

ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: ARE STUDENTS ENGAGED OR AMUSED?

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators often struggle with how to mitigate student apathy in the classroom. Even in smaller classes where professors have close contact with students, lack of motivation can prevail. At the same time, students cite lack of interesting content delivery as a rationale for boredom in the classroom.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

Professors have tried various strategies to make the classroom environment more engaging. A common approach involves in-class activities where student apathy is challenged with dynamic interaction (Shanahan, Hermans, & Haytko, 2006). Indeed a variety of teaching techniques can be employed to encourage student participation. Specific incentives for participating include the *Golden Duck Award* (Wooldridge, 2008), *Cash for Comment* (Chylinski, 2007), or *Random Selection* (Allerd & Swenson, 2006). These tools are part of a larger set of strategies focused on engaging students in the learning process via active learning.

ACTIVE LEARNING

The value of using active learning is well established in the marketing pedagogy literature (Drea, Tripp, & Stuenkel, 2005). Active learning focuses on the student experience where students engage in the course content through practical activities. Students seem to benefit from an active approach using role plays, case studies, games, simulations and the like in lieu of a passive approach where the instructor lectures for the duration of class time (Kennedy, Lawton, & Walker, 2001; Smith & Van Doran 2004; Wright, Bitner, & Zeithaml, 1994).

Students also appear to appreciate the active approach as several studies have documented high student satisfaction ratings on various active learning techniques (Laverie, 2006; Vander Schee, 2009; Yamarik, 2007). Professors also find them meaningful as they allow students to take more ownership over their learning and do not let students simply record and then replicate static information. Integration of course material with dynamic exercises in active learning helps students to better understand course content and improve academic performance (Drea, Tripp, & Stuenkel, 2005).

DEEP LEARNING

Active learning has been tied to deep learning where students integrate and better retain course material (Smith & Boyer, 1996). Deep learning instruction also tends to foster a more positive student perception of the learning environment and the course in general (Karns, 2006).

Students benefit by avoiding surface learning where they perceive having a higher work load and focus primarily on rote memorization (Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002). However, the perceived benefits need substantiation to ensure that engagement is not merely providing enjoyment at the expense of academic achievement.

CALL TO ACTION

Marketing educators should demonstrate that their approach to teaching fosters student learning (Chonko, 2004). This can be done via one of a number of assessment measures including testing, portfolios or application projects. Indeed, research demonstrating that students learn more or better via active learning is not as common as the literature describing techniques and student satisfaction with them.

Perhaps students prefer active learning because it is simply more interesting than listening to a lengthy lecture. But is the value of utilizing a game or simulation based on entertainment or engagement? Do students really acquire more knowledge, learn better or more deeply when they participate or interact with the course material? How can one demonstrate that students are not just more satisfied with active versus passive learning, but that their perception of an enhanced experience actually translates into improvement in student learning?

More research is needed to demonstrate that utilizing and assessing active learning in the marketing classroom makes for a more engaging participative atmosphere and a richer learning environment. Future studies should focus on active learning in particular to reflect that active learning indeed translates into deep learning and thus greater academic achievement.

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