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The Evaluation of the Behavioral Science Curriculum in a Private College, in View of the Perception of "*Knowledge as Consumer Goods*": Case Study

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Abstract The perception of knowledge as consumer goods appeared with the development of private education and reflects a marketing or consumer needs approach. The consumer-needs approach sees advantages in adapting higher education to the needs of the consumer. This article examines whether the behavioralscience curriculum (goals, scope, structure and content) in the private college in Israel is based on the approach of knowledge as consumer goods.The study used textual analysis of the curriculum and archived documents. A paradox was found in the results: The perception of knowledge as consumer goods had an impact on the wording of the stated goals and the curriculum's structure. However, the scope and contents of the curriculum were only partially affected by this approach.

Keywords Evaluation, Curriculum, Knowledge as Consumer Goods, Private College, Behavioral Sciences

1. Introduction

For many years, the only way to obtain a higher education in Israel was to attend one of a handful of public universities; these institutions of higher learninghad developed good reputations and were internationally recognized. Degree-gra nting colleges unassociated with these universities only began to develop in Israel in the 1980s. These colleges expanded and multiplied in the 1990s in a manner similar to the corresponding phenomenon in Portugal, where more than one-third of the higher educational institutions were private (1),and Thailand, in which the private institutions constituted twenty percent (2). Therapid expansion of private higher education and the development of private degree-granting colleges have formed a dominant theme in the study of private higher education, in Israel and abroad. However, while private colleges have continued to develop in Israel, the last six years (2005-2011) have seen a decline of private higher education in other places around the world, leading to research efforts to identify the dynamics and causes of the decline. The literature cites two broad categories of causes for the decline: social factors (such as demographic shifts), or political policy (1; 3; 4).

The possibility exists thatcurriculum in private colleges, Built on the perception of knowledge as consumer goods (or commoditization of knowledge), can become popular and appealing to its consumer-students but lack robust academic and ideological foundations. Considerations of the "the need of the client" can create curricula that meet the students' desires and satisfaction but do not have the appropriate professionalunderpinnings (5).

The aim of this article is to evaluate the curriculum of a behavioral science bachelor's degree program at the largest private college in Israel, and examine whether the curriculais affected by the college's view of knowledge as goods. We will ask if the curricula's stated goals, structure, scope and contents assigncenter place to knowledge, or whether they assign greater importance to providing the professional qualifications that are needed by the consumer student.

1.1. The Perception of Knowledge as Consumer Goods

The perception of knowledge as consumer goods appeared with the development of private education and reflects amarketing or consumer needs approach. This approach dictates a unique mode of behavior with respect to the importation (transmission) of knowledge, beginning with its marketing and concluding with the determination of its curriculum.The type of knowledge, its substance and method of transmission are influenced by, and adjusted to, the consumer's needs.This approach is revolutionary when compared to the classical concept of higher education, which framed knowledge as an absolute entity and offered it to the consumer public without any reference to consumer needs or satisfaction. In contrast, the *knowledge as a consumer good approach*gives rise to a different conceptualization of the educational process (6).

The consumer-needs approach sees advantages in

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adapting higher education to the needs of the consumer.These adaptations are generally carried out in private educational institutions, and are especially important in the technological sphere (7; 8) or in business administration (9; 10). This approach is also trickling down to the public universities, some of which try to pinpoint the needs of the student-consumer. A study carried out in the United States examined the needs of students from seven countries, and found similarities between their expectations and needs (11). Adherents of the approach claim that it is appropriate for all forms of study and can improve academic systems and processes (12). Even the Soviet educational system has started to adopt this approach in the last fifteen years (13).

However, researchers find fault with adapting higher education to the needs of the consumer and claim that the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approachmightassign lesser importance to theoreticalknowledge *per se*, and instead base its academic curricula on the professional demands of employers andemphasize professional and personal skills instead (14; 8; 15). These adaptations to the needs of the market place can impinge on other professional requirements, such as the need of professionals to acquire broad knowledge bases in their fields (16).Due to the fact that the needs of employer-consumers in the profession can affect the expectations of the students-consumers, this can impact the creation of the curricula. A curriculum based mainly on the needs of the consumer-employer is perhaps appropriate for professions such as the exact sciences, technology or business administration. However, it may be less suitable for the social and behavioral sciences because the wide scope of basic theoretical knowledge needed for these professions, is not always compatible with the needs of the consumer-employer. Even more problematic is that the sphere of knowledge in these domains is so broad with many interdisciplinary aspects, that there is no consensus regarding knowledge-acquisition needs.

1.2. Evaluating the Curriculum

During the last three decades, special attention has been paid to planning and preparing curricula at every level of teaching. The introduction of new teaching systems led to the need to create new curricula that are appropriate for recent developments. National and private centers were established in many countries to plan curricula. With the creation of these new curricula came the need to integrate evaluation into the development process. A critical review of the professional literature that addresses the evaluation of curricula indicates a number of characteristics:

The first stage of curriculum evaluation models appeared in the literature that was published during the 1970s and 1980s. A wide array of models was presented leading to confusion and differences of opinion regarding the best model. These evaluation modelsincluded, for example, "Reactive Evaluation" (17), "Ontological Evaluation" (18), and a plethora of other models, such as those proposed by Eisner (19), Ariav (20) and others. It is interesting to note that agreement exists amongst curriculum evaluators concerning the lack of standardized evaluation models and regarding the legitimacy of utilizing eclectic models (21). Some models evaluate results while others assess cost-benefit or input-output (22). However, almost no evaluation studies have been conducted that examine the relationship between the curriculum and its stated goals and objectives.

The second stage is the most recent wave of evaluation studies, which also exhibit a wide range of approaches regarding evaluation; these approaches have almost nothing in common. An in-depth examination indicates that the majority of evaluation studies focuses on the results of the curriculum and its effectiveness. Examples abound: An evaluation was conducted on a curriculum for treating the elderly, which examined the curriculum's effectiveness and its results (23). Another study examined the impact of a national mathematics curriculum on the way teachers functioned (24). The ramifications and results of an innovation, like learning outside of the school, are the focus of a recent evaluation (25). Similarly, an evaluation was conducted on the outcome of a school curriculum in China (26). The effectiveness and outcomes of a mathematics curriculum were evaluated (27).

The following three studies evaluate the outcome of curricula based on the perception of knowledge as consumer goods:

A. In China, a Business Managementcurriculum was evaluated by means of a survey conducted among businesses. The study findings indicate that the curriculum attempted toadapt the study material to the needs of the job market (15).

B. At a technological college, attempts were made to incorporate the professional demands in the field based on the opinions of professionals and alumni who are employed in technology. The evaluation was conducted in order to examine the effectiveness and outcome of this approach (8).

C. In China, an evaluation was made of a curriculum that was created on the basis of the professional requirements of employers (14).

By contrast, a number of curriculum evaluation models propose evaluating the curriculum by assessing itsadherence to the curriculum's goals and ideology(17; 21). This model has not been applied during the last few decades, with the exception of a study conducted at the end of the 1980s by the author of this article (22). That study examined the curricula of ‘community schools’ on a national level; these are select Israeli elementary schools in which parents have a greater part in the management of the school. The evaluation model included an examination of the connection between implementation of the curriculum and the stated goals of the community approach (parental involvement). A survey of the literature shows us that in most cases, the evaluation model examining the influence of the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach, focused on the stated goals of the curriculum and examined whether the program actually contributed to the students’ professional qualifications. This study adopts and enlarges the evaluation model to examine

whether the consumer-goods approach also affects the scope, structure and content of the behavioral sciences program.

A survey of the literature leads us to the central hypothesis of this study: the consumer-goods approach will affect the behavioralscience curricula. The practical implications of this theory are:

Acquisition of professional qualifications will assume a relatively greater percentage than theoretical knowledge alone in the Goal Statement and in the curriculum (composed of the scope, structure and content of the courses). As a result, all the segments of the curriculumwill correspond to the Goals Statement: the study scope, structure and content will be adapted to the goal statement that places its main emphasis on the acquisition of professional qualifications.

2. Method

2.1. Research Questions

1). Is the perception of knowledge as consumer goods manifested in the curriculum: the stated goals, structure, scope and content? Is the centrality of acquiring theoretical knowledge per se, relinquished in favor of acquiring professional and personal qualifications?

2). Is there a correspondence between the Goal Statement and the curriculum, structure, scope and contents taught, which are supposed to be directed toward those goals?

2.2. Variables

In order to answer these questions we analyze the objectives, structure, scope and content of the curriculum and examine the relative ratio of theoretical knowledge to professional qualifications in the coursework.

Theoretical knowledge is defined as the sphere of knowledge intended to enrich the student's theoretical basis in the domains of sociology, psychology, anthropology and philosophy—the basic subjects in the behavioral sciences. Theoretical knowledge includes subjects involving theories, theoretical-research information, social policy and statistical information.

Professional qualification is defined as the sphere of knowledge aimed at professional training and inculcating skills that will contribute to the professional occupation. All of the courses in this sphere appear under the rubric of "professional cluster" and are structurally distinct in the curriculum.

Scope—the number of credits (or credit points) that students are required to take during their studies. This will be calculated out of the actual curriculum offered to the students.

Structure—the number of courses that students are required to take during their studies. This will be calculated out of the actual curriculum offered to the students.

Content—the content of the courses will be analyzed according to the syllabus for each course.

The curriculum encompasses numbers 3, 4 and 5 as listed above: the number of credits (scope), the number of courses (structure) and the syllabi of the courses (content).

2.3. Tools

The study used textual analysis of documents. A textual analysis was performed on the goals and contents listed inthe documents. The document outlining goals (or Goal Statement)was written by senior lecturers of the School of Behavioral Science. Other documents were official, public texts detailing the curriculum for students. We used also syllabuses (or syllabi) that describe the topics of the courses in detail in order to distinguish between courses focusing on theoretical knowledge and those focusing on professional qualifications

3. Results

In order to test the research hypothesis, we first present the stated goals of the program and then examine the proportion of professional training to theoretical knowledge as expressed in this Goals Statement. Afterwards we subject the scope, structure and content of the curriculum to the same analysis.

3.1. Goals

The goals, as established in the founding documents and discussions of the Pedagogical Committee, are as follows: "The School of Behavioral Sciences strives to integrate studies from various fields of the social sciences and humanities in keeping with high academic standards curriculum focuses on pivotal issues concerning the relationship between the individual and society, and strives to equip students with a broad basis of both theoretical and applied knowledge, as well as the ability to critically apply the knowledge gained."

With its interdisciplinary nature, the program strives to ensure the representation of the major disciplines in order to ensure their internalization as organized knowledge structures. The issue of learning the language and thinking of the characteristic knowledge structures is also addressed. The integration between them is based on recognition of their uniqueness.

A. To impart familiarity with major approaches used in analyzing the individual, society and culture, as drawn from the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy.

B. To promote interdisciplinary thinking combined with a professional approach.

C. To develop the students' personal professional skills.

D. To promote good study habits among the students (attending classes, submitting papers on time, etc.).

E. To contribute to the broadening of student horizons and exposure to new fields of interest.

F. To provide students with knowledge and academic requisites for continuing their studies in graduate programs in the social sciences and humanities.

G. To broaden the range of students' future employment and professional opportunities by exposure to the complexity of human behavior and organization as reflected in issues of social and public policy.

H. To enable students to integrate into a variety of private and public settings, including consulting, human resources, educational and therapeutic frameworks, management, and communications.

I. To encourage a spirit of volunteerism and contribution to society as part of the development of individual skills.

3.1.1. Analysis of Goals

Do the goals include transmission of theoretical knowled ge and/or development of professional qualifications; if so, what percentages are devoted to each?

An analysis of the nine stated goals above yields the following results:three goals (A, E, F) constituting approximately 30% of the total relate to theoretical knowledge; three goals (B, C, D) also approximately 30%, refer toprofessional skills; two goals (D, I)about 20% relate to values; and two (G, H)about 20% to professional qualifications. Thus, only one-third of the goals are directed toward providing theoretical knowledge while half is directed toward applied knowledge—that is, professional skills or consumer needs. This result is what we anticipated for private colleges that adopt the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach and strive to fulfill the wishes of the student-consumers. The students are interested in acquiring as many professional skills as possible as well asapplied knowledge that leads to greater professionalism. This situation is what differentiates the private college from the university; the latter places a greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge whilethe private college tries tofulfill the students' desiresand offerthem the applied knowledge they willneed for their careers. The college's behavioralsciencecurriculum is extremely popular; 280-300 students register for it each year, while only about one-third that number register for the analogousprogram in an Israeli university every year. Nevertheless, the goals also reflect a viewpointofintegrating theoretical and applied knowledge.

3.2. Scope

The scope of study ranges from 114 to 128 credits. The course distribution (based on an average of 122 credits) is as follows: Introductory courses: 10 credits or 8.5%;Required courses: 60 credits or49%; Electives: 10 credits or 8.5%; Professional Clusters: 30 credits or 24%;Seminars:6 credits or 5.5%;Experiential Learning Program(not mandatory): 6 credits or 5.5%.

3.2.1. Analysis of the Scope

The inclusion of "Professional Clusters" clearly testifies to the influence of the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach, because the curriculum could have included only subjects directly connected to the behavioral sciences as the universities do.

The inclusion of the professional cluster clearly results from the desire to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the student-client. Nevertheless, an analysis of the distributionof *all* the courses yields a different picture entirely.

The course distribution between courses imparting theoretical knowledge and those that impart professional qualifications in the scope (122 credits) is as follows:

A. Theoretical Knowledge: Introductory courses: all the credits, 8.5 percent; Required courses: 75 percent of 60 credits is 45 credits, or 37 percent; Electives: all the credits, 8.5 percent; Professional cluster: 21 percent of 30 credits is 6 credits or 5.5 percent; Seminars: all the credits, 5.5 percent: Experiential learning: 5.5 percent. Total: 70%.

B. Professional Qualifications: Required credits: 25 percent of 60 credits are 15 credits or 12 percent; Professional cluster: 79 percent of 30-to-24 credits are approximately 20 percent. Total: 30% (approximately).

These results show that despite the addition of a professional cluster, the large majority of the coursework (70 %!) Is devoted to theoretical knowledge while only 30% is devoted to professional qualifications.

C**.** Structure: The curriculum structure includes about100 courses: 5 introductory, 18 required, 24 electives, 15 seminars and 38 professional clusters. The program offers the following three professional clusters: Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management;Communicat ions; and Criminology. The Experiential Learning Project is offered as an additional elective course.

3.3. Content

In order to determine the proportion of the subject matter that is dedicated to applied professional qualifications, a content analysis was performed on 106 syllabuses which describe the course content in depth.

Introductory courses: 5 courses (10 credits) are taken in the first year only, in both semesters.They include the theoretical basis of the behavioral sciences; the basics of humanistic and social thinking. All 5 courses focus on theoretical knowledge.

Required: 18 courses (60 credits): These include basic courses in psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology that are taken over a three-year period. These courses provide students with single-discipline and interdisciplinary knowledge, both empirical and theoretical, and constitute an academic foundation for the elective courses and seminars.In the first year, the required courses include several single-discipline and interdisciplinary subjects such as the biological elements of human behavior, learning, development and socialization.During the second year the required coursesteach the psychological and social elements in the formulation of social policy. During the third year the courses deal with Israeli society, psychopathology and deviance in Israeli society. Thefollowing required

courses teach research skills and are offered in the first and second years: Research Methods, Statistics, Computer Usage and Library Instruction, Tests and Measurement.

Out of the 18 courses offered above, 14 focus on theoretical knowledge (7—disciplinary knowledge and 7—interdisciplinary knowledge; 4 courses offer professional skills.

Electives: 24 courses: (10 credits): The interdisciplinary nature of the program is reflected in the elective courses and the variety of subjects connected with the social sciences and humanities. Twenty-four elective courses are offered which deal with psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical and educational aspects, such as Love; Dealing with Domestic Problems and Crises; Ethics and the Good Life; Journey to Urbanization: Bachelorhood, Marriage and Everything in Between; Backpacking as a Maturation Process; Religion, Psychology and Existentialism; State, Communications and Democracy in the Arab World; Literature, Deviance and Writing; and Madness and Normalcy in the New Age.

Some of the elective courses are taught simultaneously by two different lecturers who specialize in different disciplines. The two lecturers conduct a dialogue in the classroom and lecture in turn. An examination of the content of the elective courses shows a similar scope of sociological and psychological content and a minimum of philosophical and anthropological content. The elective courses are offered to third-year students, though second-year students are permitted to register on the basis of availability. All 24 courses emphasize theoretical knowledge (2—disciplinary and 22--interdisciplinary knowledge).

Seminars: 15 courses (6 credits): Fourteen to 15 seminars are offered that deal with a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary subjects. For example: Sex, Gender, Love: a Contemporary View of Soap Operas; Education, Society and Ideology; Sensation Seeking and Risk Taking on the Roads; Humor is No Joke; and Sounds and Silence. All students are required to attend one seminar.All 15 seminars focus on theoretical disciplinary knowledge.

Professional Cluster section: The students select one professional cluster out of the following three options:

Management, Organizational Behavior, and Human Resources Cluster. The program includes 26-30 credits of required courses and 4 credits of elective courses, for a total of 30-34 credits.

Communications Cluster: The program includes requiredcourses, elective courses and workshops, for a total of 28-30 credits.

Criminology and Law Enforcement: The program includes required courses, elective courses and a seminar, for a total of 34 credits.

Out of the 38 courses offered in the professional cluster, about 8 focus on theoretical knowledge.

The Experiential Learning Program (6 courses) is open toselect Behavioral Sciences students who are interested in combining their theoretical studies in the department with practical volunteer field work.

3.3.1. Analysis of the Content

How is the content distributed between theoretical knowledge and applied professional training?

A.Theoretical knowledge: There is a wide spectrum of single-discipline and interdisciplinary theoretical knowledg e-based courses: 5introductory courses, 14 requiredcourses, 24 electives, 15 seminars and 8 from the professional cluster. Total: 66 courses or 66 percent of the structure.

B. Professional Qualifications: 4 required (professional skills) and 30 (from professional cluster). Total: 34 courses or 34 percent of the total.

Regarding "imparting of values" that appears in the Goals Statement: None of the course syllabuses (in the structure) makes mention ofinstilling values. Only the Experiential Learning Program emphasizes volunteerism as a valueand the program is not even compulsory for all students.

True, the Goals Statement was obviously crafted under the influence of the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach, with greater emphasis on the development of professional qualifications. But this approach was only partially reflected in the Scope, Structure and Content sections: Scope-- only 30% of the credits are dedicated to professional qualifications (and 70% of theoretical knowledge); Structure and Content—only 34% of the courses are dedicated to professional qualifications (and 66% of theoretical knowledge).

3.4. Goals, Structure, Scope and Contents

The analysis of the courses provides interesting findings. Although theoretical knowledge constitutes only 30% of the goals, in actuality theoretical knowledge constitutes 70% of the credits (scope) and 66% of the courses. Professional knowledge and professional skills account for 50% of the goals while only 25% of the scope and 34% of the structure and course content. While values constitute 20% of the goals, there is no mention of values at all in the course-structure.

This information indicates that while the private college adopts an approach that reflects the perception of knowledge as consumer goodsin its Goal Statement, this is not reflected in the actual courses and required credits with their traditional emphasis on theoretical knowledge. Perhaps, then, the proclaimed goals of the college reflect a desire to attract students by promising skills that will enable them to succeed in the professional marketplace, even though the curriculum does not carry through on these goals.

There is only a partial correspondence and that to a large extent,the overall viewpoint of knowledge as consumer goods is not reflected in the college curriculum. Thus we deduce that our Hypothesis was only partially supported.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The expansion of higher education in industrial nations and its greater accessibility to the layperson raises the question: Is higher education directed toward the needs of the student-consumer, and are curricula constructed

according to the professional demands of the employment market? Higher education that attempts to fulfill the needs of the student-consumer, evolves from the perception of knowledge as consumer goods. This study evaluatesthe curriculum that leads to a B.A.degreein behavioral science at a large, established and prestigious private college in Israel.

Doesthe Goal Statement reflect the perception of knowledge as consumer goods? In other words, is the centrality of acquiring theoretical knowledge relinquished in favor of acquiring professional and personal skills? Do these goals reflect ideology or a professional perception?

The findings which are based on content analysis of documentsshow interesting results. The perception of knowledge as goods clearly impacts the stated goals of the curriculum, despite the fact that they contain a clear ideological message. Only 30% of the Goals Statement addresses theoreticalknowledge-based courseswhile 50% emphasizes professional and personal skills, and 10% discusses values. A similar divisionisevident concerning the curriculum's structure. By contrast, an analysis of the scope and the contents of the curriculum (that is, the contents of the actual courses) indicate that they arenot affected by the perception of knowledge as goods. Thus, 62% of the scope and contents are devoted to theoretical knowledge, 38% to skills, and nothing to values—in stark contradistinction to the Goals Statement.

This finding is very interesting and perhaps explains what happens when private colleges adopt the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach as part of their marketing strategy (16) and attempt to direct their Goals Statement to the needs of the consumer (10; 7). The stated goals and curriculumstructure constitutes a type of 'packaging' for the product, the bachelor's degree in behavioral science. Those who are interested in this degree, check the ‘packaging’ (i.e. Goals Statement) to help them choose the college that suits their purposes. These potential students are not really interested in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge; instead, they want to acquire the training and professional skills that will enable them to integrate into the workforce. Thus, applicants are often encouraged to choose a private college because it offers Professional Cluster courses, but they do not necessarily examine the curriculum to see what proportion the skill-based courses constitute (28).

Thus, the study’s findings regarding the influence of the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach on the scope, structure and content of the curriculum, pointed to a possible inconsistency. Despite the emphasis placed on applied information and professional qualifications in the Goals Statement, theoretical knowledge still received the lion’s share of coursework in contrast to professional qualifications. How do we explain this paradox?

In contrast to technological professions (such as engineering, business administration, etc.) Whose study-programs train students for the relevant professionaloccupations, the behavioral sciences are a very broad, interdisciplinary field comprised of a variety of theoretical and applied subjects with no one well-defined professional occupation. Therefore, it is questionable whether a behavioralscience curriculum would, indeed, be affected by the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach. But our research supported our hypotheses that the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach does affect the behavioralscience curriculum, mainly in the following two aspects:

First of all, the Behavioral Sciences Department offers professional cluster electives, in addition to the general behavioral science classes. This structure gives professional guidance and orientation to the students, and does not exist in traditional university studies. These clusters are in *addition* to the ‘traditional’ theoretical studies typical of behavioral science departments. The School also offers an Experiential Learning Program, offering students hands-on volunteer work (though it is not mandatory). Thus, the clusters (and Experiential Program when applicable) are very important in preparing the students for future careers and giving them the professional qualifications they need, despite the fact that these courses comprise only a small proportion of the overall curriculum.

Second, the Goals Statement emphasizes the importation of professional qualifications as a major objective of the School.

It is important to address the issue of theoretical knowledge within the sphere of the behavioral sciences field. The behavioral sciences are interdisciplinary and include the domains of sociology, psychology, anthropology and philosophy. It aims to enrich knowledge about the human being and about human interaction with society. Thus, theoretical knowledge is, in effect, professional training for this field. We feel that even those subjects that focus on theoretical knowledge, help prepare the students for their future careers in professions of the cluster groups: management, criminology and communication. Thus, even so-called theoretical subjects are no less important in preparing the student for a career in any field that involves human interaction. Private colleges realize this fact and thus continue to provide the requisite theoretical knowledge basis, while they simultaneously adopt theknowledge-as-consumer-goods approach in their Goals Statement to attract students and make their programs as attractive as possible. But although it is true that private colleges want to attract large numbers of students, they are also careful about creating and maintaining good reputations over the years; they know that successful graduates are their best advertisements. So when they create their curricula, they are careful to include the traditional academic subjects and theoretical knowledge-based courses, as the universities do. Then, they may add professional clusters and the like (for professions such as Organizational Behavior and Human-Resources Management, Criminology,and Communications). In short, though colleges tend to emphasize the knowledge-as-consumer-goods approach in their Goal Statements offered to applicants, they are often able to accomplish the dual objectives of providing both theoretical and applied knowledge-based courses, for the best of both worlds.

Thus we deduce that the behavioralscience curriculum is partially affected by the knowledgeas consumergoods approach.

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