

The Little Engine(er) That Could(n't)

Every college has one. In fact, almost every department has one. What is it? A faculty member who thinks he/she is too good for his/her present position but who can't seem to convince anyone at a "better" school that he/she really is ready for the next level.

Enter Barry Babin. Babin, who some claim is the premier scholar in the CoB, has a pedigree that fails to impress. His bachelor's degree in industrial engineering is from Louisiana State University (2007 USN&WR Tier 3), while his MBA in marketing is from the University of Central Florida (2007 USN&WR Tier 4). His doctorate in marketing is also from LSU (2007 USN&WR Tier 3). Using a weighted average, Babin's education would place collectively at the top of Tier 4 in the USN&WR 2007 rankings. Given that Babin teaches at a Tier 4 school, we think he found his comfort level at USM.

Babin's research record is lauded as outstanding, and he has produced some quality articles. However, Babin himself is quick to let you know just how good he is. From the USM CoB website, here is a portion of Babin's bio:

"He is well respected internationally and has lectured in many countries outside of the United States including Australia, South Korea, France, Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom."^A

Let's see just how good Barry Babin really is. According to Business Source Complete, Babin's first publication appeared in 1991. Here's a table to compare Babin to some of his coauthors and some other marketing researchers over the same period:

Name	# Publications (1991-2005)^B
Barry Babin	46
Jean-Charles Chebat	44
Michel Laroche	60
Joseph Sirgy	50

Among his usual coauthors, Babin hardly seems to dominate. In fact, Tier 1 and 2 schools are full of Associate Professors of Marketing with research records that rival Babin's. Maybe this is why Babin has been unsuccessful at making the move to the "big time" schools at which some of his graduate school counterparts now reside – marketing researchers are a dime a dozen and good schools can hire a young researcher instead of a used up misanthrope from a backwater school. Maybe Babin's record is just outstanding in comparison to his marketing colleagues at USM. What's clear is that Babin's record, which would be nothing special at a quality business school, has been rewarded at USM. Or has it?

In Babin's recent years at USM, he has drawn the type of teaching schedule he has wanted and has had control over certain elements of the CoB that could have impacted his life. If Barry Babin had been able to move to a good school, he might have gained access to doctoral students, a diminished teaching load commensurate with a doctoral

program, and resources that accompany that situation as well. However, at USM (the third school in a poor state) Babin had none of these things. So, he created his own little pseudo-doctoral institution existence in suite 306 of Greene Hall. Since becoming a full professor, Babin has taught mostly graduate (MBA) students, along with a very few seniors in marketing. Babin's classes, centered on marketing research and consumer behavior, were restricted to those MBA students who declared marketing as their concentration or major. Insulated from the Great Unwashed that inhabit the classrooms at the USM CoB, Babin had a low-stress, do-it-yourself existence. Through his position on the CoB graduate committee, Babin could act as gatekeeper, turning away applicants that he deemed unworthy – most often those students whose record was built on work ethic – the kind of student that would camp out on his doorstep and continually exercise their right to his time. Such students would pose a serious threat to his research time and agenda.

Babin also apparently received *carte blanche* with respect to travel and research funding. Documents at www.usmpride.com illustrate Babin's extravagant spending and travel, both domestic and abroad. Trips to France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Korea have all apparently been funded by the CoB, as well as annual trips to convention and conference sites. However, it appears that travel money is all Farhang Niroomand would allow Babin in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Babin's most productive research years never yielded extraordinarily large raises, at least not according to www.usmpride.com.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. – that's how the saying goes. In the early 2000's, Babin's research productivity had declined so that his research agenda was being supported primarily by the *Journal of Business Research*. Oddly enough, Babin became marketing editor of the *JBR* in 1999. Since 1999, 50% (7 of 14) of Babin's refereed journal publications have been published by his own journal, including 2 articles in 2004 and 2 articles in 2005. What's a fellow to do? When your research well runs dry, you can re-tool, dig in, and change research agendas, or you can do what Babin has done – become a game player and an administrator. Make no mistake about it. Babin's decision to become an administrator wasn't born out of necessity following Alvin Williams' resignation in 2005. Babin had already taken a number of shots at department head and dean jobs at other schools (notably Southern Illinois University and University of Louisiana at Lafayette), all of which declined to hire the inexperienced candidate. They probably even asked themselves why Babin couldn't get the position at USM, the school at which he developed his career. Subsequent to Williams' resignation, Babin was hand picked by Harold Doty to be his personal ramrod, and the job came with a \$25,000 raise, a raise that Babin no doubt thought was long overdue.

To continue Babin's vision of transforming the Department of Management and Marketing into a pseudo-doctoral granting institution environment, Babin's first order of business as chair was to order the doors to the departmental offices closed to students. Babin relocated Janice Prescott to a remote location, removing her from the customer service role established by Williams. Students who dare to open the doors to Management and Marketing have been greeted by...no one. They are left to fend for

themselves and find their own way. For a marketing guy, Babin apparently opted out of the customer service courses in his MBA and PhD programs, because he apparently doesn't believe in that concept. Babin also has had time as chair to act as an ex officio member of the graduate committee, continuing to protect his now further diminished teaching load from unwanted students. Additionally, Babin was one of the architects of the graduate committee re-vote on the digital MBA program, casting one of Doty's 5 pocket votes of the 9 total votes (the other Doty supporters were Laurie Babin, Beth LaFleur, Francis Daniel, and Doty himself). Further, Babin has continued his role in the CoB Jet Set, traveling extensively throughout the 2005-2006 school year, even reportedly teaching abroad during the academic year.

Barry Babin started out as an engineer and has ended up engineering a B-movie version of a real academic career. He may have some publications, and his decision to ride the coat tails of some elder coauthors has led to his receipt of a few positions in the marketing community. However, his record is not stellar, and his chances of being hired at a more prestigious institution are near zero. Babin has traded any integrity he may have once possessed for the opportunity to be a big fish in a muddy little pond, but that's still not enough. He occasionally deigns to walk the hallways of Joseph Greene, chancing an encounter with a fellow faculty member (common thought says that Babin has no peers, at least not in his own mind) or worse yet, a student. He awaits his orders from Doty and then dutifully carries out the directive, as he did when he chastised his department for its participation with www.usmpride.com. Had Babin remained only a scholar, he could have retired and been remembered by all as a good researcher. As is, he will be remembered as the engineer who tried mightily but could not engineer his way out of a lifetime of Tier 4 status.

Everyone stand and recognize Barry Babin: Future Tier 4 Hall of Famer.

^A http://www.usm.edu/business/faculty_staff/management/barry_babin.html

^B Business Source Complete