University Parish, Earl served as a Eucharistic Minister, Lector, and on several Parish Committees. His work as treasurer of the St. Vincent de Paul Society helped provide assistance to needy families in the Norman area for many years.

He enjoyed running, walking with the dogs, and playing tennis with the “Ax” group. He and his wife, Gerry, took great pleasure in traveling much of the world, seeing new places and meeting new faces. Regular family outings to Lake Texoma and annual trips back to Massachusetts were times he cherished.

He is survived by his wife, Gerry, and their five children, Kathleen Whitman of Norman; David Whitman and his spouse Peter Stiglin of Sheffield, Massachusetts; Patricia Pemberton, her husband Mickey and grandson Shane of Pottsboro, Texas; Pamela Price, her husband Steve and grandchildren Megan and Christopher of Oklahoma City; Kenneth Whitman and grandchildren Sarah, Kristen, and Alicia of Dallas, Texas; a brother Allister, his wife Lorraine and nephew Douglass of Silver Springs, Maryland, as well as numerous relatives in the Boston area. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the St. Thomas More St. Vincent de Paul Society.

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**From the President: Back to School with NAEP Pro-D**

*Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016*

Kelly Kozisek - NAEP President
Chief Procurement Officer
National Association of Educational Procurement
Kelly Kozisek - NAEP President
Chief Procurement Officer
Oregon State University

Wow, summer is just flying by! At Oregon State University we've closed out year-end and are supporting Capital Planning & Development, Student Affairs, and Housing & Dining Services, as they wrap up remodeling and preparing for the influx of students here in another six weeks. Soon the students will be back on campus, learning things that will prepare them for their careers and develop their life-skills. NAEP is right in sync with this type of activity, by offering its own array of professional development opportunities for its members.

At the end of August there is the Strategic Procurement Institute, held in Denver, Colorado. It isn't too late to take a look at the agenda posted on the NAEP Events and Programs site and register for this popular event.

Fall is the season of regional and district meetings. These meetings are excellent opportunities to build relationships with your colleagues and suppliers, as well as gain information on important higher-education procurement topics. Registration is open for many of these meetings, so make preparations now to attend—in order to learn what’s going on with other universities in your region.

On the other end of the spectrum, it isn't too late to submit a proposal in response to the 2017 Annual Meeting Call for Programs. Share your knowledge and expertise with your colleagues! Whether you are a seasoned presenter or someone who hasn't yet dipped their toes into the presenter pool, the NAEP website has a variety of tools to assist with developing and presenting a compelling program. Program submissions are due in August so act quickly to submit your program for next year's Annual Meeting.

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Registration

Registration for the 2017 Annual Meeting will open in mid-August. NAEP is pleased to announce the early-bird registration rate has not increased from last year. Register today to be in Reno, Nevada in March 26-29, 2017.

Supplier Diversity Institute Recap

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016

Kansas City at the start of August was the place to be for the NAEP Supplier Diversity Institute. Well over 100 conference attendees, speakers, and suppliers networked and took in best practice sessions over the course of the one and a half day event. One of the networking highlights was the Monday evening reception organized by the Kansas City Host Committee at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.

Educational content focused on two main tracks geared towards both new practitioners and those with newer diversity programs as well as experienced professionals and those with mature programs. We are currently loading the PowerPoint presentations and handouts from the various sessions to the NAEP website.

Check out the website next week for pictures of the event courtesy of Ernie Webster from the University of Georgia

Strategic Procurement Institute, August 28-31

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016

Just One Seat Left!

Hurry, there's just one seat left for the Strategic Procurement Institute II in Denver later this month. This popular institute typically sells out and this event is no exception. NAEP will be offering a wait list for those that sign up after we have sold out.

Why should you grab this last seat? The primary objective of this institute is to dig deeper into each of the four pillars of spend management (opportunity assessment, business case development, cost management execution and supplier relationship management) and take that information from theory to practice. The Institute will focus on the practical application of each pillar using live data sets. In-class time will be concentrated on practical “how-to” road maps combined with extensive class discussion with your colleagues and facilitated in a manner to increase the value of what you can take back to your institution for immediate use.
Opportunity Awaits You Backstage at NAEP

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016

Are you interested in being part of the production crew that keeps NAEP up and running year after year? Are you ready to get involved behind the scenes at NAEP but don’t know where to start? Here are just a few places where you can try out anything from a small role to volunteering to produce or direct a meeting, an event, or a project.

Actively participate in your regional meetings by helping to organize, by presenting, by being a vendor liaison. If you like to write, submit an article for publication in the Educational Procurement Journal or here in the Purchasing Link.

Act on this opportunity immediately by networking at your own regional meeting this fall. Do more networking at the Annual Meeting this spring in Reno. That’s the place where you’ll have the opportunity to talk to our current board members, to listen to their visions and to offer your own.

Ready for the curtain? Contact NAEP to start your adventure!

Women’s Leadership Institute, December 6-9

Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016

Ready for the curtain? Contact Tori Longo to start today.

The 2016 Women’s Leadership Institute will be held December 6-9, 2016 in Dana Point, CA.

Be a part of a special program for women seeking to become leaders in higher education administration and student affairs. Coproduced by several higher education associations, this unique program will bring together administrators from across campus functions to help you:

- Hone your leadership skills for working in a rapidly changing environment
- Develop a better understanding of the campus as a workplace and culture
- Share experiences with others about how campuses are adapting and adjusting to the new reality
- Create new personal networks and networking skills to better tap the higher education community
new reality

- Create new personal networks and networking skills to better tap the higher education community

Through presentations, small-group exercises, and discussion, you will gain a practical understanding of what it takes to be a leader on a college or university campus—both the challenges and the rewards. Examine the unique roles, skills, and relationships needed to lead as higher education faces and deals with the most challenging period in 50 years.

Registration information can be found here.

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### Regional Meetings

*Posted By PLink Admin, Friday, August 12, 2016*

Your regional meeting is right around the corner. Students are coming back to campus and Labor Day will be here before we know it. Register now before it’s too late!

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<th>Region</th>
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<td>Great Plains</td>
<td>September 25-28</td>
<td>Minneapolis, MN</td>
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Quote of the Month

“Persons are judged to be great because of the positive qualities they possess, not because of the absence of faults.”

— John Fitzgerald Kennedy