

Chapter 7

The Role of a Chief Mission Officer in Maintaining Mission in Schools and Colleges of Business

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ABSTRACT

In the present competitive environment, it is becoming increasingly important for schools and colleges of business to establish distinctive identities to differentiate themselves from their competition and to provide unique offerings to best prepare their students to be adept contributors in their future careers. The missions of schools and colleges of business play a key role in this endeavor. Once identified, however, maintaining a unique identity can be more difficult than initially establishing one. This chapter proposes the use of chief mission officers (CMOs) as key individuals or groups of individuals as a means to ensure continuing integrity of the mission of a school or college of business to facilitate the maintenance of a distinct position in the marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Quality higher education is viewed as fundamental to a nation's future (American Council on Education, 2012). With over 19 percent of graduating college students receiving an undergraduate degree in business in the U.S., Schools and Colleges of Business (SCBs) play a key role in the education received by students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Given the large number of universities offering business degrees

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through SCBs, business education has become a very competitive arena. As would be expected within such a competitive environment, the missions of SCBs play a critical role in differentiating a particular SCB from its competition and can be the source of its distinctive competency. Although SCBs are affected by the missions of their home institutions, the missions of SCBs are often a much more detailed application of the institution's overall mission to the business education environment.

In the past, many institutions of higher education and the academic units at those institutions did not possess unique missions besides possibly geography. The lack of unique missions did not prove to be a serious shortcoming since universities faced a sellers' market with seemingly endless streams of interested qualified students (Absher & Crawford, 1996), prompting numbers of new institutions and new branch campuses (Levy, 2010). With an increasing number of competitors, new modes of competition (such as online), demographic shifts, changing students' desires/needs, increasing demands for accountability, and the need to develop new streams of revenue, however, the seller's market has arguably disappeared, replaced by a buyer's market where prospective students possess a myriad of educational alternatives (Austin, 2012). Consequently, institutions of higher education are presently facing particularly challenging times (King & Sen, 2013).

Instead of an endless stream of students, therefore, many SCBs are finding they must compete with a dizzying array of new competitors of a variety of different types using various forms of instructional delivery. Many SCBs are even finding that they are facing competitors on their own campuses as numbers of "business-like" programs are developed by other schools and colleges (e.g., communications, sports management) as other academic units try to deal with their own competitive realities. Consequently, SCBs are increasingly finding that they must establish clear positions in the marketplace to provide students with specific reasons to choose to attend their institution or program over another. In the absence of a defined niche, business education becomes commoditized and competition becomes based on price, location, or the availability of expensive "extras" that have little to do with education (e.g., luxurious dorms, exciting entertainment, gourmet food) to attract students (Morelli, 2010). As a result, SCBs are devoting growing attention to establishing and communicating positions unique from the competition they face – positions that offer students more than simply buzzwords and platitudes.

A unique position in the marketplace at a particular point of time, however, is not sufficient for the long-term success of SCBs – SCBs must ensure that they provide enduring offerings consistent with that position. In other words, the position needs to be implemented in the marketplace and maintained in and through the programs that a SCB provides. Although academic units may be good at developing positions, implementing and maintaining them is often much more difficult (Fitz & Naughton, 2013).

How can SCBs offer and maintain distinctive academic and co-curricular educational experiences consistent with their stated unique market positions? This paper looks at one alternative to do just that. The purpose of this paper is to examine how SCBs may be able to ensure academic integrity and innovation while maintaining a distinct position in the marketplace. Specifically, the role of Chief Mission Officers (CMOs) in bringing institutions' missions alive to their internal and external stakeholders is explored. The role of mission in higher education in general and specifically in SCBs is first reviewed. Then, the historic and present use of CMOs in various organizational contexts is examined. Finally, the applicability of CMOs, or closely related options, in SCBs located in any type of college or university is explored.

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