

MARKETING ALUMNI: PEDAGOGICAL PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

Learning styles of marketing students have changed over the years. Changes have also occurred in emphases placed by the AACSB, universities, schools and departments on meeting student learning needs. This paper measures the pedagogical preferences of marketing alumni and relates them to a global attitude toward the marketing major. This approach may be used in any marketing program as a potential attitudinal enhancement mechanism, as key pedagogies can be identified and emphasized. Results indicate an association between in-class exercises and overall attitude toward the marketing major.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is now being held accountable in ways that were all but unseen in the past. Assessment is now a bellwether term and accrediting agencies are increasingly turning to quality enhancement and continuous improvement. Within business education, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has adopted new standards that are process and outcomes based and are directly centered on a business school's mission (AACSB 1994). Within this rubric, marketing programs have also developed mission statements and accompanying goals and objectives. Whether these goals and objectives are actualized or not is a function of both inputs (e.g., pedagogy) and outcome assessments. For many business schools and marketing programs, goals and objectives are being developed that recognize student-centered learning and its enhancements through the creation of learning environments. To help actualize these goals, business education in many institutions, most notably the California State University (CSU) system, is beginning to formally consider Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles of teaching and learning. One of these principles

is that good teaching practice respects diverse ways of learning. Following this line of thinking, an AACSB Task Force (1998) recognized the need to have teaching styles that matched learning style differences. The CSU in its Cornerstones Report (1997) also recognized the principle that students and their learning experiences are the center of the academic enterprise. Indeed, writings are affirming that students be placed first and that instructors recognize the need to respect diverse learning styles (e.g., see the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1996; A Report for the ECS Chairman's "Quality Counts" Agenda in Higher Education, 1996). Given this canopy of student-centered focus, business and marketing educators are increasingly being asked to recognize the presence of diversity in learning approaches. The rationale for this is simple. If students are presented with their preferred learning style, learning should be improved and students should be more satisfied with their educational experiences. In turn, these students should be in a better position to contribute their talents to the organizations of the twenty-first century. From this standpoint, students are viewed as being imbued with a set of knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to contribute to business enterprises.

While learning styles are part of this customer focus in marketing, little has been developed concerning student preferences for instructional styles and no research has related these preferences to an overall attitude toward a marketing program. This study will pursue this topic.

LEARNING STYLES AND PREFERENCES

To help understand the significance of learning styles it is necessary to note that the term learning style is used in different ways in the literature.

One common use of the term is to indicate the preferences learners have for different teaching delivery styles. Canfield (1994) defines learning style to be, "... the affective component of educational experience, which motivates a student to choose, attend to, and perform well in a course or training. This definition focuses on the preferences students have for particular types of educational experiences. Kolb (1984) defines learning styles as "generalized differences in learning orientations based on the degree to which people emphasize the four modes of the learning process as measured by a self report test called the Learning Style Inventory." Stewart and Felicetti (1992) define learning styles to mean, "...those educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn." It is *how* a student learns, not *what* was learned.

Other authors make a distinction between learning styles and other aspects of the learning process. Sadler-Smith (1996) suggests that the notions of learning styles and cognitive styles be thought of separately, as they have important distinctions for instructional strategy. Curry (1991) makes a distinction between learning preference – the favoring of one particular mode of teaching over another; and learning style – a distinctive and habitual manner of acquiring knowledge, skills or attitudes through study or experience. Learning styles may also encompass individual differences in how information is taken in and processed (Garger and Garger 1994), or differences in how individuals perceive, think and solve problems and learn (Witkin, Moore, Goodenough and Cox 1977). Lamont and Friedman (1997) refer to the way students learn as learning patterns. They note that changes have occurred over several years in the way students prefer to learn marketing and how they prefer to be taught.

The distinctions in the use of the term 'learning styles' thus depend on whether one is talking about preferences the learner has for different pedagogical approaches, or whether one is talking about the actual process of acquiring and processing information in the learning process. This study examines learning styles from the perspective of students' preferred educational experiences, or preferred pedagogical approaches.

PREFERRED PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

A number of studies have examined preferred pedagogical approaches. In this regard, Matthews (1994) administered Canfield and Knight's (1983) Learning Style Inventory and found that business majors preferred conceptual and social/conceptual-based pedagogies. They preferred learning with other students, as opposed to learning alone.

A study by Nulty and Barrett (1996) indicated that business students prefer pedagogies that are active and concrete. Also, Stewart and Felicetti (1992) examined preferred pedagogies of marketing majors and nonmarketing major business students, and found a significant difference between the two groups. They found that marketing majors, relative to nonmarketing majors preferred a learning style which was either methodological and included, "use of computer aided instruction, direct application problems, hands-on opportunities, and programmed instruction;" or a second, more holistic method of learning which included, "short lectures with discussion, short assignments with reflection time, group discussion, television and movies."

Karns (1993) examined pedagogical preferences of marketing students for learning activities and found a positive relationship between level of stimulation, level of effort and concrete or real-world applications. The major conclusions of the study were that marketing students prefer pedagogies that have more involving content and are oriented toward application of marketing knowledge.

Other studies have investigated specific pedagogies, such as team projects (Williams, Beard and Rymer 1991; Batra, Walvoord, and Krishnan 1997); experiential learning (Wynd, 1989), gaming and simulation (Laughlin and Hite 1993; Wellington and Faria 1996), and Web based courses (Canzer 1997). Clow and Wachter (1996) examined the extent of use of six different teaching techniques in principles of marketing courses. Their study focused on what teaching methodologies were used by marketing instructors. The current study extends these works by addressing the effectiveness of alternative teaching methods in marketing courses, especially those that influence attitude toward the major.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with marketing alumni of a teaching-oriented, six-year university in the Western United States. The survey instrument was designed to reveal alumni perception of the effectiveness of different teaching methods and tools. It also measured the contribution of the program towards the development of key knowledge and skill areas relevant to the major. Semantic differential scales regarding attitudes towards the marketing major were used, along with demographic and classification data.

The survey was mailed to 298 alumni who had graduated three to five years earlier. Sixty-six complete questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 22.1%. No follow-up with nonrespondents was conducted. The authors were interested in this set of alumni because they had been out of college long enough to have a better and more balanced perspective on their education. And yet, they had not graduated too long ago when memory effects might cloud their perceptions. This group provided us with a basis for comparison with the first survey, thus potentially validating the findings from the current seniors.

The average respondent age was 27.2. Males made up 69.7% of the respondents. The average marketing major G.P.A. of respondents was 2.94. On the question of ethnicity, 90.6% identified themselves as Caucasians.

VARIABLES

The teaching methods selected for analysis were those which were commonly used by the faculty. These methods are as follows: cases, lectures, computer simulations, class discussions, group projects, in-class exercises, individual projects, written assignments, and exams. The measurement of these methods was accomplished through the use of a seven-point semantic differential scale which ranged from poor to excellent (1=poor, 7=excellent). If a respondent did not experience a particular method, the student was instructed to check a box indicating a lack of exposure to the approach. The global attitudinal framework of Mitchell and Olson (1981) was employed to develop an overall affect measure for the marketing program. The measurement of global attitude was made

through the use of the following semantic differential scales: good experience versus bad experience, satisfactory versus unsatisfactory, useless versus useful, ineffective versus effective; valueless versus valuable, good use of my time versus waste of my time, not enjoyable versus enjoyable, and desirable versus undesirable. These measures were scored on a one-to seven-point scale with the high-end of the scale denoting a positive response.

RESULTS

Among the alumni surveyed, the rated effectiveness of the nine pedagogical approaches ranged from a low of 4.62 (exams) to a high of 5.76 (group projects). Exams were the least preferred pedagogical approach.

With respect to the enhanced global attitude measures, a principal components factor analysis on eight measures revealed a single unrotated factor that explained 66.3% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .39 (valueless versus valuable) to .78 (good use of my time versus a waste of my time) and supported unidimensionality or the presence of a single overall attitudinal orientation toward the marketing major.

The results of regressing the nine pedagogical approaches against the global attitudinal factor revealed a R^2 value of .415 ($F=4.10$; 9 and 52 d.f.; $p=.0005$); thus over 40% of the variance in global attitude is explained by the co-variation of pedagogical variables. Table 1 shows the detailed regression results and suggests that outside of exams and individual projects (which possess nonsignificant negative betas), the remaining variables co-vary directly with global attitude.

[Insert Table 1: RESULTS OF REGRESSING TEACHING PEDAGOGIES AGAINST GLOBAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MARKETING MAJOR]

Further, an assessment of beta weights reveals that in-class exercises (.31, $p=.02$) and class discussions (.29, $p=.05$) have the greatest relative explanatory power. Each of these variables also possesses a statistically significant t-value. The results of the survey revealed that in-class exercises and class discussions help to explain

the variation in global attitude toward the marketing major. A manipulation of these variables may therefore impact student attitude towards the marketing major, and consequently, satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The survey results indicate that preference for certain pedagogical methods may be correlated with overall liking for the marketing major. Specifically, rating of in-class exercises and class discussions were found to be related to overall positive attitude¹. Thus, alumni who rated in-class exercises and class discussions as being highly effective tools of learning viewed the marketing major more favorably. These two pedagogies provide a certain level of critical engagement that helps develop a positive attitude toward the marketing major. This finding is consistent with Matthew's (1994) conclusion that business majors prefer learning with other students, as opposed to learning on their own. It is not clear from this study whether it is the process of engaging in the activity or the enhancement in learning that results that is responsible for the positive attitude. Nevertheless, this has implications for curriculum development and provides a tool for generating a more favorable attitude amongst students. Future research may attempt to address this issue.

Those alumni who rated in-class exercises and class discussions low had less positive overall attitudes toward the marketing major. This indicates that more traditional pedagogies are preferred by some students, and this suggests the possibility of offering students alternative pedagogical approaches as they select among multiple sections of the same course. In essence, each section could have its predominant pedagogical orientation presented in the class schedule. Further research should attempt to develop and explore the learning and attitudinal implications of a pedagogical segmentation of the course market.

This research has also presented an approach for the enhancement of one's global attitude toward

¹ In-class exercises are assignments handed out by the instructor in class and worked upon individually or in groups for the purpose of actively engaging students. Assignments may include application of marketing concepts or models, application of analysis and decision tools, and role-playing.

the marketing major. By measuring and relating pedagogical preferences to overall attitude or indicators of satisfaction with the marketing major, key pedagogies may be identified and emphasized.

CONCLUSION

Undergraduate education is undergoing substantial change. There have been calls to "rethink marketing education, including curriculum design and teaching methods" (Lamont and Friedman 1997). Much of the literature, with some exceptions, takes a top down approach in this regard. However, it is important to look at the issues from the bottom up by measuring student perceptions. This study takes that approach. If we can better understand the perceptions of students we can have better curriculum and teaching method development. This would then lead to better learning by students, and a more positive attitude. Eventually these should result in attracting potential students to the marketing major, where enrollments have been declining (Hugstad 1997; Lamont and Friedman 1997).

Student satisfaction in general is influenced by university level variables like dormitory food, parking, and such (Juillerat and Schreiner 1996). Marketing educators cannot do much about these uncontrollable variables. What they can do, and should, is to help develop a more favorable attitude towards the major. This, in turn, should lead to enhanced learning. The use of in-class exercises and class discussions appear to be tools that seems to help, and some educators might wish to incorporate them at a greater level than they may have done in the past.

COMMENTS

References and table are available from the first author on request.