

INTEGRATING ADVERTISING RESEARCH INTO ADVERTISING UNITS

Gayle Kerr, School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, Queensland University of Technology,
Brisbane, Q 4001 Australia; (+61 7) 3864 1243, gf.kerr@qut.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This paper questions whether the teaching of research should be more practical and more strongly linked to the discipline it services. In the case of advertising education, is there a better way to teach research by integrating it into the students' first experiences with the areas of advertising practice?

To answer this question, this paper reports on the progress of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, where research is taught as part of advertising content. The structure of the advertising units and the relationship between the integrated material and the learning and assessment outcomes is explored. The integrated content is compared with the material in a stand-alone research unit that students otherwise would have taken in their advertising program in Australia. In addition, the learning outcomes are compared with Burge's Model of Student Skill Development. A research agenda is established to track the research proficiency of students undertaking the program of integrated advertising research.

Although the concept of integrating content such as communication or ethics across the curriculum is not new, and is even supported by AACSB guidelines, it has not been previously applied to advertising. Integrating research into advertising curriculum demonstrates the value of research, how it is applied in advertising decision-making and offers many real-world applications for assessment. In addition, it allows the teaching of research to draw from a variety of learning strategies that align with the student skills development throughout university.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Most advertising programs, globally, include a research unit. This unit is often common to all students studying in the business, arts or journalism facilities and does not consider the special needs of advertising research. It is not connected with the advertising process or even advertising management decisions. It teaches the theory and mechanics of research, but not the application.

This division between the need for research and its application to advertising practice appears to carry over into the workplace. Radford and Goldstein

(2002) suggest, "While research is acknowledged by practitioners, they have not found a way to integrate the value of research methods into the day-to-day practice of corporate communications."

This paper questions whether the teaching of research should have a more practical orientation and be more strongly linked to the discipline it services. Is there a better way to teach research by integrating it into the students' first experiences with the areas of advertising practice?

To answer this question, this paper examines how value may be added to the teaching of research by integrating it in advertising content. Although the concept of integrating content such as communication or ethics across the curriculum is not new, and is even supported by AACSB guidelines, it has not been previously applied to advertising research. Perhaps research is an ideal subject for integration as advertising research is more specialized than marketing research and has important and unique applications in all areas of the advertising business.

While theme-based units that adopt a multi-disciplinary approach have replaced stand-alone units in some US universities, integration is less practiced in Australia. Indeed, the advertising program is the School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations at the Queensland University of Technology is the only one in Australia to integrate research into advertising curriculum. This paper reports on its progress by exploring the structure of the advertising units and the relationship between the integrated material and the learning and assessment outcomes. It compares the integrated content with the material in a stand-alone research unit that students otherwise would have taken in their advertising program in Australia. A research agenda is established to track the research proficiency of students undertaking the program of integrated advertising research.

STAKEHOLDER'S NEEDS AND THE TEACHING OF RESEARCH

Marketing research courses have received criticism for their inability to adapt to changes in the educational context and in the marketplace (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp and Mayo 2000, Benbunan-Fich, Lozada, Pirog, Priluck and Wisenblit 2001, McCorkle, Alexander and Reardon 2001, Beall and Hussain

2003). Technology has reshaped the way we do marketing and interact with our consumers. Students have also changed, with traditional school leavers no longer the main entrant into university programs.

Beall and Hussain (2003, p. 61) note, "The changes that have swept the academic and technological worlds towards the close of the last millennium imply that educators need to tailor their courses in ways that are directly relevant to real business world situation."

This paper assesses the needs of both these stakeholder groups – students and employers – in

relation to advertising research. To first consider what students need from an advertising research unit, it is important to understand how students learn. McMorland (1990 in Burge 1996) suggests that students undertake six stages of skills development, from aspirant to retirement. The first three, aspirant, student and novice, relate to career formation, while the last three span career fulfilment. Burge relates this to the King Wood and Mines Learning Hierarchy to develop the skills based student development model, presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1
THE SKILLS BASED STUDENT DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

	Vocational skills	Generic skills	Professional Identity	Learning
Stage 3/ Year 3	Business meetings, briefings, presentations. Analysing client needs. Organizational politics and representing an organisation. Creation of databases and development of recommendations for client use. Full literacy in word, presentation and statistical programs.	Creativity. Putting ideas in practice. Knowing what you don't know. Self-evaluation. Critical thinking. Prioritising projects. Tying theory to real work problems. Discovery by self. Written and oral presentations to clients and industry. Learning to listen to verbal briefs. Leadership. Negotiation. Resolution of conflict. Motivate others.	Shift from idealism to realism. Questioning of other's expertise. Discriminate between useful and redundant knowledge. Belief in theory base even when value is not easily recognized in real life context.	Knowledge gained through assessment of conceptual soundness of claims. Problems may be ill-structured. Interpretations must be evaluated using conceptual soundness, degree of fit with data and parsimony.
Stage 2/ Year 2	Managing project activities under supervision. Cooperating with group members in a project and presenting to peers. Use of specific industry software and databases.	Prioritising tasks. Peer evaluation. Learning from experience. Directed discovery. Written and oral communication. Teamwork. Cooperation. Allocation of tasks.	Non questioning of specialists. Understanding that things can go wrong. Initial superficial evaluation of members of industry.	Knowledge gained from evaluating evidence. Judgements may involve personal evaluation of data. Certain concepts aid decision makers in their evaluation.
Stage 1/Year 1	Personal Time Management. Communication competency. Computer competency.	Self-organisation. Learning to learn. Basics of report writing and business communication.	Decision on career path.	Knowledge gained through observation and through authority figure. Such knowledge is assumed to be correct and certain.

The implications of this for our advertising research unit is that students develop different skills and use different learning styles through their three years at university. A student entering first year university has a very different skill set to the one about to graduate and analyses information and learns in a different way.

Often the dilemma with a stand-alone unit is where to place it in the university program in order to maximize the benefit. Introduce it too early and students' thinking and evaluation skills may not be sufficiently developed. Introduce it too late and the research needs of the earlier units in the program will not be supported and they will have to include a component of research anyway. An integrated unit, however, can match the research content with the style of learning, beginning with basic secondary research skills before advancing to more analytical thinking and problem solving.

Another important stakeholder group to consider is employers. A study of employer expectations of QUT research graduates in the field of business identified five core capabilities of graduates as communication skills, breadth of knowledge across the discipline, analytical thinking, quality of research skills and practical application of theory. (Bull and Waldersee 1999). In another study (Kerr and Moran 2000), employers of advertising graduates listed research as an important generic skill they looked for in a graduate. This research ability involved analytical thinking, problem solving, interpreting skills and thinking across disciplinary paradigms.

Stern and Tseng (2002) compared the priorities of academics and practitioners on market research education. They found that practitioners felt that case study, topical exercises and simulated marketing research projects were the most necessary methods, while academics nominated topical exercises, lectures and real marketing research exercises. The five topics that academics would like to see included in a research course are questionnaire design, data analysis and interpretation for descriptive methods, the research process, sampling and quantitative data collection methods. The practitioners favoured a more applied approach nominating communicating and reporting research, research ethics, the research process, quantitative data collection methods and information usage.

Beall and Hussain (2003) supported this by recommending a real-world, client-based research project as the most effective technique to teach market research. "For students to better understand the business environment, everything that is said

inside a classroom or use has to be related to the business" (Beall and Hussain 2003). The research unit should be practical or applied. Perhaps even integrated.

THE CASE FOR INTEGRATION

Integration offers many potential advantages. The first and perhaps the strongest point in favour of integration is that research can be applied to the specific advertising content. For example, concept testing can be examined as part of the advertising copywriting course.

Secondly, the research content can introduce the unique aspects of advertising research that are not addressed in a typical marketing research unit. Areas such as media class, vehicles and audience research can be examined in detail and in context in a media planning unit. The other benefit is that integration removes the need for a stand alone unit and allows an educator to include more advertising subjects in the major.

One potential disadvantage of integration is the possible inconsistencies in research instruction and expertise across the different units in the advertising program. Faculty may not feel qualified to teach or assess research and resent surrendering advertising content to research. In addition, the distribution of the research content across the different units may be unclear. If students do not take these units in the correct order, then they will miss the sequential building of the research skills (Young and Murphy 2003).

The alternative, the stand-alone marketing research unit, allows a singular focus on research. Often taught by research specialists, the research focus does not compete for class time against advertising content (Young and Murphy 2003).

Weighed against this is the danger that students may treat the research unit, with its often unpopular statistical orientation, as a one-off hurdle in their advertising education. They may not see how it links with the other advertising units and contributes to the advertising process. In addition, faculty may hold the stand-alone unit solely responsible for the instruction of research and make no attempt to apply research skills in their unit.

The dilemma, to integrate or stand alone, is similar to that faced by marketing educators trying to satisfy employer needs and AACSB requirements and include communication or technology into the marketing program. As Young and Murphy (2003,

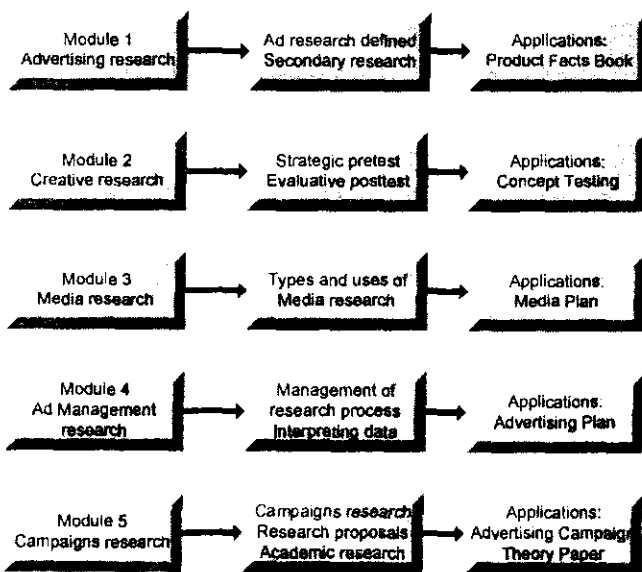
p.57) note, "How can the marketing curriculum effectively and efficiently provide these skills without the reduction of content knowledge?". The answer in many cases is to integrate. This is supported by AACSB International (2002) standards which state, "curriculum goals may be course specific, or they may be spread throughout the curriculum".

THE PROCESS

The process of embedding research into the advertising curriculum at QUT began with an examination of the current practice. A stand alone, school-based unit in research serviced the three disciplinary areas of marketing, public relations and advertising. An audit was undertaken on this unit to reveal the content, assessment and teaching and learning methods. This identified a number of shortfalls in the unit specifically related to advertising research. An effort was made to then connect research to the needs of advertising through the content studied and the types of assessment practiced.

Figure 1 introduces the five advertising units in the advertising major at QUT. It shows the kinds of research that is addressed in each unit and also the applications of this research in terms of assessable items.

**FIGURE 1
INTEGRATING ADVERTISING RESEARCH
INTO ADVERTISING CURRICULUM: STRUCTURE,
CONTENT AND APPLICATION**



Once the structure and content of the new embedded research unit had been developed, it was compared with the existing school based research unit from which it had been developed.

Apart from their structure, the two units differ in content and assessment. The integrated research unit has a singular focus on advertising research and covers many areas of advertising research not found in the marketing research unit. In addition, the emphasis in the stand-alone unit is on marketing research, especially surveys, questionnaire design and statistics. While surveys are presented as an important method of advertising research, they are not given particular prominence across the thirteen weeks of content. In addition, statistics are taught in the stand-alone unit as an important skill to be mastered. In the advertising unit, they are introduced and explained, but students are not required to be proficient with a statistical package such as SPSS. The emphasis is on making advertising decisions based on an understanding and interpretation of statistics.

The other major point of difference is in terms of assessment. The assessment in the stand-alone unit is through exams and tutorial exercises. While this tests students' knowledge of research, it does not test application. In the embedded unit, the assessment tasks are applied to the content area of the unit. For example, in the media unit, students are required to undertake media research to develop a media plan. In the advertising management unit, they draw on their secondary and primary research skills to formulate an advertising plan. They also visit and critically analyse advertising and research sites as part of their online tutorials.

**TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENT IN STAND-
ALONE UNIT AND EMBEDDED UNIT**

Stand alone unit	Embedded unit
Mid semester exam 40%	Product Facts Book demonstrating secondary research
Tutorial exercises 20%	Creative concept testing as part of copywriting campaign
Final exam 40%	Media research in media plan
	Advertising Plan
	Internet research online tutorial exercises
	Campaigns research incorporating problem identification, target market identification, concept development and testing, media research and campaign evaluation
	Theory Paper

EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRATED RESEARCH UNIT

As the integrated unit was only phased in during 2002 and 2003, it is too early to evaluate its impact on the research skills of undergraduate advertising majors. However a number of evaluative measures are in place.

1. Informal evaluation – feedback from students taking the units.
2. Evaluation of research skills in capstone advertising unit.
3. Evaluation against theoretical models

The informal feedback confirms the theory expressed earlier in the literature that students see a stand-alone unit as a one-off hardship that has to be endured as part of their advertising program. Their preference is to study research as it is applied in the different areas of advertising, as in the integrated unit. They like the practical orientation of the research and can see its usefulness in the advertising decision-making process. Another informal observation is the view of the writer that the quality of the research skills has already improved in final year advertising majors.

In terms of more formal evaluation, following discussion with advertising lecturers in the program, it was felt that the most effective way to evaluate the program was to measure its cumulative effect. This is best done in the capstone advertising unit, advertising campaigns, where students incorporate all areas of research studied, from secondary research to problem identification to target market identification to concept testing, media research and campaign evaluation. By the time they reach this unit, they have undertaken all research components. If their understanding of research is strong, it should be exemplified by good research in this unit.

Historically, the research has been the weakest part of the campaigns unit, with research findings often generalised from a focus group or two. A record of the research skills of advertising students over the past decade is contained in a library of advertising campaigns students project documents. These can be evaluated against the same project completed by students who have learned research through the integrated unit. However, these students will not complete their advertising program until the end of 2004.

Another way to evaluate the integrated unit is to compare the learning outcomes with Burge's Model of Student Skill Development presented earlier.

The content of the integrated unit develops with the skill level of the student. In the first year advertising unit, the student is introduced to the concept of marketing research, advertising research and secondary research skills are developed. This is in line with Burge's model, which suggests that learning is gained through observation and authority figures.

**TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF THE TEACHING OF
ADVERTISING RESEARCH AND BURGE'S MODEL**

Dimensions of vocational, generic skills, professional identity and learning	Embedded Research Unit	Stand Alone Unit
Stage 1 – Self organisation, time management, communication competence. Knowledge gained thru observation and authority figures.	Introduction to marketing research and advertising research. Secondary research skills	
Stage 2 – Teamwork, project work, prioritising tasks. Knowledge gained from evaluating evidence.	Media class, vehicle and audience research. Creative testing, strategic copy research, concept testing, copy evaluation.	Marketing research, advertising research, research process, research methods, data analysis, interpretation, reporting.
Stage 3 – Presentations, critical thinking. Tying theory to real work problems. Shift from idealism to realism. Knowledge gained through assessment of conceptual soundness of claims.	Advertising management research – using research to make advertising decisions, case analysis. Advertising campaigns research - research design, research proposals, academic research, ethics.	

By the second year at university, knowledge is gained from evaluation. Students learn research by evaluating media research data or by testing alternative creative concepts. By third year, students are demonstrating higher level thinking skills and applying theory to real world problems. In the integrated unit, students use the case approach to solve real advertising problems. They work in teams to plan, conduct and interpret advertising research across every aspects of the campaign process from problem identification to campaign evaluation.

Students use different types of research at different stages in their university program. Beginning with basic secondary research, students develop more evaluative and analytical skills in research through to higher-level secondary research and the application of research to advertising problems. This supports Burge's model, as well as the case for integrating the research unit in the advertising content.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents an alternative to the stand-alone marketing research unit taught in advertising courses. Integrating research into advertising curriculum demonstrates the value of research, how it is applied in advertising decision-making and offers many real-world applications for assessment. In addition, it allows the teaching of research to draw from a variety of learning strategies that align with the student skills development throughout university. While initial evaluation is positive, it is too early to determine whether integrating research will improve the research skills of undergraduate advertising students.

REFERENCES

- Beall, R. and M. Hussain. 2003. The Best Way to Teach Market Research: A Challenge for Educators in the New Millennium, 2003 Marketing Educators' Association Conference Proceedings, Arizona.
- Benbunan-Fich, R., Lozada, H., Pirog, S., Priluck, R. and J. Wisenblit. 2001. Integrating Information Technology into the Marketing Curriculum: A Pragmatic Paradigm. *Journal of Marketing Education* 23 (1).
- Bobbitt, M., Inks, S., Kemp, K. and D. Mayo. 2000. Integrating Marketing Courses to Enhance Team-Based Experiential Learning. *Journal of Marketing Education* 22 (1).
- Bull, J. and R. Waldersee. 1999. Employer Expectations of QUT Research Graduates in the field of Business. Queensland University of Technology Report, Australia.
- Burge, A. 1996. A Skills Development Model for Marketing and Advertising Programmes. 1996 Western Marketing Educators' Association Conference Proceedings, California.
- Kerr, G. and C. Moran. 2000. Employer Expectations of Advertising Graduates. 2000 International Advertising Association Conference Proceedings, Miami.
- McCorkle, D., Alexander, J. and J. Reardon. 2002. Integrating Business Technology and Marketing Education: Enhancing the Diffusion Process through Technology Champions. *Journal of Marketing Education* 23 (1).
- Radford, G. and S. Goldstein. 2002. The role of research methods in corporate communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 7 (4).
- Stern, B. and D. Tseng. 2002. Do Academics and Practitioners Agree on What and How to Teach the Undergraduate Marketing Research Course? *Journal of Marketing Education* 24 (3).
- Young, M. and W. Murphy. 2003. Integrating Communications Skills into the Marketing Curriculum: A Case Study. *Journal of Marketing Education* 25 (1).