

The Student as the Customer, and the Faculty Dilemma

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ABSTRACT- College and university faculty members today may be facing an identity crisis brought about by an unlikely cause, business economics. In the recent past, say, thirty years ago, college professors were held in the highest regard by peers and students, and recognized for their sagaciousness, wisdom, expertise, and contribution to the community. However, recent data shows that some professors nowadays feel expendable, as second-class citizens, and servants to their patrons, college students or so-called customers. By sheer nature of referring to the student as the customer conjures up the notion that professors work for the students and it is the professor's job to make sure they are educated, yes, but mostly kept happy and committed to staying enrolled to meet university fiscal demands.

Consequently, research shows that faculty members are attempting to reconcile the customer satisfaction of students with the rigor, scholarship, and professionalism expected from them by their university employers. In a new poll, faculty members described how they receive conflicting objectives from well-intended school leaders that simply cannot be done without the risk of losing their teaching position or losing dissatisfied students to the plethora of competing universities marketing themselves to a diminishing number of new student candidates. Therefore, customer satisfaction is apparently a key driver in determining whether faculty members are retained or retired, regardless of their reputation, tenure, or tenacity.

Keywords: Student Customers, Faculty in Fear, Universities as Businesses.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Author(s): G. Stan Reeley and Mary Ann Reeley;
Received: 13/09/2023; **Accepted:** 03/10/2023; **Published:** 20/10/2023;
e-ISSN: 2347-470X;
Paper Id: IJBMR-;
Citation: 10.37391/IJBMR.110302
Webpage-link:
<https://ijbmr.forexjournal.co.in/archive/volume-11/ijbmr-110302.html>



Publisher's Note: FOREX Publication stays neutral with regard to Jurisdictional claims in Published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business may be business, and here in America our lustful pursuit of profits and rewards can be powerful, addictive, and compelling. The economics of consumerism and the science of marketing are taught fervently by most colleges and universities worldwide, with a bit of ethics layered into the mix; yet, practicing what is being preached is one of the provocations behind this study. Our institutions remain noble ones— institutions such as our justice system, religion, healthcare, and finally, academia at the centre of this article.

Amidst the noble canons academia once possessed, today there is an ambition for fiscal success, a powerful force that movie stars exploit to convince admissions officers at our best universities to give spots to their children above more qualified applicants, recently in the news (Drozdzowski, 2023). Some politicians influence university leaders with promises of beneficial legislation in exchange for admitting their children so they can use the university brand on future job applications to their advantage, or simply to be a legacy like their parent or sibling, although they fall short in meeting standard admission criteria.

It is within this framework where college professors today find themselves, confused and struggling internally, juxtaposing their role as a fiscally minded advocate of the university that employs them with that of an educator of the student, the customer, and by most accounts, their employer, a position perceived by hosts of faculty members as a modern-day contradiction (Guilbault, 2016). Too often nowadays the idiom, customer, to describe a student is being used operationally in academia, and from new research findings presented here with supporting literature, it's becoming an uncomfortable and contentious situation between professors, students, and university leaders. To better assess the validity of these claims scientifically, data were collected and analysed by this author from responses provided anonymously by college and university professors hailing from assorted geographic regions and academic institutions across the United States and around the world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature shows how student customer satisfaction has a direct and powerful impact on whether faculty members are retained by many colleges and universities across the country, and globally, and if leaders within these institutions will support faculty first, particularly adjunct faculty members, when they are challenged by disgruntled students. This debate has been ongoing for decades, and some academies are beginning to reevaluate the rationale of taking the customer position as being in the best interest of the student. Wherever academic institutions recognize students as customers and the customer is always right philosophy, the quality of the education is tarnished, faculty-student relationships are damaged, and student standards/outcomes are compromised, their mission cannot be met. Students who view themselves as customers may only be considering their short-term wants, and

not the long-term needs, and expectations, of all parties/stakeholders, such as their future employers (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). The concept of the student customer, if this relationship exists solely because there has been an exchange of money/funds for a product (education), value-for-money (Royo, J. P., 2017), hinges on the student being made “aware of the contributions to, and expectations of, their education on the part of all other stakeholders. In complex exchange processes such as these, customers have to be educated in their role. The same is true of students as customers” (Eagle & Brennan, 2007, p. 56).

The relationship between the person delivering the required educational services (faculty) and the student/customer is forever altered, as individual parties view the role of the other differently; faculty has the desire to instill the concepts of “hard work, responsibilities and standards of excellence”, while the student/customer sees themselves “as passive consumers, rather than as active participants and co-responsible participants in their own education” (Jennings & Angelo, 2006, as cited by Royo, J. P., 2017, p. 50). Higher education is being realigned through the emergence and growth of neoliberal policies (tuition fees, rankings, and student surveys), in how higher education is framed, that is as a means of reaching immediate, instrumental goals rather than as a component of one’s long term, intellectual development (Schwartzman 1995; as cited in Budd, R. (2017). “As such, the metaphor of customer is seen as inappropriate in relation to what the role of the student is, or should be” (Budd, R., 2017, p. 24).

2.1 Medical Students

Experts in medical education view this student-customer shift as exceptionally dangerous when considering our future physicians. “The student-customer model may, for example, inculcate damaging attitudes towards staff, including the rejection of ‘irrelevant’ course material because the student ‘knows best what is relevant’, and promote a culture of blaming others for academic failure” (Parsell, 2000, p. 328). Exam success and achievements, by whatever method is necessary may be normalized. “At the beginning of their medical education students cannot fully understand what is expected of them in the ensuing years of preparation. They cannot judge which aspects of their learning are relevant in different situations and cannot fully recognize what is important until after they qualify. In contrast, the purchase of a consumer item, for example, carries no further expectations or obligations. The purchaser needs only basic information, no qualifications, and attitudes that extend only as far as function and design” (Parsell, 2000, p. 328). Medical students may have started the customer-student mindset as undergraduates, and its perpetuation will have far reaching public consequences.

2.2 The Customer’s Customers

Another way to look at the customer relationship is to examine the end client, the one served by our customer-student graduate. This may be the patient, business client, consumer, or even a student. It may be necessary for faculty to “suffer the consequences of dissatisfied student customers who cannot achieve their goals to meet our societal obligations to graduate

only competent clinicians” (Tanner, 1999, p. 148); however, do they have the support of the institutions for which they work? Postsecondary institutions promote the idealization that educational credentials are a commodity to be purchased by the customer/student for their own future economic gain. This engagement negatively impacts the faculty-student relationship (Saunders 2010; cited by: Robinson, (2022).

2.3 Literature Concludes

Perhaps it is how the educational organizations present themselves, using buzzwords and marketing metaphors, that produce misunderstanding and misconceptions that are illusionary, producing a customer is always right student attitude. The fee-for-service-mentality, as the concept of the student customer reinforces, should be replaced by a sense of citizenship within the college/university community/relationship building based on dyadic mutual respect and organizational hierarchy (Chart A). Ideally, with engagement in academic rigor, students identify and connect theory and practice, thus transferring these skills into the workplace for continued career success. Customers feel that if there is something that they do not like, they are justified in complaining. These actions, while not aligning with educational standards and processes, or the student’s opportunities for success, negatively impact the original purpose of said education, and the faculty involved in its delivery (Svensson & Wood, 2007). Students use surveys to complain and retaliate.

Data suggests that the information students provide in such surveys is not necessarily “a fair and accurate assessment of faculty teaching skills” (Kane et al., 2016, p. 11). Responses can be positive for non-academic aspects, such as the student felt that the faculty member was a nice dresser or they liked a specific shirt, while a negative or unflattering response provided could be a classroom did not have windows and thus a depressing environment was perceived by the student (Düddul, P., 2023). Online classrooms present a whole new host of challenges subject to interpretation by students, yet most of these are beyond the control of faculty and often relate to unfriendly technology implemented by university leaders. Retention is another direct result of a satisfied student experience, and even more of a factor than the teaching quality or physical surroundings (Carter & Yeo (2016). It has been noted that students tie their satisfaction rating to their grade; meaning, the higher the grade corresponds to more positive feedback on surveys. These student surveys are more of an opinion poll, and not a true measure of the academic rigor, the value provided to the student, or anything faculty-related (Düddul, P., 2023).

It is no wonder that faculty members feel conflicted when student survey responses are not glowing. Because it’s the job of the faculty member to teach, grade fairly, and retain students so that the fiscal goals of the college or university are met, the stress and frustration of balancing it all seems virtually undoable when some students truly feel entitled to a high grade and special benefits because of the large sums of often borrowed money they pay for tuition. Until academic institutions bring into the arena appropriate instruments to evaluate teaching

competence accurately and honorably, faculty are threatened by opinion, not legitimate measurements. How inappropriate that one's livelihood can be threatened by an opinion (Hornstein, 2017). When academic decisions are determined by opinion and not by expertise, experience, and academic rigor and standards, the result can only be harmful to the student, faculty, academic institutions, and the public at large (Parsell, 2000).

Further, whether a faculty member is perceived to grade more harshly or easily is scrutinized by students and school leadership as well—and the debate on what is fair grading is subject to interpretation, mostly by students. Surprisingly the student as the customer debate is not a new phenomenon, considering the age of supporting sources in this article; however, what is new is the more overt, intense strain between some, not all, students and faculty members who view their roles in the higher learning process as something different than a few decades ago. Because of intense competition between colleges and universities for the expanding and contracting tuition dollars, exacerbated by a tsunami of online learning institutions now available, and with many doctoral graduates hoping to apply their degree to land teaching positions, the basic economics (supply-demand-price) model has never shown brighter in this industry. Faculty members do not feel secure knowing there is a breadline of replacement candidates waiting to replace them, while students are aggressively reeled in by recruiters. It is during this activation period that students are conditioned to believe they are at the center of operations.

3. THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument was crafted by this writer and as a convenience sampling via the Internet distributed to two social media outlets to a targeted audience of college faculty members as nine relevant questions in a five-point Likert Scale format using Survey Monkey for data dissemination, collection, and ratio analysis. Specific universities were not targeted because of IRB restrictions; however, the number of clustered responses was sufficiently revealing with outliers considered to make reasonable assumptions in support of information provided in this article. The response ratio over the time allocated was statistically significant. While the instrument was not validated prior, data corroborated with previously published materials, some cited in this piece, strongly indicate that results obtained are reliable. Consequently, readers may conclude with confidence that data presented here are worthy of further discourse and debate.

3.1 Human Subjects

Two social media membership sites where predominately online adjunct faculty members gather to opine and share their teaching experiences provided useful data to develop the survey results for this article. The response ratio was high, and all professional human subjects contacted teach with various colleges and universities across the United States—and abroad. Thus, it is affirmed their perspectives provided on each question posed are both credible and real-world relevant.

Here's the Rub—the Problem Statement

College professors have historically been hailed as the leaders in their classrooms by creating their own unique environment centered on teaching life lessons about the joy of success and the consequences of failure. Further they are obliged to advance critical thinking, foster collaboration exercises, to show students how rewards are recognized when deadlines are met, and to accept responsibility and accountability when they are not. The problem is that today faculty colleagues admit they must play duplicitous roles as being both arbiters of student success by leading them towards higher graduation rates, and one where retention ratios and customer satisfaction are equally measured by university administrators (Deen, 2022). If the professor is not so-called popular with students or is perceived too harsh in grading or demanding with deadlines, these perceptions by student customers, whether real or unfounded, could result in higher dropout ratios, an exodus toward competitors, or poor survey scores, and thereby risk their employment with their school for doing a job they love and are trained experts in performing.

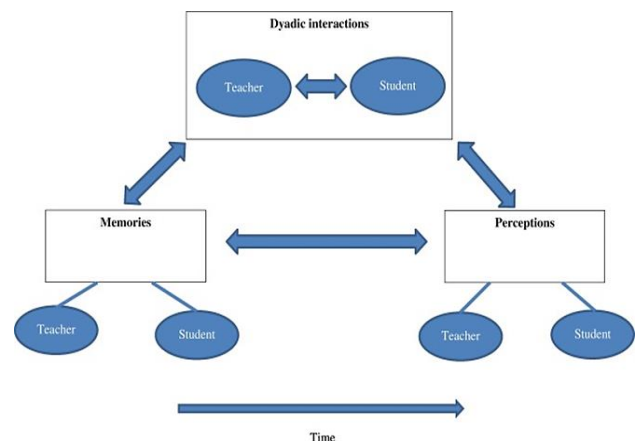


Figure 1: Courtesy of Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology

Chart A shows symbiotic relationships between both students and teachers over time involving dyadic interactions expected during conventional classroom experiences. The exchange between memories and perceptions shows separate, but equal discourse that faculty members acknowledge as typical representations for quality learning and mutual respect. While nuanced, there is no overlap as in a Venn Diagram showing students extending beyond into spaces that teachers occupy where the perception (or reality) of the student as a customer would be apparent. Therefore, this author concludes that a paradigm shifts to where faculty members are made to become subservient to students is abnormal, perhaps toxic, and has no place in healthy college and university environments. Once students are empowered to direct or control the synergy established with their teachers, the conventional and most efficient process for learning is adversely compromised. Consider the notion of training students to function effectively in real-world workplace situations where the hierarchy is predetermined by the culture of the business, student graduates conditioned to view themselves as customers may likely find themselves at a disadvantage and without practice to be productive and successful employees, and not always right

(Brinkworth, M., McIntyre, J., Jurasaschek, A., Gehlbach, H., 2018).

3.2 Customer Is Always Right

Maitland Jones, Ph.D., an author of seminal textbooks on the tedious subject of organic chemistry was aggressively recruited from UCLA to teach as a resident professor at NYU; however, after a brief time in the classroom, Jones was fired by university leaders after a handful of students (80 students from his 350-student course) circulated a petition complaining that Jones didn't give them the attention needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While circumstances may have been something different or a combination of other variables that caused the termination of Jones, colleagues of Jones stated they all feared what student customers might share about their experience while in a class they teach and believe that the petition was the catalyst for the firing, regardless the stature and name recognition Jones brought to NYU (Marcos, 2022). It is unclear as to how carefully university leaders weighed their options prior to the firing; still, there seems to be little doubt that the demands of the customer (to be right) had an impact on which direction their decision went, even in a high-profile situation such as this one.

In the 1890s when consumerism, a byproduct of competition and capitalism was emerging worldwide, César Ritz, founder of the Ritz Carlton Hotel chain in the 1890s, coined the motto "Le client n'a jamais tort" (the customer is never wrong) sparking a new meaning to the concept of ultimate customer service above everything else (Chinn, 2023). While good service is enjoyed and appreciated by customers, readers must ask themselves if institutions of higher learning, hospitals, and religious organizations are or should ever become part of the customer satisfaction business model when arguably they exist to serve a much higher calling with a broader and more noble mission. Fast Forward 100 Years. Institutions today invest time and immense resources into highly developed quality initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM) to install and make permanent a climate where employees continuously improve their ability to provide on-demand products and services that customers will find of value as an organization-wide effort (Barone, 2023). Six Sigma is also used and is a familiar tool used by these institutions. Objectives include exceeding the customer's expectations, maintaining a competitive position in the market, managing, or eliminating defects—an ambiguous claim—raising profits, and retaining the customer's loyalty. Whenever these seemingly reasonable objectives are applied into teacher-student-administrator relationships, the new paradigm that emerges can be surprising, troubling, and confusing, especially for faculty members whose professional objectives are far different and more intimate than peering through the lens of a standard business model (Chart A).

3.3 Fair Grading—And What Student Customers Expect

One surprisingly controversial issue where students, faculty, and school leaders agree to disagree is on grading. While policies typically exist for consistency and are acknowledged

by all three groups, interpretation of these policies and consequently, expectations vary, once again causing confusion and stress for the teaching process and uncertain autonomy for faculty in their classrooms, both in-seat or online. Because of open enrollment observed by many colleges and universities today, a very diverse mix of students with a wide range of circumstances and backgrounds are expected in every classroom each term. Higher education is practice for graduates to become successful in their career pursuits, so it is important for faculty to be consistent through the rituals of grading protocols established by schools in addition to a high standard for ethical behavior.

There is value in setting a standard for grading outcomes as a measurement. The effort, time, energy, and even wishes for success are fine, but the effort is not a substitute for success. Metaphorically, when relying on a mechanic to repair your car who tells you it is fixed, and after sliding into the driver's seat, turning on the vehicle, and pulling onto the highway, thoughts of the driver are the effectiveness of the repairs, not that the work was done with passion or feeling, or having worked really hard and put in many hours. The quality of the repairs is what matters. The medical community has already considered the impact on healthcare outcomes when providers are inadequately responsible for their actions (Parsell, 2000). When classifying students as customers, an unspoken push for faculty to disregard rigor, deadlines, and professional behavior in the classroom is replaced by lesser measurements that include excitement/passion, the length of time spent to complete course work, family obligations, and a host of other excuses that would not be tolerated at the workplace (Düddul, P., 2023).

"Fair grading practices are those that provide an equitable evaluation of student performance, regardless of individual ability or background. Fair grading practices aim to create an unbiased evaluation system that provides each student with the same opportunities for success. This includes utilizing a consistent and predictable scale that is understood by all involved in the assessment process; this means utilizing a standardized scale that applies to all students equally, no matter their ability level or background. It also provides a transparent way for teachers to assess student progress to provide an objective evaluation" (Strobel Education Website, 2023).

There is a delicate balance between ensuring that students leave the classroom with the tools needed to move forward and enjoy a successful career, and yielding to the unrealistic customer is always right premise, even if this false sense of satisfaction is temporary and in the moment. For example, faculty can structure their teaching methods to inspire students through their own personal passion, by listening and responding to student's concerns, by frequently communicating and supporting students when life becomes overwhelming and hinders their concentration, whether in-class or online, and by providing a standardized rubric and grading process and making sure that every student understands what is expected of them, but is this enough to satisfy the student-customer? Grades, just like career promotions, must be earned by proving scholarship, skills, and acuity. Student-teacher relationships should not be adversarial, and to be fair, faculty members must make clear to

students their intentions to foster student success from day one and continue this mission throughout the time they spend together (Chart A); however, students must fully accept their role and expectations, and not seek preferential treatment due to circumstantial situations unless they communicate professionally in advance with their professor, just as they would be required to do in the workplace.

Consequently, research shows that faculty members are attempting to reconcile the customer satisfaction of students with the rigor, scholarship, and professionalism expected from them by their university employers. In a recent poll, faculty members described how they are receiving clashing objectives from well-intended school leaders that simply cannot be done without the risk of losing their teaching position or losing dissatisfied students to the plethora of competing universities marketing themselves to diminishing numbers of new student candidates. Consider the response ratios to nine questions from the survey below asked anonymously to faculty members where relationships between students, faculty, and their administrators are shown. A practiced and scholarly analysis and interpretation of these ratios are provided by this author, yet the reader may determine their validity.

4. SURVEY QUESTIONS, RESPONSES, RATIOS, AND RESULTS

Q 1: My university leaders view students as customers.

76.9% Agree or Strongly Agree

From this ratio, it can be determined that a large percentage of faculty members believe that the college or university where they teach view students as their customers. Whether this perception gives students a louder megaphone or a superpower to govern how their education is delivered, or it's simply the business model of the academy because money is paid by students toward earning their degree to teams of workers to provide this service for them, cannot be definitively determined. This author is not making assumptions about expectations students might have based on this singular response; however, from the survey results as a whole and supported by literature, the hierarchical rank of students within some colleges and universities is that of a customer through the eyes of faculty members.

Q 2: When faculty members are asked to view students as customers and marketing philosophies tell us that customers are always right and must be kept happy—and if the university's revenue stream is impacted when students leave because their college experience didn't yield outcomes "they" expected, these variables can and do change how we as teachers teach.

87.18% Agree or Strongly Agree

The results show that most faculty members acknowledge their awkward responsibility to retain students by keeping them happy, realizing this may be an impossible feat in some instances. Because faculty members are eventually placed on

the front lines with students after their ego-bolstering experiences with recruiters and advisors, the stress of customer satisfaction, teaching and grading fairly, feeling their job may be at risk if students do not rate the professor favorably, and that fewer students mean a dam in the revenue stream, it's no wonder that faculty members are rethinking their teaching methods if students indicate any dissatisfaction during the term, or at the end in their opinion survey.

Q 3: If a student/customer complains to a university leader about a score they received while in a class I taught, I feel that university leaders would support me without question.

38.46% Disagree or Strongly Disagree; 15.38% Neither Agree nor Disagree

While the response ratios in disagreement are smaller compared to the other results from the instrument, it is interesting that over 15% are unsure if their institution would support them over a student is a more compelling factor to ponder. Perhaps this uncertainty causes more stress than respondents who are already aware of the culture and attitudes of their institution towards faculty and the behavior of its leadership on matters of loyalty. The case regarding Dr. Maitland Jones proves interesting because the approximate proportion of students who circulated a petition to have Jones fired that was carried out by school leaders is similar.

Q 4: My primary expectation as a teacher is that students have a satisfying course experience.

89.74% Agree or Strongly Agree

These results indicate that most faculty members want students to have an excellent classroom experience from day one, whether in-seat or online—and to exceed their expectations without requiring external motivation or incentive to do so. It's an intrinsic reward for faculty. This author, a faculty member, enjoys teaching students, and equal to my colleagues we teach for the joy of the interaction, the sharing of knowledge, and because this profession gives us a sense of purpose and legacy. We do not teach solely for financial rewards, mainly because the pay is meager compared to other industries where an advanced education could be applied, and greater monetary wealth be achieved. For a faculty member, mutual respect is their currency. Regardless, most faculty members begin each term with optimism and a positive attitude about every student's success potential; however, some students nowadays may view the role of faculty differently.

Q 5: If my grading falls within "acceptable" university ranges, but this outcome causes dissatisfaction among students, I feel that my teaching job is at risk, particularly if students complain or start dropping out.

69.23% Agree or Strongly Agree

Q 6: As a member of faculty, university leaders expect that my collective course grades for the class to fall within a

predetermined range/average/mean; but if otherwise, I am perceived as grading too easily or too harshly.

48.72% Agree or Strongly Agree

Q 7: Faculty members receive “mixed messages” from university leaders regarding how students should be treated, taught, and graded while in their assigned classes.

69.24% Agree or Strongly Agree

Responses to questions 5, 6, and 7 on grading indicate that a large ratio of faculty members are dealing with issues surrounding grading, namely, what constitutes as fair, as well as how to grade with consistency and still maintain customer-student satisfaction. Perhaps both cannot be achieved, as students will complain about their grade, feeling that it should be higher because they worked so hard, or that their life circumstances/work-life-balance challenges that interfered with the quality of their assigned task or prevented them from meeting the deadline was more important than students in their class who completed assignments on time and with higher quality. While faculty members will strive to accommodate students who have real emergencies or unexpected life situations, too often these turn out to be delay tactics and unfounded. Nevertheless, faculty must determine if school policy is specific enough to support them after they require students with tenuous excuses to face consequences, such as penalty points or a zero, or fear that the student will reach out to administrative parties with the school and complain about the professor, immediately placing the faculty member in a defensive position to prove their grading decision to school leaders. Lastly, some university leaders look at data and determine that statistically only a certain percentage of students should earn an A, B, and so on, regardless of what is occurring in the classroom. This author is acquainted with the notion that faculty members are reprimanded by some school leaders if students in their classes score higher marks than what is statistically predicted, again forcing faculty members to defend themselves on the other side of the coin. Perhaps a faculty member is a terrific teacher and students respond well to them; thus, the class members earn higher grades than what the stats forecast. Faculty members have been accused of giving grades to students to win their favor, skewing data that administrators might expect, when the reality is that faculty-student symbiotic relationship was positive and higher than average results were achieved (Chart A). In sum, when professors make allowances for students with issues, real or questionable, or not make allowances, they may be reprimanded. Whenever faculty members are excellent teachers and students score higher marks than an arbitrary average, their motivation for these results may be called into question. Hence, is there a winning recipe for faculty?

Q 8: Faculty are simply members of a team of multiple departments, each designed to recruit and retain students so that the university can fiscally prosper in today's competitive marketplace.

69.24% Agree or Strongly Agree

These responses show that a large ratio of faculty respondents consider themselves to be members of the team who recruit and retain students, in addition to educating them, and hierarchically equal with workers in Student Services and Advising who perform very specific and designated roles to recruit and retain, but who are not responsible for the classroom experiences ahead. While working in an ensemble is agreeable to most teachers, and high enrollment and fiscal success are important to faculty members, once this achieved, teachers are placed on the front lines charged with maintaining these numbers, and could be held accountable if they should dip, whereas their coworkers in Student Services and Advising would not be. This author has participated in countless university meetings where Student Services is recognized and celebrated for their recruitment efforts, but faculty members were not mentioned. Perhaps this is because teachers are not considered to be a profit center within the college or university, yet Student Services are.

Q 9: The mission of an academic institution is compromised when excessive focus is given to the pursuit of financial success rather than academic rigor, which is why I became a teacher, not a salesperson.

94.87% Agree or Strongly Agree

The high ratio is not a surprising one, particularly based on the literature provided here, and from other survey responses described. Faculty members view themselves as teachers of students in a fiduciary sense, not as part of a marketing team to bolster the bottom line of their employer. While business teachers may better understand the resources required to keep the doors open and lights on compared to, say, a philosophy teacher, regardless of the discipline the goal is the same, the delivery of education. Whether a college or university is for-profit or not, the value-added is the relationship enjoyed between students and teachers (Chart A). Faculty members wholeheartedly agree that the mission of an institution of higher learning should not be driven by the pursuit of financial gain, rather the reputation they garner for being a high-quality deliverer of education. Consequently, when education becomes a product, a commodity, misconceptions about students as customers emerge, who works for whom becomes unclear, and a deceptive mission by university leaders becomes mainstream, an unsavory environment for faculty members today and future teachers will likely endure.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: THE DILEMMA, UNRESOLVED

In sum, most professors who teach with institutions of higher learning are hopeful that every student in their class will be successful, and rise to the challenge and rigor expected to complete with aplomb the research and writing, meet the deadlines, give attention to detail, and critically think through scenarios presented to them—all skills essential to be successful in real-world industry applications; however, some students may expect special attention and believe because of the expenses incurred they should be given options that the other class members did not get even though all grading was fair and consistent. Again, let us assume that the remaining 270 students

in Maitland Jones' organic chemistry class met his criteria, though difficult, and chose not to retaliate by signing a petition against him unlike the 80 students who did and were successful in having him removed (Marcos, 2022).

Professors well acquainted with this author experience the same dilemma of working to keep their student customers engaged, challenged, and yes, satisfied as best as possible; however, they are also pressed to ensure they are retained and kept loyal to the school, thereby fulfilling the university mission for quality education, and in doing so, stay in a solid fiscal position (Reeley, 2016). Unfortunately, the student customers will decide at the end of the term if they feel their needs have been met; but if not, the blame almost always falls on the professor. Students have the last word at the end-of-term surveys, a tool they do not have in the real workplace. Professors want to instill a sense of achievement in their students, helping them to feel they earned their degree and did not purchase it. The commencement experience for them is almost euphoric when this is realized. Thus, it is the hope that university leaders appreciate the occasional no-win scenario professors find themselves in and will support them when there is a dispute brought to the fore by a disgruntled student or students who believe they did not receive a fair grade due to circumstances that unfolded, whether in or outside of the classroom (Weimer, 2010).

6. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This author is and always will be first and foremost an advocate for students, yet it is vital that faculty members have an advocate for them as well. Throughout a 25-year career as a teacher, still ongoing, and having witnessed colleagues experience immense stress, anxiety, and one of them a broken heart that contributed to his death, it is unfair to fall in line quietly whenever there are injustices and imbalances in a system far bigger than a single individual can right (Reeley, 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this study and ultimately this article is to raise awareness among faculty peers, students, and university leaders but not to impugn the behaviors of any of these segments. Perhaps a worthwhile and potentially revealing piggyback study might be to survey a sampling of college students to determine their relationship with professors, as they perceive it, and subsequently corroborate data presented in this article. An additional follow-up study could be conducted with a random sampling of college and university leaders describing their view of the role of faculty today. Results could then be compared, contrasted, and triangulated for authenticity and validation, and findings may generate a new perspective on an issue that has been in the shadows for decades.

View this research presented by this author as a presentation at a scholarly symposium in April 2023 hosted by Saint Leo University@

https://saintleo.zoom.us/rec/share/7RYY62jGSPPJBBztMC4Pkb43_mh6J2OxwqzqJRVrO9mFFyVzT5t6PMMw3Z0Ay7TK.yGgCDMMXvhyphxZHo

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