

ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS THROUGH INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEWS

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Introduction

Marketing programs, and indeed most of academia, are increasingly developing assurance of learning programs. The drive for assurance of learning comes from AACSB accreditation and maintenance (AACSB 2007), as well as to meet legislative requirements, to demonstrate the quality of business programs, and to ensure continuous improvement (Zhu and McFarland 2005). Course-embedded assessments are often chosen for assurance of learning, due to the usefulness of the data and the ease of implementation (LaFleur, Babin and Lopez 2009). Assessment in marketing programs, though, "has not progressed very far beyond exams, course evaluations and current student data" (Sampson and Betters-Reed 2008, p. 27). Using multiple choice exams for assessment is a valid approach that can provide insights across a number of topics with one tool (Michlitsch and Sidle 2002). However, multiple choice exams lack the power to provide deeper insights into how, where, or why students are learning or, conversely, why they are not learning.

One way to address this lack of explanatory power is to assess learning using multiple methods. This could include indirect methods, such as employer evaluation or student self-assessment surveys. While some programs may use multiple measures for a learning goal, the measures themselves are not typically related. The purpose of this paper is to describe a methodology that pairs a direct and indirect method to analyze learning in the Principles of Marketing course. The method combines quantitative assessment from a multiple choice exam and qualitative findings from interviews with course instructors. While the exams alone provide insights into which topics students are and are not performing well, the interviews contribute to a conversation about "why" and add a deeper understanding of some possible underlying contributors. This paper adds to the growing assurance of learning literature in the marketing field.

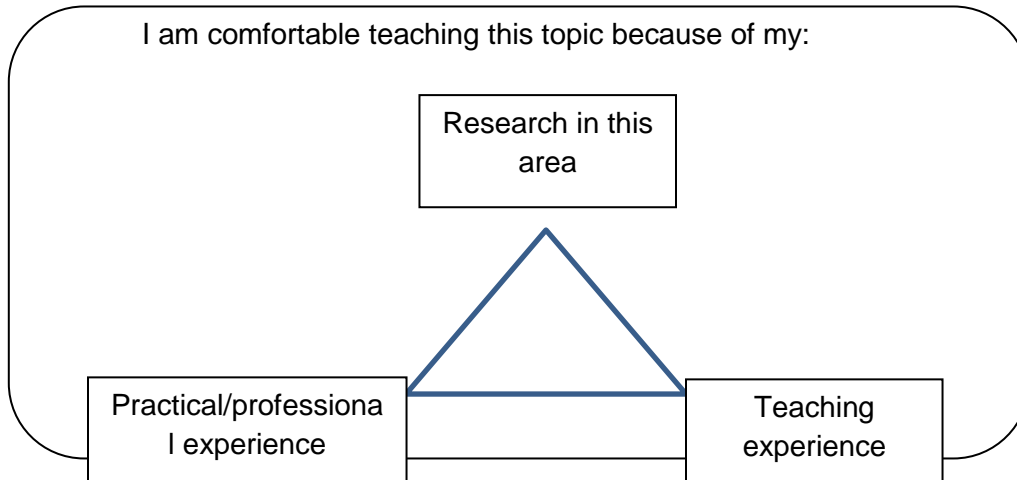
Table 1: MC Exam Results

		Exceeds		Meets		Fail		Meet or Exceed	
LO 1	The Marketing concept	70	19%	223	61%	74	20%	293	80%
LO 2	Marketing environment	145	40%	204	56%	18	5%	349	95%
LO 3	Marketing research	41	11%	175	48%	151	41%	216	59%
LO 4	Consumer buyer decision process	94	26%	224	61%	49	13%	318	87%
LO 5	Market segmentation, target market, positioning	50	14%	186	51%	131	36%	236	64%
LO 6	Product	180	49%	169	46%	18	5%	349	95%
LO 7	Price	129	35%	212	58%	26	7%	341	93%
LO 8	Distribution	131	36%	204	56%	32	9%	335	91%
LO 9	Promotion	121	33%	204	56%	42	11%	325	89%
	Targets	> 10%		20% - 70%		< 20%		> 80%	
		shading = target not met							

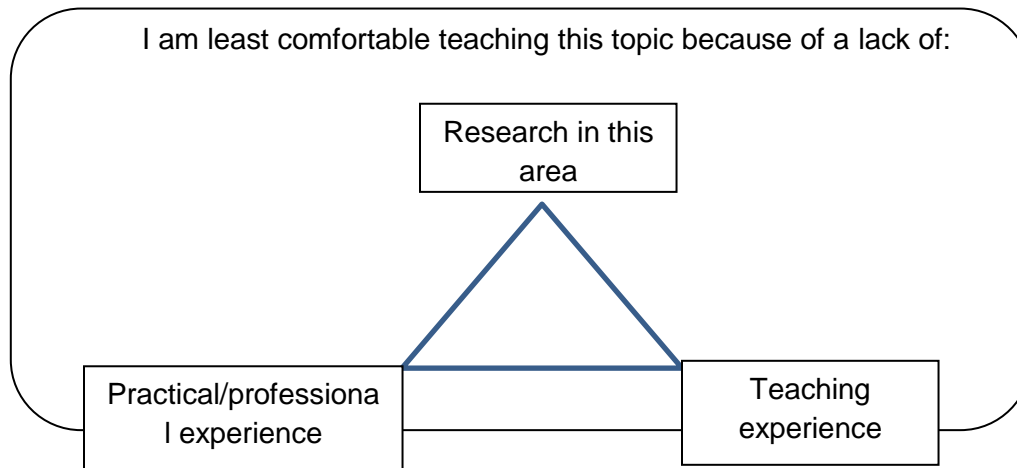
Exhibit 1: Interview Questions

What is the subject area you are most comfortable teaching in the Principles of Marketing course?

Place a dot on the triangle that best represents what has led to your comfort in teaching this topic (for example, if you have done research on this topic, your dot might be near the top of the triangle). Tell me about why your dot is where it is:



Tell me about the topic you are least comfortable teaching in the Principles of Marketing course. Place a dot on the triangle that best represents what has led to your comfort level in teaching this topic. Tell me about why your dot is where it is.



What tools, resources, or experiences would help you increase your comfort in teaching this subject area?

Tell me about the topics students seem to have a hard time understanding

Methodology and Initial Results

At the researchers' mid-western, public University, Principles of Marketing is required for all business majors. For marketing majors, the course provides the foundation upon which other required courses and marketing electives build. For other business majors, this is the only marketing course that students will take en route to a business degree. As a result, effective learning of key marketing concepts is essential for both groups of students. The faculty

Exhibit 2: Summary of Interview Results

- The elective courses taught by instructors influence which topics instructors find most comfortable to teach in the Principles of Marketing course. Research and work experience also play a role, as elective teaching tends to focus on an instructor's area of expertise. The topics varied widely between participants.
- Instructors' least comfortable teaching topics tend to stem from the absence of any kind of experience with that particular topic. These responses are as diverse as the comfortable topics, stemming from the differences in instructors' backgrounds.
- A theme from the interviews is a feeling that marketing research is difficult for students to understand, creating a clear link to the exam results. Some participants expressed the idea that coverage of marketing research can be light, given it is covered by the Marketing Research course which is required for marketing majors.
- Other topics instructors feel are difficult for students to understand are SWOT, pricing, distribution, and business-to-business marketing/derived demand.
- Instructors provided several ideas for filling in the gaps in their knowledge, including hands-on experience, good assignments and case studies to use, listening to professional speakers, conducting research, and a list of website resources.

developed six learning objectives for the course (one objective has four sub-objectives), and has administered a common exam to assess learning in these areas. The questions were pulled from a test bank, and were chosen for their broad application of marketing concepts and the links to the learning objectives. The exam includes five questions for each learning objective, resulting in a 45-question exam. Standards were set for exceeding, meeting, or not meeting standards. The exam was pre-tested with a summer course, and some changes were then made to clarify question wording and to ensure the answers were not contrary to the textbook content. The exam was then administered in all sections of Principles of Marketing for one academic year. The results were compiled and reported by learning objective (see Table 1).

The assessment committee then met to discuss the results and determine what could be done to improve student learning in the areas where results did not meet the standards. What the committee found, however, was that we did not feel confident about why students achieved the results they did. Without answers to the “why” we felt the proposed solutions were based on assumptions. We assumed that students were not receiving enough information or examples on these topics and, therefore, simply needed more of those things.

Members of the committee, the authors here, decided to try collecting additional information about student learning. Personal interviews of teaching faculty were selected as the data collection methodology. The purpose of the interviews was not to identify shortcomings or strengths of any individual instructor, but to gain insights into what may be contributing to students' ability to meet or not meet learning goal standards. Interviews were based on a small number of questions, to keep each interview under ten minutes (see Exhibit 1) The questions were paired with a visual tool in order to help the participants get started and encourage them to provide detailed explanations. The faculty teaching Principles of Marketing were chosen as key informants. Faculty are knowledgeable about the dynamics of student learning in their course, and observe student behavioral queues that provide insight into learning. For example, the instructor monitors student participation, answers questions about course content in and outside of class, grades course assignments. While students could provide insights into their individual learning experiences, the instructors are best positioned to provide qualitative information about student learning as a whole.

The results of the interviews are summarized in Exhibit 2. While the topics that instructors find most and least comfortable to teach are as varied as the instructors themselves, many of the instructors mentioned difficulty with the marketing research topic, which is reflected in student

exam results. This result highlights a need for additional support on this topic, including some training or hands-on experiences for teaching faculty. In addition, the researchers noted some feeling among instructors that because the topic is covered in detail in the Marketing Research course, this lessened the need to cover it in Principles. Reviewing and updating the department's curriculum map could be one way to create a common understanding of where students develop and practice each skill reflected in the learning objectives.

The interviews highlight the challenge of having diverse faculty address a standard set of learning goals. While the marketing research objective is one area where multiple instructors need support, responses show an opportunity for knowledge sharing among instructors on several topics, leveraging each instructor's expertise. The combination of exam analysis and instructor interviews did provide insights into student learning. The mix of direct and indirect assessment methods may require additional resources, but does help address the overall goal of better understanding student learning in order to improve curriculum.

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