

ALL FOR ONE ... AND ONE FOR ALL: THE VALUE OF A STANDARDIZED INTRODUCTORY MARKETING EXPERIENCE

Matthew L. Meuter, Kenneth J. Chapman, Daniel Toy, Lauren K. Wright, and William McGowan,
California State University, Chico, College of Business, Chico, CA 95929-0051;
(530) 898-4820, kchapman@csuchico.edu

ABSTRACT

There are a variety of advantages to standardizing course content for multiple sections of a class taught by different instructors. From applying the quality enhancement principles laid out by TQM and Six Sigma, to minimizing inefficiencies or omission of content, to enhancing student learning and accommodating the requirements of accrediting bodies such as the AACSB, there is ample justification to proceed with the standardization of curriculum. Our marketing department has developed an efficient and effective way to address the potential for cross-sectional variance in a required introductory marketing course while still allowing instructors to use their own classroom management styles and teaching approaches. This paper describes the process we went through to create and integrate a standard set of concepts for all of our introductory marketing courses.

Each semester there are, on average, 15 sections and 600 students enrolled in the introductory marketing class. These classes are typically taught by six different instructors. This allows for wide variation in the concepts that instructors choose to cover in their classes. In an effort to standardize our students' learning experiences in the introductory marketing class, all faculty and part-time instructors began discussions in spring 2004 to identify a set of fundamental marketing concepts that are central to understanding marketing and to which all students must be exposed.

From this discussion, twelve key concepts known collectively as the "marketing models" were identified and agreed upon by our department. In addition to a verbal description, a one page visual graphic was created for each concept. In fall 2004 the concepts were introduced into all introductory marketing sections as required reading and provided electronically to all students. In addition, instructors teaching other marketing courses were encouraged to make connections between the marketing models and their course content.

The standardization exercise and the implementation of a uniform set of fundamental marketing

concepts have provided a number of important benefits. First, we ensure that there is uniform coverage of all critical concepts across all sections of the introductory marketing course. It no longer matters which instructor teaches which student, because we can be certain that all students have been exposed to the same basic marketing concepts. Second, the key concepts were selected partly for their ability to be fundamental building blocks for future marketing courses in the curriculum. Exposure to these concepts makes students better prepared for their other marketing classes. Third, the focus on a relatively small set of critical marketing concepts can potentially lead to greater retention of these key concepts by students. We clearly signal to students that these are 12 critically important building blocks for other marketing courses and their future marketing careers.

Fourth, the standardized approach creates more opportunities to highlight connections between marketing courses. By referring to the models, faculty can more easily remind students how topics covered in a marketing research class might relate to a consumer behavior theory or a discussion in international marketing. Fifth, a standardized set of concepts creates a variety of opportunities for the evaluation and assessment of students. Not only can assessments be made of students across sections, but the standardization provides some guidance to determine levels of retention and learning as students near the end of their marketing program. Sixth, the standardization process used for the introductory marketing class can be utilized in any situation where there are multiple sections taught by more than one instructor. Finally, all faculty and part-time instructors met regularly throughout the standardization process to identify key concepts and to share valuable information regarding teaching tips, examples, cases, or classroom management strategies that were particularly effective. This increased dialogue about effective classroom teaching has been extremely valuable.