Identifying Market Segments
in the Evaluation of a Course Assignment

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators are concerned with developing assignments that will facilitate students' acquisition of "critical skills" and also provide direct, visible relevance to students' career goals. Additionally, educators need to address student wants and needs, which are most often communicated through evaluation forms.

This paper addresses both these concerns by first identifying a pedagogical tool which aids both student career planning and development of a critical skill--writing a marketing plan. A segmentation approach is presented for evaluating the effectiveness of this assignment in an introductory marketing class of 90 students. Cluster analysis of scale items on a special evaluation form was used to identify two segments--one for whom the assignment was extremely meaningful, the other whose reaction was considerably less enthusiastic. Segments differed significantly (p < .05) on eight of 15 scale items. The identification of segments and resulting insights would not have been obtainable from a simple review of means and standard deviations of scale responses aggregated for the entire class as is usually completed for student evaluation forms.

For example, the difference in responses of males and females was significant. Not only were males represented at a significantly higher level in the "favorable" segment, but also a separate analysis to compare males with females indicated that males enjoyed writing the plan and found it more useful than females in clarifying goals. Results of demographic analysis based on age and work experience suggests that this assignment may be most helpful to students who have sufficient work experience to relate to the "real world" of business, yet not so much full-time experience that they have no more need for such a plan. Students with no work experience related the assignments much more to future coursework and the school environment; their optimism about transferability of skills was not shared by the more experienced students.

Several implications can be drawn from this study. First, the Self-Marketing Plan can serve as a uniquely useful tool for a sizeable segment of introductory marketing students.

Second, an examination of means of responses to scaled items yields insufficient insight into student evaluation. For example, for the statement, "I would have preferred to write about a product," mean response for the class was 3.73 out of 5.00, suggesting moderate disagreement (1 = "Strongly Agree," 5 = "Strongly Disagree"); mean response for the "favorable" segment was a resounding 4.57 out of 5.00.

The results of this study suggest that, at the undergraduate level, the self-marketing plan be required only when an alternative assignment is also offered. When students are not involved in career decisions, perhaps because they have not yet set goals, the assignment may have little perceived usefulness.

Finally, there are implications for course evaluations. Examining only means on a series of scale items may conceal underlying segments, with implications for educators' career planning and administrators' decisions regarding teaching assignments.