

## **ESTABLISHING KNOWLEDGE OF CAREERS IN MARKETING AT THE LOWER DIVISION: INFLUENCING MOTIVATIONS FOR CHOOSING MARKETING AS A MAJOR<sup>i</sup>**

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Empirical evidence demonstrates that marketing majors are among the lowest performing students relative to their academic peers on a number of different dimensions including incoming quantitative and verbal/reading scores on college entrance exams, GMAT scores, and salary levels post-graduation (Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan, & Rochford, 2007). Possible explanations for the observed performance gap between marketing and other business majors include marketing attracting a pool of students who perceive themselves as more “creative” than quantitative, and a perception that marketing is perhaps an “easier” major compared to more rigorous options such as finance and accounting (Lamont & Friedman, 1997). Declaring marketing as a major becomes a “fallback” strategy because other options seem too difficult (Hugstad, 1997; LaBarbera & Simonoff, 1999).

Another explanation is that marketing majors don't fully understand the requisite skills and capabilities that marketing entails. Unlike accounting and information systems (where most business schools offer courses at the sophomore level), most marketing majors do not take their introductory marketing courses until junior year. Hence, students who declare marketing as their major may not really understand what marketing entails. In addition, students who self-identify as more quantitative may have already declared a major such as accounting or finance before taking their first marketing course. The net effect of these myriad factors may be that marketing does not attract the same quality of majors as other disciplines.

This study explores a strategy for setting expectations about, and influencing, student motivations for choosing marketing as a major: offering a lower-division marketing course to provide a comprehensive overview of possible career paths and their requisite skill sets for success. To assess the value of such a strategy, a mid-sized public university in the Northern Rocky Mountain region offered a course called “Careers in Marketing” at the lower-division (200) level. In this particular case, the professor volunteered to teach this course on an experimental basis with no compensation for a three-year time period. Moreover, this institution allows experimental courses to be offered for three years without undergoing a formal approval process. Students filled out a pre- and post-course assessment of marketing career knowledge, interest in pursuing marketing as a major, and motivation for doing so. Perceptions of a group of

students enrolled in the standard, junior-level introductory marketing course required of all business majors were also taken (pre- and post-course assessments) in order to provide a control sample.

We find that, despite having similar levels of knowledge of careers in marketing at the start of the class, students in the experimental Careers in Marketing course reported a significantly higher level of relevant marketing knowledge at the end of the semester compared to the control sample of students. Furthermore, after taking the experimental course students reported lower rates of undesirable motivations for majoring in marketing (not being quantitative, marketing being an easy major) whereas students reported higher rates of these reasons for majoring in marketing after taking only the required, junior-year course. Our results indicate that many, but not all, of the previously mentioned explanations for discrepancies in quality of marketing majors relative to other business majors are valid. Over time, the cumulative effect of adding a lower division marketing careers course could result in higher caliber students.

### **Hypotheses**

We assessed whether or not the course led to more realistic expectations about marketing;<sup>2</sup> the rationale for the hypothesis follows.

H1a: Student knowledge of marketing in both the experimental class and control class will be comparable at the pre-course assessment;

H1b: Student knowledge of marketing will be higher in the post-course assessment compared to the pre-course assessment in both the control and the experimental class;

H1c: Student knowledge of marketing in the experimental class will be higher in the post-course assessment than in the control class post-course assessment.

Given that the experimental course is designed specifically to address what marketing entails, if the course actually delivers that information, the increase in student knowledge should be greater than in the standard marketing course.

H2a: Student knowledge of the degree to which quantitative skills are required for success in marketing will be comparable at the pre-course assessment for both the experimental and the control class;

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We thank a reviewer for the helpful suggestion to break our 2\*2 hypotheses into more easily framed simple paired comparisons.

H2b: Student knowledge of the degree to which quantitative skills are required for success in marketing will be higher at the post-course assessment compared to the pre-course assessment in both the control and the experimental class;

H2c: Student knowledge of the degree to which quantitative skills are required for success in marketing in the experimental class will be higher in the post-course assessment than in the control class post-course assessment.

Prior research indicates students choose marketing because they believe it is based on more “creative” work than quantitative work (Lamont & Friedman, 1997) and that such students tend to be lower-performing students than other majors (Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan & Rochford, 2007). H2 is designed to explicitly test the degree to which the experimental course helped set student expectations about the need for marketers to have quantitative skills.

H3a: Student interest in marketing as a major will be higher in the experimental course than in the required (control) marketing course at the pre-course assessment.

H3b: Student interest in marketing as a major will be significantly different in the experimental course than the required course at the post-course assessment.

First, because students self-select into the experimental course, whereas all students must take the junior level marketing course, we expect student interest in marketing will be higher in the experimental course than in the required course. However, beyond that expectation, it is difficult, *a priori*, to determine whether student interest in marketing over the course of the semester will increase or decrease, and hence, a non-directional hypothesis is offered in H3b.

H4a: The reasons students give for their interest in marketing as a major will differ between the experimental course and the required marketing course.

H4b: The reasons students have for their interest in marketing as a major will change over the duration of the semester in both the experimental course and in the required course.

As noted in the prior literature (Lamont & Friedman, 1997), student reasons for majoring in marketing include: a desire to avoid a quantitative discipline, for students who might believe that they are more creative than quantitative; a belief that marketing is an easier major compared to other majors; a fallback strategy if no other majors sounded interesting.

In addition to these reasons, certainly some students pursue a major in marketing, not because they are avoiding something else, but because of a genuine desire to work in the marketing field. Hence, all of these possible reasons were included in the test for this hypothesis.

Presumably, students enrolled in the experimental course would exhibit a higher genuine desire to work in the marketing field than the range of students in the required marketing course. In addition, if the experimental course effectively communicates the types of skills necessary for success in marketing careers, students may find that the reason for the interest in marketing as a major may change over time to reflect the information and knowledge received.

*Covariates.* Student interest in marketing due to prior exposure from family or work experience, GPA, and course instructor were included as covariates.

### **Method**

A one-credit lower-division course developed to provide information about the range of careers in marketing as well as the requisite skills and capabilities for these various careers was offered for the first time in the Spring 2012 at a four-year, medium-sized (15,000 students) public university in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. The 15-week course met one hour per week and was structured to bring in ten marketing professionals from a variety of relevant careers. Speaker titles/positions are available upon request. Student coursework included conducting research on speakers both before (job title/ position, industry, customers, competitors, trends), and after (insights, reflection, etc.) the speakers' presentations. Students also completed career assignments in which they conducted research on their own skills and interests, marketing positions, and marketing-related trade associations and resources to gain personal insights about whether marketing was a potentially good career fit for them. The final exam asked students to identify three themes that were consistent across all speakers' presentations of marketing careers, and to discuss what those themes meant in terms of success factors for marketing professionals. Hence, the course was focused on conveying an accurate understanding of what a career in marketing entailed and the degree to which the necessary skills and opportunities were congruent with the student's own interests and aptitudes. *The syllabus is available from the first author upon request.*

### **Measures and Scale Validation**

Surveys were administered on the first and last days of class to students in the experimental and required marketing classes. Although only one section of the required marketing course was sampled at the outset of the semester, multiple sections were assessed at the end of the semester to ensure that differences were not unique to a specific professor. Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

	<b>Experimental Course</b>		<b>Control Sample</b>	
	<b>Pre</b> n=24	<b>Post</b> 21	<b>Pre</b> 36	<b>Post</b> 57*
<u>Class Standing</u>				
Freshman	1	1	0	0
Sophomore	10	11	0	0
Junior	7	5	28	40
Senior	5	3	7	14
Other (MBA)	1	1	2	3
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	9	10	25	37
Female	15	11	12	20
<u>GPA</u> (mean/std. dev.)	3.18 (.50)	3.18 (.48)	3.28 (.57)	3.26 (.44)

\* A section taught by another professor was added to the post-360 survey data collection.

Appendix 1 shows items used for each of the constructs in this study. Unless otherwise noted, all items were 5-point Likert scales anchored “Strongly disagree” / “Strongly Agree.” Table 2 provides descriptive statistics and correlations.

The focal constructs assessed were: knowledge of marketing; quantitative skills required for marketing; and interest in being a marketing major.

### **Analysis**

The design was a 2 (pre/post) \* 2 (experimental course/required marketing course). Multivariate analysis of variance with covariates (MANCOVA) was used to assess whether or not significant differences existed between the pre-and-post course scores on the constructs of interest, as well as whether there were significant differences between the experimental course students and the required marketing course students (control sample).

### **Results/Findings**

Omnibus tests were significant for both the course (Hotelling's  $F = 16.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and time (Hotelling's  $F = 26.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as the course by time interaction (Hotelling's  $F = 3.922$ ,

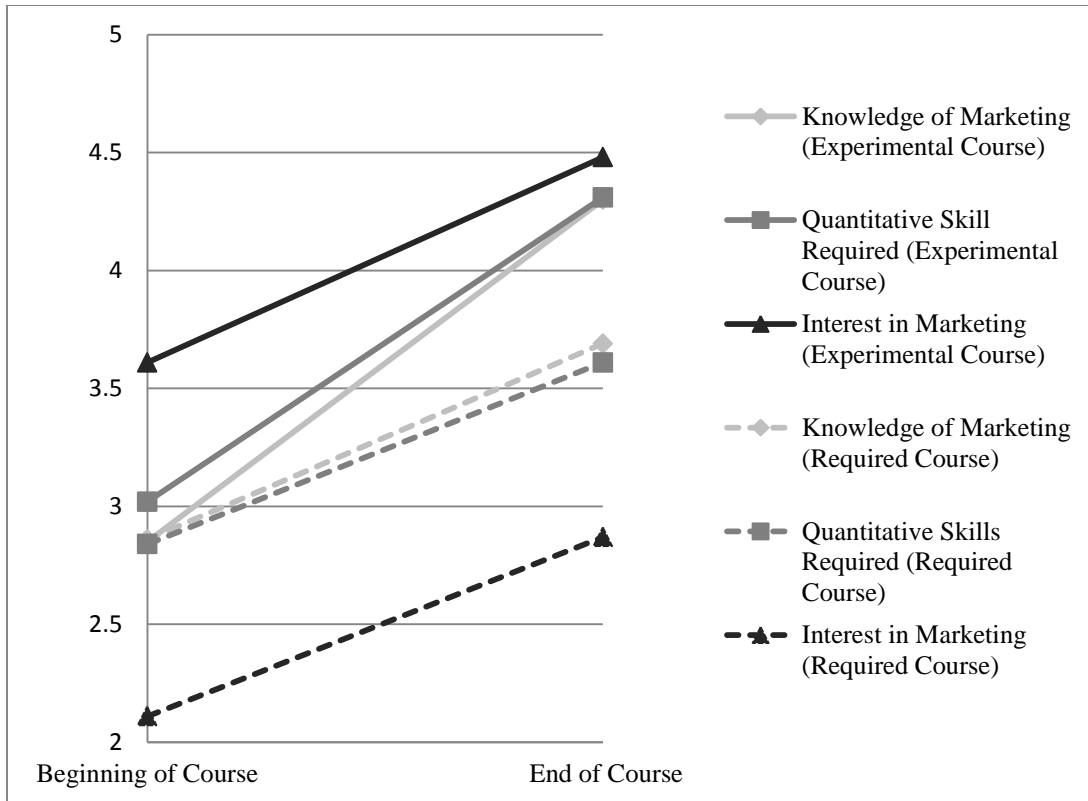
**Table 2****Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics (n=134)**

	Knowledge of Marketing	Quantitative Skills Required	Overall Interest in Marketing	Really Want to Work in Marketing	Marketing Easiest Option	I'm Not Quantitative	I'm More Creative than Quantitative	No Other Majors Sounded Interesting	GPA
Knowledge of Marketing									
Quantitative Skills Required	.837**								
Overall Interest in Marketing	.453**	.498**							
Really Want to Work in the Marketing Field	.377**	.390**	.738**						
Marketing Easiest Option	-.103	-.147	-.036	.019					
Not Quantitative	-.046	-.011	.087	.147	.022				
More Creative than Quantitative	.195	.132	.213*	.312**	-.101	.412**			
No Other Majors Sounded Interesting	.066	.006	.139	.199*	.398**	.172	.104		
GPA	-.060	-.025	-.055	-.016	-.186	-.089	-.142	.011	
Mean***	3.42	3.43	3.02	3.63	2.15	2.57	3.26	1.91	3.20
Standard Deviation	.90	.86	1.38	.98	.84	.99	1.05	1.02	.39

\*\* Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

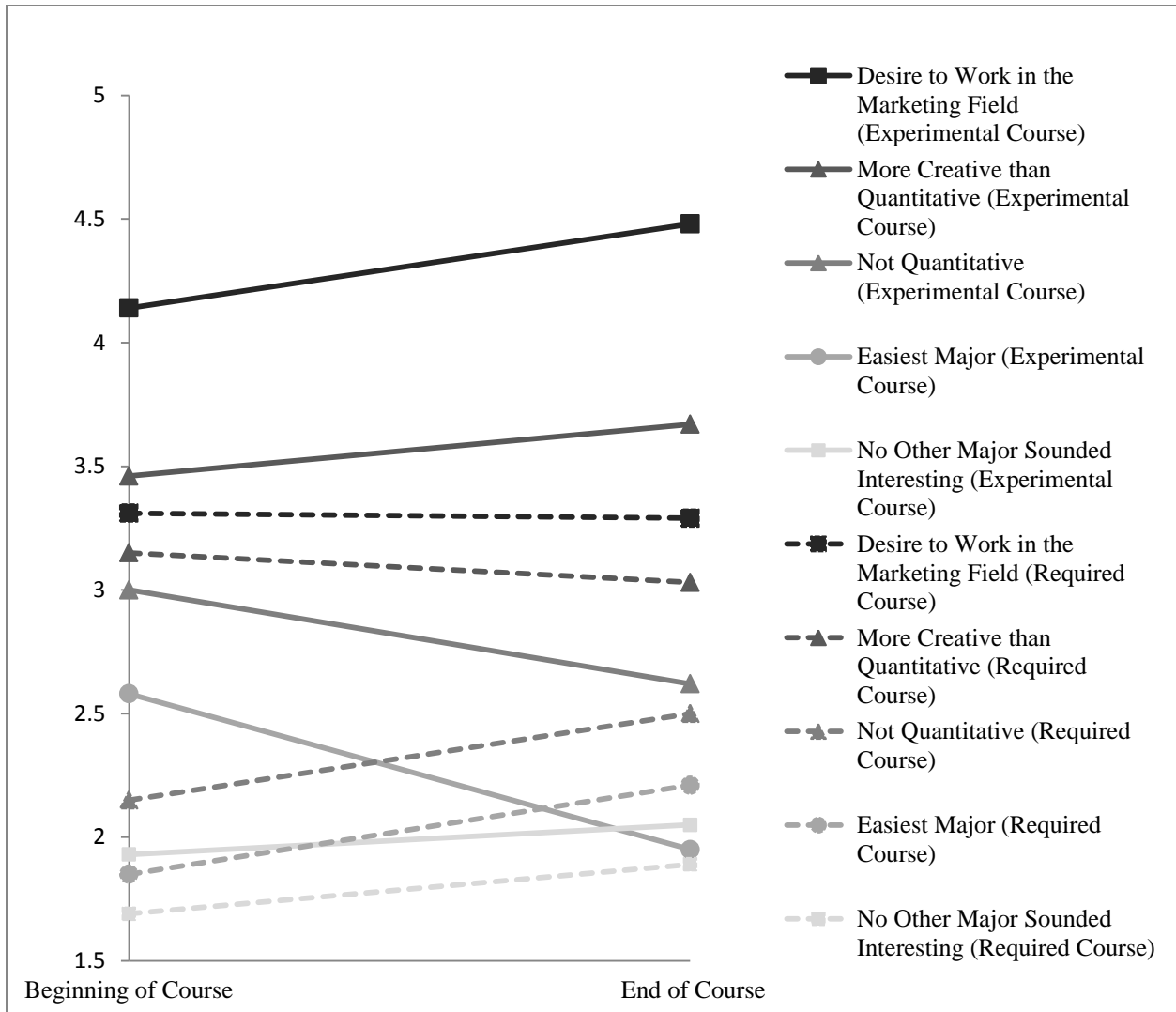
\*\*\* All means on a 5-point scale, except GPA (4.0)



**Figure 1: Results for H1, H2, and H3**

$p < .01$ ). The effect of time (pre/post course assessment) was significant for all three dependent variables (knowledge of marketing, appreciation of quantitative skills required for marketing, and interest in being a marketing major); the effect of course (experimental/required) was significant for two of the variables: interest in marketing and beliefs that marketers needed quantitative skills; and the interaction between course \* time was significant for two of the variables: knowledge of marketing and beliefs that marketers needed quantitative skills. Explained variance (adjusted  $R^2$ ) in these dependent measures was .38 for Knowledge of Marketing, .35 for belief that marketers required Quantitative Skills, and .31 for Interest in Marketing, all significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

Further analyses (paired comparisons of means) were conducted to examine H1, H2, and H3, and these are visually displayed in Figure 1. H1 examined the effects of course and time on students' knowledge of what a career in marketing entails. Although knowledge of marketing



**Figure 2: Results for H4**

increased significantly over the semester for both the experimental course and the required marketing course, the scores in the experimental course were significantly higher than in the required course students ( $x = 4.30$ ,  $s.d. = .43$  and  $x = 3.69$ ,  $s.d. = .76$ , respectively  $p < .01$ ). Hence, H1 is supported.

H2 examined students' beliefs that a career in marketing requires quantitative skills. Students reported significantly greater understanding that quantitative skills are necessary in marketing in after taking the experimental course than after taking the required course ( $x = 4.31$ ,  $s.d. = .43$ ,  $x = 3.61$ ,  $s.d. = .86$ , respectively,  $p < .01$ ) supporting H2.



H3 examined the effects of course and time on student interest in marketing as a major. Student interest in marketing as a major increased significantly over time in both courses (to 4.48 and 2.87 respectively, both  $p < .01$ ), supporting H3.

H4 examined the effects of course and time on the reasons for student interest in marketing. The omnibus tests were significant for the effect of course on reasons for interest in marketing as a major (Hotelling's  $F = 4.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for the interaction between course and time (Hotelling's  $F = 2.97$ ,  $p < .02$ ), but not for time. These results are presented in Figure 2. The variance explained in the dependent variables (adjusted  $R^2$ ) ranged from a high of .35 for genuine desire to work in the marketing field, to .18 for Easiest (both significant at  $p < .01$ ). Explained variance in "I'm not quantitative," "I'm more creative" and "No others interesting" were not significant. Two covariates were significant in explaining students' reasons for interest in marketing: gender and prior work experience. The remaining covariates (GPA, professor, family member in marketing, and prior marketing coursework) were not significant.

Students' genuine desire to work in the marketing field was higher in the experimental course than in the required marketing course ( $x = 4.34$ ,  $s.d. = .68$  and  $x = 3.29$ ,  $s.d. = .83$  respectively,  $p < .00$ ). This finding makes sense in that students self-selected into the experimental course because of their interest in marketing as a career. Simple paired comparisons show that although genuine desire to work in the marketing field did increase over time in both courses, the time difference was significant only in the experimental course.

Students' interest in marketing as a major because they said "I'm not quantitative" exhibited a significant difference between the two courses ( $p < .02$ ) at the pre-test. Students in the experimental course stated a stronger interest in marketing because they did not believe they were quantitative compared to the students in the required course (3.00 versus 2.15,  $p < .02$ ). Interestingly, the direction of the change over the course of the semester was the opposite for the two courses—although not strong enough for a significant interaction effect. As Figure 2 shows, scores on this reason for interest in marketing as a major ("I'm not quantitative") went *down* for students in the experimental course over the semester, while the scores *increased* for students in the required course (time 2 experimental course  $x = 2.62$  compared to required course  $x = 2.51$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Finally, as shown in Figure 2, univariate tests indicated that the significant interaction effect between course \* time was centered on one dependent variable: "marketing is the easiest way to get through college." Paired comparisons showed that student perceptions of Easiest exhibited a significant decrease over time in the experimental course

(pre-course  $x=2.58$ ,  $s.d. = .67$  to post-course  $x=1.95$ ,  $s.d.=.81$ ,  $p<.03$ ) while the perceptions in the required marketing course went up slightly but not significantly (pre-course  $x=1.85$ ,  $s.d.=.80$  to post-course  $x=2.21$ ,  $s.d.=.94$ ,  $p>.10$  NS). Additional tests indicate that the difference between the two groups at the pre-test level was significant, while the difference between the two groups at the post-test level was not significant. This is an important finding in that students in the experimental course changed their perceptions about marketing being the easiest way to get through college: not only did they express a higher genuine desire to work in the marketing field by the end of the experimental course, their motivation because marketing was perceived as easiest also decreased.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This pattern of findings shows that students in the experimental course came to realize that marketing is not as easy as thought, that their reason to pursue marketing was less driven by a motivation that they were not quantitative, and that their desire to work in the marketing field increased; these findings reflect a major goal of adding the course. The findings for the effects of course and time on interest in marketing are important: despite their stronger interest in marketing as a major prior to the course, the experimental course does not have a stronger effect over the semester than the required course. Given that many schools are “turf-oriented,” this finding can mitigate concerns among faculty in other departments that offering a sophomore-level marketing class might somehow detract from or possibly cannibalize the numbers of students signing up for their majors. Further research is necessary to clarify how students’ increased understanding that marketers require quantitative skills fails to decrease their interest in marketing as a major “because they are not quantitative.” Effective methods for preventing or correcting this discrepancy could improve congruence between students’ aptitudes and skill sets requisite for success in marketing. Longitudinal research could ascertain whether this course helps attract a higher caliber of student.

References available upon request

### **Appendix 1: Questionnaire**

Motivation for taking course: I’m a declared marketing major and would like to learn more about what my career options will be.

- I’m a nondeclared major thinking about declaring marketing.
- I’m thinking about changing my major from \_\_\_\_\_ to marketing.

- I wanted to learn more about marketing before my junior year.
- Course sounded interesting.
- Recommended by advisor,
- I wanted to take a course from this professor.

Knowledge of Marketing. 5-point Likert scales (Strongly disagree/strongly agree)

1. I have a solid understanding of what “marketing” means.
2. I know what a career in marketing entails.
3. I know what skills are required for me to be successful in a marketing position.
4. I have a solid understanding of what my options are for jobs in marketing.
5. I understand what other courses and majors will help me gain useful skills to use in a marketing career.

Quantitative Skills for Marketing. 5-point Likert scales (Strongly disagree/strongly agree)

1. Relative to other jobs in business, it is important for marketers to have good quantitative skills.
2. Marketers must have good analytical skills.

Interest in Marketing. What is your interest level in being a marketing major? (Not at all (1) /Somewhat (3) /Extremely (5))

If you circled 3-5 above, please answer why you expressed interest in being a marketing major: (5-point Likert scales Strongly disagree/strongly agree)

Reasons for interest in marketing. 5-point Likert scales (Strongly disagree/strongly agree)

- Marketing sounds interesting.
- I really want to work in the marketing field.
- Getting a degree in marketing seems like the easiest possible way to get through with college.
- I’m not very quantitative.
- I’m more creative than quantitative.
- No other majors sounded interesting.
- Other reason (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Class standing

Declared major

Gender

Current GPA

I have a family member who works in marketing.

I have previous work experience in marketing.

I have previously taken other marketing courses (number of courses).

I'm currently enrolled in other marketing courses (number of courses).

For students who were either concurrently enrolled in the introductory junior-level marketing course or had previously taken the introductory marketing course, who was your professor?

**(Experimental Course/Post-Course Survey Only)**

To what extent did this class (Not at all/Great extent):

- meet your objectives in taking the course;
- address your questions about pursuing a career in marketing

How likely would you be to recommend this course to another student (Very Unlikely/Very Likely)