



Authentically Cornell: the Evolution of Marketing at Cornell

Manoj Thomas¹ · Helen Chun¹ · Sachin Gupta¹ · Jura Liaukonyte¹ · Suzanne Shu¹ · Kaitlin Woolley¹

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Abstract

The authors reflect on what makes the marketing department at Cornell University's SC Johnson College of Business distinct from marketing departments in other business schools. They present a brief history of the study of marketing at Cornell, discuss the current structure of the department, the pedagogical approach, and the values and ideals cherished by the marketing faculty at Cornell.

"I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study."

Ezra Cornell, 1865

To understand the marketing area at Cornell University's SC Johnson College of Business, we must begin with a description of the university itself. Nestled in New York state's Finger Lakes region, in the rustic, hilly town of Ithaca at the edge of Cayuga Lake, Cornell is often considered the most beautiful Ivy League campus. Founded by Ezra Cornell in 1865, this land-grant research university has attracted faculty, students, and administrators from all over the world who value theoretical rigor and practical relevance in equal measure. Cornell is known for excellent research programs in several disciplines in the humanities, and the natural, applied, and social sciences, many of which are ranked in the top ten worldwide. At the same time, the university takes pride in putting this rich theoretical knowledge to practical use. Cornell has its own hydroelectric plant to generate electricity; runs a successful luxury hotel on campus; breeds unique apple varieties in its orchards; and makes handcrafted premium ice creams with milk from its own dairy cows.

The marketing area at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business embodies the same spirit. Today, the marketing area at Cornell is ranked fourth worldwide in terms of publications in top-tier marketing journals.¹ At the same time, the Cornell marketing area also takes pride in applying marketing knowledge to solve practical problems. The marketing faculty at Cornell have strong ties with the food and agriculture industry, collaborate with hotels and restaurants

in the hospitality industry, and work on startup ideas with technology-focused MBA students enrolled at Cornell Tech, a state-of-the-art campus in New York City where business students study alongside engineering students learning how to bring technology innovations to the marketplace.

1 Three Schools, One Marketing Area

The marketing area at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business spans three sister schools that are part of the college: the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management (Dyson), the Cornell Peter and Stephanie Nolan School of Hotel Administration (Nolan), and the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management (Johnson). The Johnson School has two campuses: The traditional 1-year and 2-year MBA programs are offered on the Ithaca campus, and a specialized technology-focused MBA is offered at Cornell Tech in New York City.

In 2016, the three schools merged to form the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business (the SC Johnson College), and the marketing faculty in the three schools became members of the marketing and management communications area.² Figure 1 presents a schematic summary of the current area structure. Although the marketing area in its current form

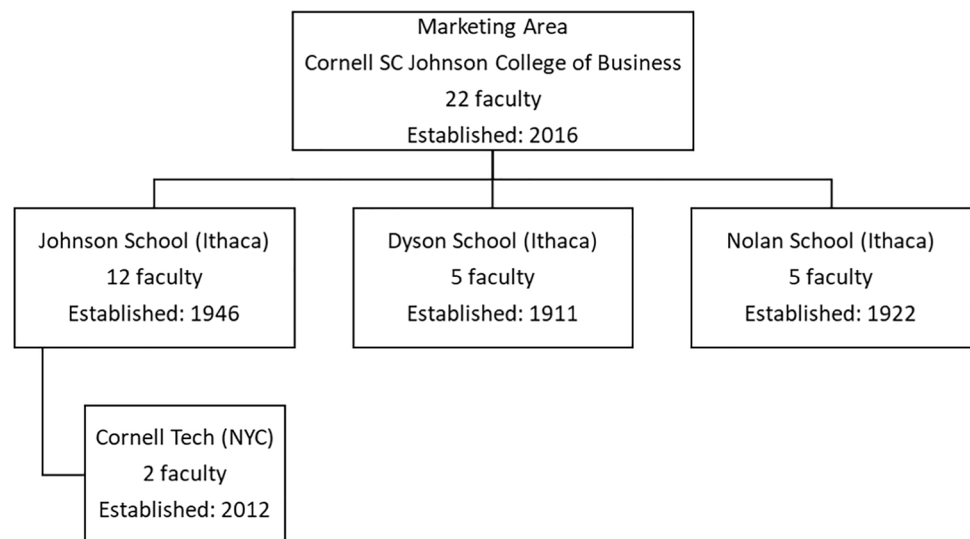
✉ Manoj Thomas

¹ Cornell University, Samuel Curtis Johnson College of Business, Ithaca, NY, USA

¹ This ranking is based on publications listed in the UT Dallas Research database for the 2019 to 2021 period. The four top-tier journals include the *Journal of Consumer Research*, the *Journal of Marketing Research*, the *Journal of Marketing*, and *Marketing Science*. Columbia Business School, Booth School of Business and the Wharton School rank higher than Cornell in this list.

² In the current structure, the marketing sub-area and the management communication sub-area are grouped together as one area with a common area coordinator. However, given the aim and scope of this article, we restrict our discussion to the marketing sub-area.

Fig. 1 Schematic summary of the current area structure



is only 5 years old, each of the three schools has a rich and storied history.

1.1 Johnson School: Graduate Business Programs

The Johnson School started in 1946 as the School of Business and Public Administration [3]. During the initial years, this new graduate school offered two degrees: Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Public Administration (MPA). Although by this time MBA degrees were offered by other Ivy League institutions, notably the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and the Harvard Business School, Cornell University's president, Edmund Ezra Day, and the first dean of Cornell's School of Business Administration, Paul O'Leary, envisioned Cornell's business school program to be distinct from the prevalent offerings. Unlike other universities that designed their business administration programs to groom students largely for the private sector, Cornell's program was designed to cater to both the private and public sectors. This was because, unlike the other Ivy League institutions, there were several state-supported colleges on campus. Hence, the public sector and its concerns were much more salient at Cornell than at peer institutions. Additionally, since Ithaca did not have a community of leaders of large and well-established private sector businesses, Cornell's values and goals were more influenced by the surrounding agrarian economy.

From its inception, the graduate school offered several concentrations in marketing. Extant records suggest at least three such concentrations were offered: marketing and statistics, marketing and foreign trade, and transportation and marketing.

Delbert J. Duncan was the first marketing professor to be hired into Cornell's School of Business and Public Administration in 1946. Duncan, who had an MBA from Harvard

and a PhD from Northwestern, was an expert on retailing and was the co-author of two leading marketing textbooks: one an introductory text, *Marketing Principles and Methods*, and the second a more specialized book on retailing, *Retailing Principles and Methods*. Some of the other early marketing faculty at Johnson included John M. Rathmell (PhD from Wharton), Vithala Rao ('70 PhD from Wharton), Dick Wittink ('74 PhD from Purdue), J. Russo ('71 PhD from Michigan), and Alice Isen ('68 PhD from Stanford). Rathmell wrote books on services marketing; Rao wrote pioneering papers on conjoint analysis; Wittink was known for his work on scanner panel data models; Russo wrote influential papers on the information distortion effect and other mental processes in everyday judgment and decision making; and Isen was known for her studies on how positive affect influences decisions and behaviors.³ These faculty members played important roles in developing the research culture at the Johnson School. Today Johnson has 12 marketing faculty, half of them specializing in quantitative research and the other half specializing in behavioral research.

1.2 Dyson School: Undergraduate Business Programs

While the Johnson School was founded in 1946, some of the earliest marketing classes offered at Cornell were part of the farm management program, which would later evolve into the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, the current undergraduate

³ This is not an exhaustive list of marketing faculty members at the Johnson School. Our aim here is to provide some illustrative examples of the research activities that took place at the Johnson School in its formative years.

business program at Cornell. As early as the 1870s, the faculty in the program believed that a core part of the farming curriculum was rigorous training in business. The Department of Farm Management was established in 1911, and early marketing classes offered by this department focused on helping agricultural producers in New York state bring their goods to market. The movement of goods to retailers (channels) and the pricing of the products were central topics of study for both students and faculty. An interesting piece of trivia is that the faculty were initially housed in an old poultry feed house until New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt appropriated money to build a new management school building [6].

Research in marketing expanded into issues of packaging and retailing in the 1940s and 1950s. The 1950s also saw the development of a special extension program to research consumer behavior in retail environments in New York City. Marketing Professors Max E. Brunk and Walter T. Federer conducted Latin square-designed field experiments in retail stores to understand consumers' purchasing behavior, resulting in their article "Experimental Designs and Probability Sampling in Marketing Research" that was published in the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* in 1953. More complex experiments that tested size and location of marketing displays as well as differences in packaging continued to be run in supermarkets and retail outlets throughout the 1950s. The research being done by Cornell academics was appreciated by retailers and manufacturers, who recognized the value of these methods to study consumer response to marketing activities. Ed McLaughlin, a PhD in agricultural economics, joined the Dyson marketing faculty in 1983 and played an important role in shaping the marketing curriculum at Dyson.

Today, a core belief within the Dyson School is "our business is a better world." The School's goal is to prepare tomorrow's business leaders who can build and grow successful enterprises with a responsibility to society, people, and planet. The undergraduate business curriculum, including marketing courses, reinforces this vision of applying core business concepts to building a better world. Every undergraduate business student at Dyson is required to take a series of courses under the Grand Challenges framework, which is modeled to inspire students to use their business skills to make a difference globally or locally. Like the Johnson School, Dyson's marketing faculty focus on both behavioral and quantitative research. Of the five current marketing faculty, two of them focus on quantitative research and others on behavioral research. Supporting Dyson's core ethos, marketing faculty conduct applied and interdisciplinary research that also engage with local and global challenges, such as those in health, food, finance, and policy domains.

1.3 Nolan School: Hospitality Programs

The world's first collegiate hospitality management degree program was founded at Cornell in 1922 [1]. The growth of the twentieth century hospitality industry, particularly hotels and restaurants, was propelled and nourished by Cornell's pioneering program that combined practical training in the industry with academic training in such areas as engineering, accounting, and economics. By taking a scientific approach to managing the hospitality business, Cornell's hospitality management education raised the standards in the industry. Cornell also played a significant role in inspiring other hospitality management degree-granting institutions around the globe, several of which are now modeled after Cornell's program.

Ellsworth M. Statler, a self-made hotel magnate, who was skeptical of hospitality college education until his visit to Cornell in the late 1920s, played a pivotal role in building the world's first teaching hotel at Cornell. After the opening of Statler Hall and Statler Inn in 1950, the School of Hotel Administration further expanded its curriculum to support graduate study, executive training, and research activities. As the hospitality industry grew and matured, its dynamic and complex nature required the development of specialized disciplines such as development and design, marketing, information technology, finance, law, human resources, and real estate, as well as the science of lodging and food service. In 1973, the hospitality industry's first master's degree program was launched to educate senior managers with the knowledge and skills needed to lead an industry that had become increasingly more global, diverse, and complex. With support from industry, in 1992 the School created the Center for Hospitality Research to advance and sponsor research relevant to both industry and academia [7].

The Nolan School currently houses four centers and institutes focused on hospitality research, real estate and finance, entrepreneurship, and hospitality labor and employment relations. E. M. Statler's quote "Life is service—the one who progresses is the one who gives his fellow men a little more—a little better service" embodies the spirit of the Nolan School community and inspires the service orientation of marketing faculty in their research and teaching. Today, services account for almost 80% of the labor force and GDP in our economy, and increasingly drive the competitive advantage of many leading companies in all industry sectors around the globe. Nolan's marketing faculty focus on research programs that advance both conceptual and applied knowledge in the services and hospitality industry, and offer industry-oriented core disciplinary courses as well as highly specialized courses such as cruise, wine, and luxury marketing.

William H. Kaven, a Ph.D. in business and public administration from Cornell, joined Nolan in 1970 and offered

the first required marketing course for undergraduates. He played an important role in shaping the marketing department and led Nolan's international initiatives. He also authored a book, *Managing the Major Sale*, published by the American Management Association. Some of the other early marketing faculty at Nolan include Leo Renaghan ('79 PhD from Penn State), Chekitan Dev ('88 PhD from Virginia Tech), and Mike Lynn ('87 PhD from Ohio State). These faculty members played important roles in developing the teaching, research, and hospitality industry engagement culture at Nolan. Today, the Nolan School has five marketing faculty, three focusing on behavioral research and two on managerial research. Advancing knowledge in the services and hospitality industry, Nolan marketing faculty conduct applied and interdisciplinary research in the domains of services marketing and management, hedonic experiences, experience design, service branding, sustainability, and tourism.

2 Research Culture: Rigor, Relevance, and Impact

An organization's structure shapes its culture. Cornell's unique structure distinguishes the marketing area's research culture from other top-tier business schools. Cornell's marketing faculty publish in a broader set of research journals than the marketing faculty in many peer schools. All marketing faculty, particularly junior faculty, and doctoral students are encouraged to publish their work in mainstream marketing journals so that they can create an identity in the marketing scholarly community. However, in addition to publishing in mainstream marketing journals, many also publish in journals outside the discipline. As detailed below, these include foundational disciplinary journals as well as specialized applied journals.

First, Cornell marketing faculty advance basic research, publishing in foundational disciplinary journals including psychology, economics, and statistics. The Cornell marketing area prides itself on welcoming and celebrating scholars with PhDs in basic disciplines, such as psychology and economics, as marketing faculty. Additionally, Cornell provides ample opportunities for business school faculty to frequently interact with psychologists and economists to discuss research of mutual interest. For example, the Behavioral Economics and Decision Research Center (BEDR) unites scholars across Cornell who share a common interest in judgment, decision making, and behavioral economics. BEDR at Cornell was founded in 1989 by Nobel Prize winner Richard Thaler (who was then on the faculty at the Johnson School) and is jointly supported by the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Human Ecology. Overall,

SC Johnson marketing faculty benefit from and attend more than 10 different thematic seminar series organized not only across the three schools within SC Johnson, but also across different departments outside the college.

In addition, the marketing area advances applied research, reflecting the missions upon which the three sister schools were founded. To this end, some marketing faculty publish in specialized applied journals that focus on specific industries, such as services marketing or hospitality marketing. For example, faculty members in the Nolan School of Hotel Administration are encouraged to publish in applied journals that are accessible to practitioners, in addition to publishing in mainstream disciplinary journals. Specifically, the Nolan School, in association with Sage Journals, publishes the *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal that documents research relevant to hospitality industry practitioners. Several members of the marketing area publish in this journal. Similarly, in addition to publishing in mainstream marketing journals, Dyson marketing faculty also publish in applied economics and psychology journals.

It is because of the unique structure of the college that the Cornell marketing faculty cherish and celebrate rigor and relevance in equal measure, publishing in mainstream marketing journals and foundational disciplinary journals in psychology, economics, and statistics, as well as in journals that document applied research with managerial relevance. Van Osselaer and Lim [8] provide a detailed analysis of the research productivity of faculty members at the Johnson School and how it compares to other business schools.

3 Pedagogy at Cornell

The marketing faculty at Cornell teach in undergraduate, MS, MBA, Executive MBA, and PhD programs.⁴ After the merger of the three schools, the faculty have considerable flexibility in planning their teaching; they can teach different courses to the same student population or teach the same course across different student populations. There are two other aspects of the marketing curriculum at Cornell that set it apart from peer schools: the unparalleled breadth of course offerings and the immersion programs.

3.1 Unparalleled Breadth

Because SC Johnson is an amalgamation of three sister schools, it offers an unparalleled breadth of elective courses across the schools, going beyond the usual electives such as

⁴ The Cornell SC College of Business offers 19 different degree programs with cross-school coursework and collaboration.

consumer behavior, market research, advertising, and pricing. The Cornell marketing area offers elective courses on specialized marketing topics such as Wine Marketing, Luxury Marketing, and Colloquium of Food Marketing. At the same time, the marketing group also includes electives that offer a deep dive into theoretical topics such as Consumer Neuroscience, Managerial Decision Making, and Behavioral Science for Marketing. In addition, many Cornell business students also attend classes outside the college, taking advantage of the more than 100 fields of study offered by the university.

3.2 Immersion Programs

Performance learning is more than a catch phrase at Cornell. In addition to the core and elective courses, the Cornell marketing area offers “learn-by-doing” immersion courses designed for students specializing in marketing. The immersion courses were pioneered by the Johnson School to train 2-year residential MBA students for their summer internships by combining classroom learning with the practical experience of working on real-world marketing consulting projects from companies. The Strategic Product and Marketing Immersion class at the Johnson School, offered in the first-year of the MBA curriculum, is co-taught by tenure-track marketing faculty and business practitioners. Students enrolled in this six-credit semester-long class learn “hard” skills (e.g., how to collect and analyze data to inform marketing decisions) as well as “soft” skills (e.g., how to present ideas persuasively to stakeholders), and apply these skills while working on real-world consulting projects for companies. Similar marketing immersion courses have now been rolled out for Cornell Tech MBA students as well as for the undergraduate students at Dyson and Nolan.

3.3 PhD Program

The SC Johnson College offers a vibrant PhD program, under the aegis of the graduate school at Cornell University, that has produced impactful thought leaders in the marketing field, both within academia and industry. Some of the illustrious graduates of the program include Sachin Gupta (class of ’93 who is now a professor at Cornell after spending a few years at Northwestern), Meg Meloy (class of ’96, now at Penn State’s Smeal College of Business), K. Sudhir (class of ’98, now at the Yale University School of Management), Seethu Seetharaman (class of ’98, now at the Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis), Aparna Labroo (class of ’04, now at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management), Sriram Venkataraman (class of ’05, now at UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School), and Anne-Sophie Chaxel (class of ’12, now at HEC Paris). We have also historically seen strong industry

placements, including Irene Rosenfeld (class of ’80, former CEO of Mondeléz International and chairman and CEO of Kraft Foods), Anil Kaul (class of ’95, now CEO at AbsoluteData), and Rahul Guha (class of ’96, now CEO at Cornerstone Research).

The PhD program continues to have a high rate of placing students in academic positions. In the last 10 years, over 85% of PhD students landed tenure-track jobs after graduating. Recent placements include Rice University’s Jones Graduate School of Business (Piyush Anand, class of ’21), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s Gies College of Business (Sarah Lim ’21), Virginia Tech’s Pamplin College of Business (Shreyans Goenka ’20), and Dartmouth College’s Tuck School of Business (Sharmistha Sikdar ’19).

Notably, the Cornell Marketing PhD program is designed to be “publication-oriented” rather than “exam-oriented.” Unlike some other business schools where PhD students are evaluated on their performance in comprehensive examinations, Cornell PhD students are evaluated solely on their research papers. In addition to taking a rigorous set of courses, PhD students are expected to start working on research projects from their first month in the program. At the end of the first year, they write a research paper and present it to the marketing faculty and fellow students. The theoretical and methodological rigor of this first-year paper serves as a measure of their progress toward the doctoral degree. A similar process is followed for evaluating their second-year performance, thesis proposal, and thesis defense. This approach has enabled Cornell PhD graduates to start publishing early in their academic careers. By the time they graduate from the program, many PhD students will have had publications in top-tier journals, giving them a head start in their academic careers. Our high ratio of faculty to students (about 2 faculty per 1 PhD student) facilitates the goal of the PhD program to transform students into independent scholars. Students receive individual attention from faculty, which is key to their success in the program.

The Cornell PhD program is also exceptionally cross-disciplinary in nature. PhD students are required to have on their thesis committee at least one faculty member from outside the field of management, typically from economics, psychology, statistics, or computer science. This serves the dual purpose of encouraging students to interact with faculty from outside the business college and reinforces the marketing area’s value of conducting research in the core disciplines. Additionally, PhD students are strongly encouraged to take classes in their areas of interest outside the college. As a result, most PhD students take courses in related fields such as computer science, economics, operations research, psychology, sociology, and statistics. Kaitlin Woolley, the current PhD coordinator for the marketing area, is implementing several changes to propel Cornell’s marketing PhD program into the top five.

4 The Future of Marketing at Cornell

This is a transformative period for the marketing discipline. The ongoing technological revolution—the proliferation of digital advertising and social media, the use of artificial intelligence to automate marketing, the exponential growth of digital channels, and the ability to not only personalize messages but also personalize products using 3D printing and other such technologies—presents unprecedented opportunities as well as existential challenges to the discipline.

On the one hand, the technological revolution has democratized marketing, creating a widespread appreciation for data-based marketing and market research. Multimillion-dollar advertising budgets and creative geniuses on Madison Avenue are no longer necessary for impactful marketing campaigns. Anybody with a YouTube or Facebook account and a few thousand dollars can now run an effective marketing campaign. Now it is not just the Procter & Gambles, the Unilevers, and the Amazons that invest in marketing; every small startup is interested in message optimization, price optimization, and media optimization. Furthermore, there is a growing appreciation for data-based marketing and market research. For example, AB testing is increasingly the norm in many marketing companies. Even small startups want to do AB testing to optimize their revenues and calculate their acquisition and retention costs. All of this has generated a greater demand for marketing expertise.

On the other hand, this burgeoning interest in marketing has blurred the boundaries between disciplines, which poses a threat to the identity of marketing as a discipline with distinctive expertise. Brand management has given way to product management, and some stakeholders mistakenly believe that product management is better taught by engineers and operations researchers. When it comes to text mining and statistical tools to analyze online chatter, people often turn to researchers in computer science and linguistics. When it comes to predicting the diffusion of new products, people turn to sociologists who have developed models to characterize simple and complex social contagion processes. All these trends call for a careful assessment of the distinctive capabilities and skills of the marketing function, and redefining and reasserting marketing as a discipline with distinctive expertise. Fortunately, being surrounded by world-class scholars in engineering, psychology, and sociology, and having the interdisciplinary culture of the university makes it easier for the Cornell marketing faculty to adapt to these trends.

There is also societal backlash against marketing. Marketing actions are sometimes portrayed as immoral, misleading, and dysfunctional for society—in some cases, rightfully so.

Cornell marketing faculty are mindful of these challenges and opportunities. We consider it our duty to instill customer-centricity in future business leaders because genuine

customer-centricity can not only improve societal well-being, it can also give employees a sense of purpose (e.g., [2]).

We are also mindful of our broader societal responsibilities. We are not only obligated to study the effects of marketing actions on market shares and profits, but also obligated to prescribe how marketing can be used for beneficent outcomes. In that sense, we believe that marketing as a discipline best reflects the economic and moral philosophy espoused by Adam Smith. Consistent with Smith's characterization of economic behaviors in *The Wealth of Nations* (1759), Cornell marketing scholars generate and disseminate knowledge to help the butcher, the baker, and the brewer optimize their product, price, promotion and distribution, and thus increase individual and societal wealth. At the same time, building on Smith's philosophy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [4, 5], Cornell marketing scholars also study how moral sentiments influence the perceived propriety and impropriety of sellers' and buyers' actions, and how such moral sentiments shape societal norms and influence societal welfare. We are confident that this holistic perspective on marketing, which stems authentically from Cornell's culture and values, will stand us in good stead in the years to come.

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