

TEACHING THE MBA MARKETING RESEARCH CLASS ONLINE

Gopala "GG" Ganesh, University of North Texas, 1167 Union Circle #236, Denton TX 76203;
(940) 565-3129, ganesh@unt.edu

ABSTRACT

This MEA 2007 special session describes, in great detail, the frustrations, exhilarations and everything in between of developing and teaching an online Marketing Research class for MBA students, for the first time, during Fall 2006.

The online class is built on a series of html PowerPoint presentations. The author adopted a very well-regarded and established MBA-level Marketing Research textbook. This came with a series of PowerPoint presentations. These were modified and enhanced using the author's own examples and experiences from nearly 20 years of teaching Marketing Research to undergraduate and graduate students as well as consulting activities. Finally, the topics were combined into 14 modules and placed on the WebCT platform.

The online class features several unique aspects. The most prominent of these is the use of Audio+Video segments, produced using Camtasia and the Samson USB mic. These A+Vs walk through topics traditionally regarded as "more difficult", by students from an understanding perspective and by faculty from a teaching perspective. Currently, the featured topics include: basic data analysis (frequencies, means, breakdown of means, cross tabs, Pearson correlation and partial correlation), simple and multiple regression (including step-wise), analysis of variance, discriminant analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis, multi-dimensional scaling and conjoint analysis. In every instance, datasets that either came with the book or were put together by the author are actually analyzed from scratch and explained via audio, while the students watch what exactly happens on the computer screen, in digital quality. The A+V segments come with DVD-like controls, allowing replay, rewind, fast forward etc.

Another set of A+Vs deal with a different kind of problem solving, such as those involved in calculating sample sizes and confidence intervals. For this, the Wacom writing tablet served as an "online overhead projector." The output was combined with electronic (pdf) versions of standard statistical tables (that came with the book) to create the Camtasia A+V lessons.

A third series of A+Vs were recorded with the help of former colleagues and on-campus experts to explain key concepts in designing and implementing focus groups and illustrating the use of the electronic library (using the examples of ABI-Inform and Lexis-Nexis).

As part of the course, the students designed and implemented a fairly sophisticated survey resulting in a dataset suitable for multivariate data analysis. For this, they made use of the site-licensed Web Surveyor software. Each team of 3-4 students shared a WS account, along with the author as ex-officio member. Private online chat rooms and discussion areas were made available to each of the 4 teams and some of them made excellent use of these resources.

Student performance was graded through five Graded Assignments and two exams. The graded assignments were: (GA1) A problem involving decision making under uncertainty and decision trees. Students solve a author-designed Excel workbook that calculates the Value of Perfect and Imperfect Information. They are also required to draw and then trim decision trees in both situations. (GA2) An assignment that illustrates the concepts behind sample size and confidence interval, for means and proportions, in a context, where N , the population size is 8 and n , the sample size is first 2, then 3. (GA3) Design and then implement a Web Surveyor survey for online data collection after some exploratory research (online secondary sources and web-sites) for developing the list of information objectives for the survey. These were shared among the teams, refined with the help of the author and then used to develop the online survey. The author had announced that the "best" effort would be selected and implemented for the entire class. As it turned out, two teams developed very good instruments whose features were combined and implemented online. The author deliberately avoided a lot of tweaking, fixing only problems seen as debilitating errors, keeping the students in the loop regarding the changes. The entire class took the online survey as "participants" several times: first, with their own submissions, then a draft version of the "class effort" and then the "final, revised version". These were used to spot and remove bugs, resulting

in a fine tuned survey instrument. (GA4) Basic data analysis and charting of the GA3 survey data, involving frequencies, means, correlations and cross-tabs. (GA5) Multivariate Data Analysis of a comprehensive case that came with the book, focusing on regression, anova, discriminant, factor and cluster analyses. In future semesters, the author plans to use various own datasets that resulted from several past projects. By the way, GA1, GA2 and GA5 are presently implemented as individual assignments, while GA3 and GA4 are group assignments.

It is the author's firm belief that completely fool-proof mechanisms do not yet exist for online examinations. Therefore, students are required to come to campus for the mid-term and final examinations. Likewise, the author has previously experienced and therefore avoids email-attached assignments. Students are required to submit hard copies for all graded work, either through a physical locked drop box outside the author's office OR via US mail/alternative courier

services. The graded assignments are mailed back to them in the same manner. This has worked well thus far, perhaps since the class size is small.

The author implemented a detailed end-of-the-semester custom online survey about the class experience, to supplement the standard college evaluation. In general, student feedback on both instruments has been quite positive.

The sometimes very frustrating experience of developing the course was more than offset by the exhilarating and exciting experience of actually teaching it. At MEA 2007, the author plans to make a very detailed presentation, where colleagues can "see" all aspects of the online class, ask questions and obtain clarifications. Assuming access to the Internet in the conference room, they can even login and explore the class.