

Walking-Your-Talk: Gap Analysis for Student Attendance at Collegiate Athletic Events

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ABSTRACT

Students in the Wall College of Business at Coastal Carolina University surveyed members of the student body to assess the opportunities and challenges of the University's efforts to encourage students to attend the University's Division I collegiate athletic events. By including both measures of importance and satisfaction with aspects of attending athletic events, it is possible to assess whether issues important to students in attending athletic events are producing satisfaction. This technique, known as Gap Analysis, is outlined as a demonstration project for other institutions seeking to assess and model students' perceptions of collegiate athletic events.

INTRODUCTION

A key component of success in today's business climate is the need to analyze the situation to determine the strengths and weaknesses of an enterprise. The notion of a "Strategic Window" being opened as part of the situation and available for a finite time prior to closure is an easy analogy to grasp (Abel 1978). Peter Drucker noted it is more important to "do the right thing" (effectiveness) than "to do things right" (efficiency) (Kotler 2003, p. 69).

Today's college student has a variety of options to choose from when deciding how to spend their leisure time and entertainment dollar. One option is collegiate athletics. In deed, marketing wars are fought to attract students to athletic events and won or lost on the basis of competitive advantage. In the definition of strategy used here, competitive advantage comes from the intersection of focus, flexibility, and sacrifice (Reis and Trout 1986). Here, focus means finding the "hole" in the market or the target market where the product or service has special appeal and exploiting what is important; and, concentrating on winning the marketing battle to get satisfaction. Flexibility means marketers selectively modify the product or service delivery to match the customer needs or requirements as far as possible to build loyalty. So, where important things are not being satisfied, changes must be made. Finally, sacrifice means it is impossible to be all things to all people in all collegiate athletics.

It is contended here that knowing what is in the mind of the customer is the first step in crafting strategy from a situation analysis. In the context of a strategic planning process, we must establish a baseline of customer perceptions of recent performance before determining, what (if any) changes ought to be considered in our products and programs.

The purpose of this manuscript is to outline a research study conducted at an AACSB accredited College of Business in support of the University's Intercollegiate Athletics program. Students in the College of Business (in conjunction with their instructors) crafted this study to seek input from today's student body. Such input will be used by the Athletic Department to critically evaluate past and present efforts to increase student attendance at sporting events and to plan future efforts to do so. Thus, a key component of this study is to identify the critical issues facing the athletic department in getting students to attend events and to assess their relative performance in dealing with such issues by measuring student satisfaction. Known as Gap Analysis (originally advanced by Martilla and James 1977), we can assess whether athletic administrators are "walking their talk." Stated another way, are they focusing their efforts on those items of greatest importance?

This manuscript is organized as follows. First, institutional background is provided along with some context regarding the nature and importance of the athletic program at CCU. Second, the relevant AACSB standards guiding this research effort are outlined. Third, the methodology used to conduct the study is presented. Finally, the results are presented and implications offered. The preparation of this manuscript is driven by the desire to outline a process used by one AACSB member with other institutions similarly interested in active learning and attendance at intercollegiate athletic events. The actual quantitative results are equally important to the dynamics of sharing methodologies and instruments with academic colleagues.

CONTEXT FOR STUDY: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Coastal Carolina University is a public comprehensive liberal arts institution located in Conway, South Carolina, just nine miles from the Atlantic coast resort community of Myrtle Beach. Located in one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation, the campus primarily serves its immediate operating area known as the "Grand Strand." The Intercollegiate Athletics program at Coastal Carolina University has changed dramatically with rapid growth in enrolled students. Coastal Carolina University currently sponsors 17 sports - eight men's programs and nine women's. Coastal Carolina University is a member of the Big South Athletic Conference ("Big South") and competes at the NCAA Football Championship Subdivision level (previously known as Division I-AA). Here are the mission and vision statements for Coastal Carolina University athletics:

- The Mission: Creating and Inspiring Leadership through Athletics.
- The Vision: Community Involvement, Athletics and Academics Excellence, and Team and Campus Spirit.

Athletic Programs at Coastal Carolina University have enjoyed a successful past. The best macro measure of such programmatic success is the Sasser Cup, an award given to the Big South Conference member who's combined athletic teams achieved the most success (won-loss records and points for conference standings) for that year based on regular season and championship contests, games, or events. Coastal Carolina University has been awarded the Sasser Cup a total of Nine times, a Big South Conference record.

PARTNERSHIP: COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

Business Colleges accredited by AACSB – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – commit to a program of self- and peer-assessment, continuous improvement, and assessment of outcomes in light of the Business School’s missions. Member AACSB institutions approved a new set of accreditation standards in April 2003 (with revised guidance in January 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) to enhance continuous improvement in management education. One paradigm change mandated by the change in Accreditation Standards is the push toward active learning (i.e., engaging students in the discipline of inquiry) (see www.aacsb.edu).

Mission-Driven Activities and Relevant AACSB Standards Guiding This Research Effort

Accreditation by AACSB can be described as a mission-driven program of continuous improvement. Institutions are assessed relative to their performance to published standards in light of the School’s mission. For Coastal, the College of Business is held to the following mission:

The mission of the E. Craig Wall Sr. College of Business Administration is to educate each of our students to have the qualities and attributes essential to his/her progressive and continuing development throughout careers in private, public, and non-profit organizations in a globally competitive and diverse environment. Inherent in this mission is our commitment to the following objectives:

1. Teaching - We will teach the core business functions through applied, experiential, and active learning strategies facilitated by appropriate technologies.
2. Intellectual contribution – We will create and disseminate knowledge in business, which includes learning and pedagogical research, high value added contributions to practice, and discipline-based scholarship.
3. Public service – We will provide professional expertise to benefit the local, regional, national, and international community.
4. Stakeholder involvement – We will actively promote an open and collegial environment that includes input from students, staff, alumni, employers and other institutional stakeholders.

The reader will note the College’s commitment to active learning and stakeholder involvement. These two commitments flow directly from AACSB standards 13 And 15:

Standard 13: Individual Faculty Educational Responsibility	Individual teaching faculty members: (1) operate with integrity in their dealings with students and colleagues, (2) keep their own knowledge current with continuing development of their teaching disciplines, (3) actively involve students in the learning process, (4) encourage collaboration and cooperation among participants, (5) ensure frequent, prompt feedback on student performance.
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Standard 15: Management of the Curricula	Management of the Curricula: The school uses well documented, systematic processes to develop, monitor, evaluate, and revise the substance and delivery of the curricula of degree programs and to assess the impact of the curricula on learning. Curriculum management includes input from all appropriate constituencies which may include faculty, staff, administrators, students, faculty from non-business disciplines, alumni, and the business community served by the school.
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We seek to engage students in the learning process under the assumption that they remember only 10% of what they hear, but remember 90% of what they do. Active learning enables students to create a learning experience and begin to achieve the higher order learning objective of analysis and integration of content at a practical level (Anderson 1997). And, we seek to create active learning projects to be done in conjunction with important stakeholders, both on- and off-campus. Finally, partner projects on-campus allow us to create and reinforce a sense of community and connectedness among various university departments. Collectively, we are Coastal Carolina University.

IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS ... THE FOUNDATION FOR GAP ANALYSIS

In general, studies which focus on the assessment of outcomes tend to focus solely on importance of outcomes or performance toward standards and thus do not provide a complete picture of current activities and mission fulfillment. Evaluating importance of outcomes and performance toward standards are both important. Taken separately, however, it can be difficult to convert such measures into practical strategic responses. The use of Importance-Performance Analysis can help to avoid these potential problem areas and demystify the results in such a way that decision-makers may more easily use them for developing specific action steps for their organizations.

Briefly, Importance-Performance Analysis involves measuring the IMPORTANCE and the PERFORMANCE of a stimulus and then creating a graphical display of the results on a two dimensional (i.e., 2x2) "action grid," such as presented in **Figure One**. This graph serves two important purposes. First, it offers an easily-interpreted visual display of the results of the analysis. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it provides a basis for strategy formulation.

Figure One
Importance-Performance Grid

HIGH Importance	A. Concentrate Here	B. Keep Up the Good Work
LOW Importance	C. Low Priority	D. Possible Overkill
	LOW Performance	HIGH Performance

Looking at **Figure One**, you see the upper half of the matrix represents stimulus dimensions which are perceived as higher importance while the bottom half are those dimensions which are considered of lower importance. The right-hand side of the matrix contains attributes for which performance is perceived to be at higher performance levels whereas the left-hand side of the matrix contains items with lower performance levels. The 2x2 Importance-Performance grid presented contains four quadrants:

1. **Concentrate Here** – High Importance, Low Performance
2. **Keep Up the Good Work** - High Importance, High Performance
3. **Low Priority** – Low Importance, Low Performance
4. **Possible Overkill** - Low Importance, High Performance

METHODOLOGY

Students enrolled in Marketing Research at Coastal Carolina University worked with their instructor to gather data and conduct a Gap Analysis for CCU’s Athletics.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire used in this study was based upon one developed by McCullough and Fullerton (2008) and appears in the appendix. The finalized questionnaire was posted to a unique Internet address for data collection. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in the **APPENDIX**.

Data Collection

VOVICI software was used to collect information. The email addresses of CCU students were generated through a snowball sampling procedure. A cover letter (sent via email) was used in data collection. It contained a direct link to the survey.

Respondents were offered a copy of the results upon completion of the study to stimulate participation (Goodman 2006). Approximately 1,500 email addresses were used in a seven day field period with 578 responses received from a student population of around 7,800. Assuming a good database of addresses

(and that is an unknown), we received around a 33% response rate with a 78% completion rate. Although with the response and completion rates found there are concerns regarding non-response error, recognition must be made that we did, in fact, live our mission statement: we used active learning to enhance student learning and we help an important stakeholder (our colleagues in Athletics) collect important customer feedback.

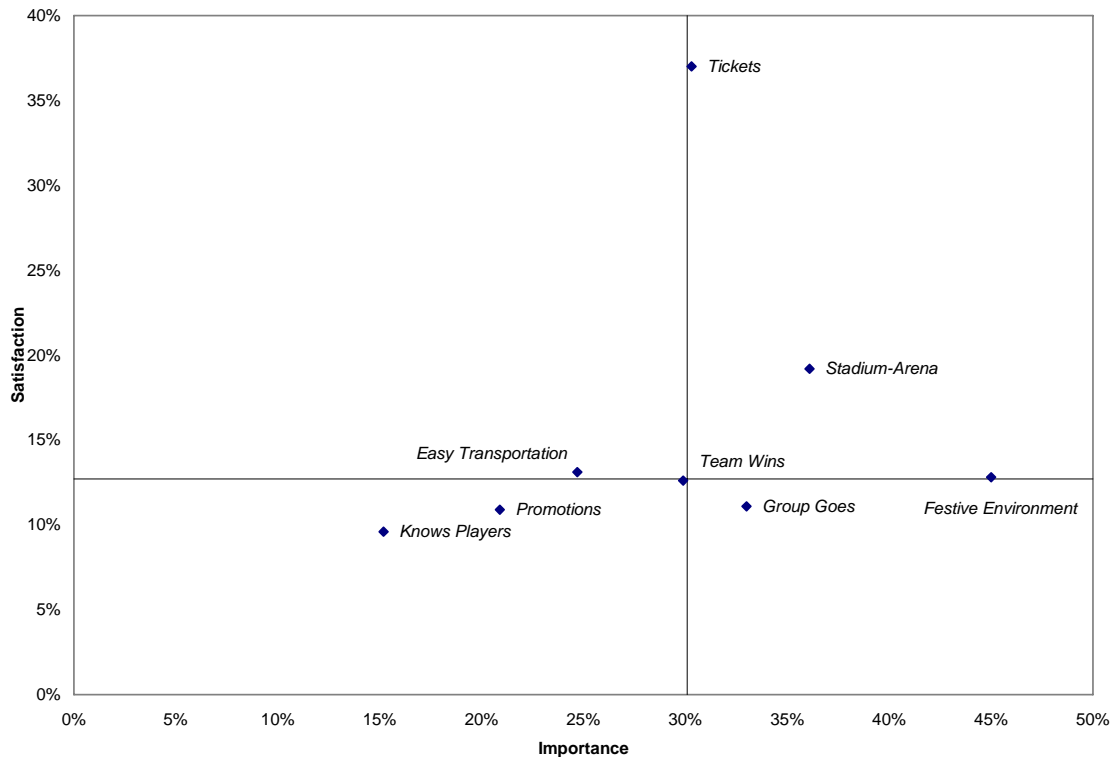
RESEARCH RESULTS

The results are presented in **Table One** and graphically in **Figure Two**.

Table One
Top – Box Importance and Satisfaction Ratings for Eight Attributes

Attribute	Importance	Satisfaction
Tickets	30%	37%
Team Wins	30%	13%
Stadium-Arena	36%	19%
Promotions	21%	11%
Group Goes	33%	11%
Easy Transportation	25%	13%
Festive Environment	45%	13%
Knows Players	15%	10%

Figure Two
Gap Analysis Using a Quadrant Chart



Since a traditional Gap Analysis using Brand Map uses only top – box percentages for both Importance and Satisfaction ratings on each of the eight attributes from the questionnaire, only those data are presented in **Table One** and used to create the quadrant chart in **Figure Two**. A clustering of responses in the High-Importance / High-Satisfaction Quadrant is the desired outcome for the organization being assessed (e.g., keep up the good work!). It indicates they are focusing efforts on important matters. They are “walking their talk.” Such is the evaluation here for only Stadium-Arena where a relatively Important attribute is also relatively high in Satisfaction. Tickets are on the borderline and are highest in satisfaction probably because ticket cost is ‘hidden’ in student fees paid with tuition. Festive environment is relatively high in Importance and relatively low in Satisfaction, presumably due to the no-alcohol policy on campus as indicated by student comments. Improvement could be made in Easy Transportation presumably due to lack of parking near the Football stadium, but this is a relatively low priority item. Game day promotions relationships with players are low in Importance and Satisfaction and therefore not an issue when it comes to improvement. The won-loss record of the team and the tendency of students to attend events in groups are not issues to be addressed since they are near the origin of the map.

The map presented as **Figure Two** is for all students. Similar maps could be constructed for segments of the student body based on the demographics included in the questionnaire.

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT FOR CONSIDERATION

The research process outlined here represents a mission-driven effort to fuse the teaching, research, and service efforts of the faculty. A synergy can be created by leveraging our efforts accordingly. The project outlined here achieved the following outcomes:

- We enhanced student learning in the Marketing Research class by embracing active learning.
- We used technology (on-line survey software) to facilitate data collection and provided an active learning experience.
- We collected input from important stakeholders (students) for use by the Athletic Department in their planning efforts.
- We provided a value-added public service to an important stakeholder (sharing the results of the study with students and the Athletic Department).

This work is presented here to provide academic colleagues at other institutions subject matter, methodology, technology support, and other research components for consideration at their respective institutions. Replication is possible for a variety of specific sports such as Football and Women's Softball, and so on. Students can evaluate the performance of all 17 collegiate athletics at CCU to address our central question: "are they walking their talk?" In our case, the answer is "yes" in general. More importantly, this fact was illustrated to our students. The outcomes provided many avenues for class discussion and student presentations.

Collectively, this was a successful project for our institution. While we were disappointed with the somewhat surprising low response rate (and have concerns regarding non-response error), recognition must be made that we did, in fact, live our mission: we enhanced a course with active learning and technology; we sought stakeholder input; we provided a value-added public service. We offer our work as a demonstration projects for other institutions seeking similar outcomes.

REFERENCES

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Gender?

Male
Female

Employment Status?

Full-time student with no job.
Full-time student with a part-time job.
Full-time student with a full-time job.
Part-time student with no job.
Part-time student with a part-time job.
Part-time student with a full-time job.

Housing Arrangements?

I live on-campus in the dormitories.
I live off-campus in CCU housing (University Place).
I live off-campus in non-CCU housing (apartment, townhouse, etc).

Student Status at Coastal Carolina University?

I entered CCU as a first-year student.
I entered CCU as a transfer student from another college or university.

Your Relationship to CCU Student-Athletes (select one)?

I am a CCU Student-Athlete.
I am the friend of a CCU Student-Athlete.
I am NEITHER a CCU Student-Athlete nor a friend of a CCU Student-Athlete.

Organizational Status?

I am a member of a Fraternity or Sorority.
I am a member of a student club.
I am a member of another student organization.
I am NOT a member of a Fraternity, Sorority, student club, or other student group.

Please tell us the LAST NAME of the person who sent this survey to you?

Please feel free to offer any additional information regarding your attendance at CCU Athletic Events in the space below.

Thank you for your input!