INTEGRATING SKILL DEVELOPMENT INTO THE GRADUATE MARKETING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Authors of the Porter-McKibbin report and many other writers encourage the integration of skills into business curricula. Examples of such skills are team-work, written and oral communications and influencing. The challenge to Marketing educators is how to integrate skill-development without sacrificing content. This paper describes an effort in this direction based on student-centered learning. The instructor sets goals, provides guidance and directs, while students do a great deal of work in the classroom and outside the classroom. Before-and-after surveys show significant increases in student self-satisfaction with respect to abilities and skills that students consider important.

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the Porter-McKibbin (1988) report, educators have been encouraged to integrate skill development into business school courses. Recent examples in the Marketing discipline are articles by Brown (1993), Shipp (1993), Cunningham (1995) and Lamb (1995). Frequently recommended skills are: team-work, written and oral communications and influencing. This paper reports efforts to integrate such skills into the core Managerial Marketing course in the Pace University MBA program.

BASIC CONCEPT OF THE MANAGERIAL MARKETING COURSE AT "GENERAL"

Pace University's MBA program enrolls 2500 students, 40% full-time and 60% part-time. A Spring 1988 survey of graduating MBA students disclosed dissatisfaction with the lack of skill-development in the MBA program. Similar studies in the Summer and Fall of 1988 confirmed these findings.

Since 1988, course materials have been prepared to help students develop skills while they learn subject matter. These materials have been used in several sections of the core Managerial Marketing course. The skill-integrating tools used include: a creativity-enhancing approach to case analysis; teamwork in preparing and presenting answers to questions and field experiences in influencing and networking.

In the Managerial Marketing course, class size ranges between 15 and 25 students. The class meets once a week for 14 weeks, with each meeting running 150 minutes. In the class sections where skill-integrating teaching methods are used, the instructor sets objectives, gives students written and verbal guidance and directs them to act on their own, in class and in the outside world and then to report on their experiences, in writing and orally.

THE FIRST CLASS MEETING - INTRODUCTION

The first meeting is dedicated to elucidating course structure and requirements. The instructor leads a discussion of various ways of learning marketing, such as: listening to lectures, watching videotapes, reading the text, analyzing case studies and conducting field experiences, such as influencing and networking. Following this discussion, the instructor explains the processes to be followed in analyzing case studies and in conducting the field experiences in influencing and networking.

THE SECOND MEETING - CASE STUDY AND QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The first half of the second class meeting is dedicated to analysis of the assigned case in the Kotler & Armstrong (1994b) text. The first case of the term in the Fall 1995 rendition of the course was *MasterCard*. The other cases used in the Fall 1995 semester were text cases: *Quaker Oats, Smith's Foods, Steel Products, New Balance* and *Nestlé*. These cases were selected because they provide an interesting and useful spectrum of marketing situations.

The benefit of analyzing and discussing cases is that it helps students to obtain an understanding of what is involved in managing a marketing activity and awareness of some of the traps that await the unwary. They also learn how to apply a creative, yet systematic approach to analyzing cases and to making decisions in the outside world.

Students are required to prepare a written brief analysis of one case chosen from the list of six assigned cases and a full analysis of one other case, also also chosen from that list. Case write-ups are due on or before the date when they are discussed in class. Each case is discussed for approximately 1.25 hours. The method used for analyzing and discussing the cases is summarized below:

List and arrange hierarchically, as suggested by Kotler (1994a), the objectives of the company in order to identify the Top Rank Objective (TRO). Then, discover the Strengths, Weaknesses, Auspicious Conditions and Threats (SWATs) of the company with respect to the TRO.

Decide whether the TRO is attainable, in view of the SWATs. If it is, continue. If it is not, select a different TRO and repeat the SWATs discovery, and *then* continue.

Create at least 10 possible strategies based on the SWATs, by answering these questions many times: "How can the company: Use its Strengths? Stop its Weaknesses? Exploit its Auspicious Conditions? Defend against its Threats?"

Develop action programs for implementing the most attractive strategies, covering: benefits to the company from this program, actions required, responsible person(s), location(s), resources required, control system and contingency plans.

Evaluate the action programs and select for implementation the programs that appear to be the most effective in achieving the Top Rank Objective.

The second half of the first meeting is dedicated to the Question and Answer activity, which helps students to learn Marketing concepts and to develop team work and presentation skills. The steps presented below are especially effective if a substantial portion (15%) of the semester grade is based on "class contribution."

The instructor prepares a list of subject-relevant questions, preferably of a thought-provoking, action-directed nature. The most convenient source of questions are the end-of-chapter questions presented in the text book. If this is the source to be used, it pays to select a book that has excellent questions. Kotler and Armstrong's (1994b) Principles of Marketing and Berkowitz, Kerin, Harley and Rudelius' (1994), Marketing are examples of such texts.

In class, students are assigned to groups of four or five persons. The instructor assigns one question to each group. Groups are allowed about 15 minutes to develop answers to their questions and to arrange their presentation roles. They are permitted to refer to the text and to any other materials. The instructor takes a seat at the side of the room and calls on groups to present their questions and answers. Oth-

er members of the class are encouraged to comment after each team's presentation. The instructor participates by helping students when they seem to require help and by emphasizing particularly important points. This process is repeated at five additional class meetings. To maximize students' ability to work with different people, the instructor brings randomized lists of students' names and assigns teams according to these lists. (Spreadsheet programs can be used to randomize lists of names.)

THE THIRD CLASS MEETING - NETWORKING PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT

At the third meeting, students bring in and present their progress reports on the "Networking Experience." *Networking* is defined as exchanging information informally and establishing personal connections. Students network mainly by conversing one-on-one in many different settings: on the telephone, in hallways, in company lunchrooms, at professional conferences, trade shows, classrooms, lounges, elevators, airplanes, trains and hotel lobbies. Some networking is planned and some just happens.

Students find *career development* networking especially useful. Therefore, the following discussion of networking focuses on career development. Many of the techniques presented may also be applied to other networking objectives as well.

The instructor prepares students for the networking experience by giving them a brief presentation at the first meeting, directing their attention to a detailed discussion in the workbook, answering their questions and outlining the two written assignments: progress report and final report. For the progress report, students are required to bring in a 2 to 3 page paper covering these topics:

1. Student's objectives and SWATs (Strengths, Weaknesses, Auspicious Conditions and Threats).
2. Evaluations of the objectives and SWATs by friends and relatives.
3. Plan for the remainder of the networking experience, including a timetable.

Several activities that students have found especially useful are described below.

INTERVIEWING ALUMNI

Alumni of the school are valuable networking contacts, especially alumni who work in fields that interest

the individual student and who have achieved significant career success. Some topics to be covered include: **Their job:** title, description of a typical day (activities and percent time in each), reports to _____, flexibility in work, best and worst parts of the job. **Advancement path**: How did they get to their present position? What is the next step? **Experience and education** appropriate for their job. **Recommendations** to the student: whom to see for information and/or opportunities?

CONDUCTING "INFORMATION INTERVIEWS"

Another information source and contact-building possibility is the "Information Interview." The student is advised to select companies that offer interesting opportunities and to attempt to schedule information interviews. The objective would be to interview people employed in higher level positions that the student might aspire to occupy in the future. The structure of the information interview would be similar to the outline presented above for the alumni interviews.

PARTICIPATING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Professional organizations may provide good opportunities for networking. Students are advised to network to identify suitable organizations by asking friends, associates, bosses and teachers to suggest organizations that might provide networking opportunities. Networking at meetings consists of circulating, meeting people and exchanging information about interests and activities and exchanging business cards. Usually, the networking period is followed by lunch where more networking may be possible.

Students are advised to review the experience after the meeting. Did they meet people who share their interests and goals, have information that is of value to them, have the power and money to offer them desirable jobs or consulting work? If the answers are favorable, they are advised to join the organization and go to more meetings. If they keep attending meetings, they will make friends in their professional field and learn about many opportunities.

NETWORKING WITHIN THEIR OWN COMPANY

Students are also advised to network discreetly within their own organization, if they are employed. For example, they may network with their own boss to discuss his (her) objectives and theirs. Also, they are advised to ask about their career prospects, as perceived by the boss and for suggestions about what

they should to improve their chances for pay increments, promotions and career advancing transfers. They are also advised to meet other people in their company at higher levels by making appointments with managers of other departments to visit and find out about the work they do. While speaking with these managers they should ask the about actual or possible openings.

THE FOURTH CLASS MEETING - CASE STUDY AND Q & A

The fourth, sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth meetings are structurally similar to the second meeting: case discussion and Q&A session. At the fifth meeting, students report on the Influencing experience they had conducted.

THE SEVENTH CLASS MEETING - MID-TERM EXAMINATION

The Mid-Term exam consists of essay questions selected from the text-book and a brief analysis of a selected text-book case. Students are advised to prepare for the exam by preparing thoughtful answers to all the questions listed on the syllabus (see Exhibit 1) for the first three Q&A sessions. The final exam, which is given at the eleventh meeting is similar in structure, but is based on the questions listed for the last three Q&A sessions and requires a full analysis of a selected text-book case study.

THE 12TH CLASS MEETING - NETWORKING EXPERIENCE FINAL REPORT

Students follow this outline for the Final Report of the networking experience: objectives of the networking experience, what was done to achieve these objectives, what results were obtained, the three most important things learned from this experience, plans for future networking, suggestions for increasing the usefulness of the networking experience.

In the author's experience, virtually all students recognize the value of being effective networkers. Furthermore, they recognize that networking comprises activities that are essentially of a Marketing nature, as noted above. They have applied the methodology described above to a variety of situations, many of them job related. Examples include: improving their standing with their own employers, seeking a new job, gaining information about choice of educational goals and strategies and all of the other goals listed at the

beginning of this section. Even students with previous networking experience have expressed appreciation for the great variety of activities encompassed in this networking experience.

From the instructor's point of view, the most beneficial outcome is that students practice Marketing in addition to learning about Marketing. It seems reasonable to expect that students who repeat the networking experience several times will internalize the strategic Marketing concepts of defining objectives, evaluating SWATs, specifying information needs, gathering relevant information and conducting a marketing campaign to achieve their objectives.

QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

The Pace Business School conducts course and instructor evaluations routinely. Evaluations for classes that had integrated skill-development into the course work were superior to evaluations received by other instructors. While this was gratifying, it was considered to be inconclusive because, as reported by Clayson and Haley (1990) and Ekrich (1990), student evaluations of teachers and courses are not always as meaningful as they appear to be. The Clayson and Haley paper revealed that teacher personality has the highest effect on evaluation and that rigor of the course is correlated inversely with evaluation. Ekrich found that "ability to motivate me" was the principal factor in student evaluations, with "uses pertinent examples I can relate to" second. Ekrich also reported that teachers who grade strictly run a risk of receiving poor evaluations. It was concluded at Pace that these evaluations did not prove that integrating skills would lead to long-term student satisfaction.

DEFINING STUDENT SELF-SATISFACTION AS A CRITERION FOR SUCCESS

Lovelock (1984) has defined education as a service that is directed at the consumer's (student's) mind, i.e. increasing the student's knowledge and skills. In addition, two objectives have been recommended specifically for higher education: to give students the education they need, (Burns 1989) and to satisfy students' learning needs so thoroughly that they stay satisfied with their education for a long time (Hayes 1989). At Pace, this led to the conclusion that the measure of success for skill-integrating teaching would be the increase in self-satisfaction that students report with respect to skills and abilities that they had identified as being important.

THE "BEFORE & AFTER" SELF-SATISFACTION EVALUATIONS

A questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the semester in six sections of the Managerial Marketing course. The total number of students covered in this study was 116. The items on the questionnaire were selected on the basis of previous research in the exit surveys mentioned above. The questionnaire consisted of two sections covering student attitudes regarding: ability to gain a promotion, ability to gain a better job, ability to influence others, ability to make personal connections, broad business perspective and competence in Marketing. The first section asked students to rate the importance of each category. All six items received relatively high ratings with respect to importance. The second section asked students to evaluate their satisfaction with their abilities with respect to the six categories.

The Managerial Marketing course was run with all the integrated skill methods discussed above. At the end of each semester, the "How satisfied are you ?" portion of the questionnaire was administered again. Statistically significant increases in self-satisfaction occurred in all six areas that students had previously identified as being important.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper describes an approach to teaching the core graduate Managerial Marketing course in a way that combines development of valuable skills with learning Marketing by practicing Marketing in addition to discussing Marketing concepts and cases.

The ultimate test of the value of a course, or a program is its effect on the students. If students are satisfied that it has improved them in ways that are important to them and if they complete the required work while meeting standards of the institution, the course or the program may be deemed successful. At Pace GSB, the focus had always been on meeting the second condition. Inattention with respect to the first condition led to lack of student satisfaction.

Using "before and after" measurements of self-satisfaction revealed highly significant improvement in all the categories considered by students to be important. The integration of skills appears to have been effective.

Exhibits and References Available, on Request.