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Can "Marketing" Options Attract Students to Forest Products Programs?

Forest Products programs train professionals that are in high demand by the forest products industry as evidenced by placement rates of 100%—and with top students typically receiving multiple job offers. Yet we continue to struggle with recruitment of students into our Forest Products programs at the national level. When we fail to attract adequate numbers of students into our Forest Products programs, the forest industry is forced to recruit from other disciplines and then attempt to either provide "on the job" wood science and technology training or simply dismiss this knowledge base. This is unfortunate for the industry, our undergraduate programs, and ultimately our profession.

In addition to the often-mentioned importance of industry support and involvement in Forest Products programs and the widely recognized effectiveness of word-of-mouth testimonials (students recruiting students) to strengthen undergraduate enrollment numbers, are there other possible solutions? For example, can an option in Forest Products "Marketing" (termed business and marketing, marketing management, industry management, among others) help boost undergraduate student numbers? Anecdotal evidence from two Eastern U.S. Forest Products programs suggests that a marketing option may be influential. At Penn State, urging from the wood products industry resulted in the initiation of a Wood Products Business and Marketing (WPB&M) option within the Wood Products program in the fall of 1992. Today, nearly half of our 60 (est.) Wood Products undergraduates are in the WPB&M option. At Virginia Tech, home to one of the nation's initial undergraduate options in Forest Products Marketing Management and the industry-supported Center for Forest Products Marketing, roughly half of their 100 (est.) undergraduates specialize in their Marketing and Management option.

Attracting students is one concern, but the major stakeholder of U.S. forest products programs has traditionally been the forest products industry. Can

our Forest Products Marketing graduates address industry's needs? I think so, but we must produce quality graduates who are adept at public speaking, writing, managing subordinates, solving problems, and using computers. These graduates must also be able to identify and segment markets, help firms satisfy their customers and build stronger supply chains, develop strategic marketing plans, calculate return-on-investment, understand the basics of a sales plan, recognize alternative distribution channel and marketing communication strategies, and, oh yes, have a fundamental knowledge of wood science and industrial manufacturing equipment and methods—and complete their degree in 4 years! This will require careful curriculum development, the cooperation of business schools, and the retention of at least one and, preferably two or more, Forest Products Marketing instructors.

Forest Products Marketing is currently a teaching, research and/or extension component in nearly all U.S. Forest Products programs. And, Forest Products Marketing is taught as a course in most of these WS&T programs; however, formal undergraduate Forest Products Marketing programs exist at only a handful of universities. It may be time to reevaluate Forest Products programs around the nation and examine the cost/benefit of adding or expanding a Forest Products Marketing undergraduate program. What do you think?

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Editor's Note: Paul ends his presentation with the question "what do you think?" What DO you think? Is the idea worth further discussion and action? What should be our next steps? Please write to me with your thoughts; I'll share them with Paul and others and print comments and highlights in future issues of *Wood and Fiber Science*.

BOB YOUNGS, *Editor*