

MARKETING ON THE ISLAND: AN ATTEMPT AT SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION IN A PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING CLASS

Vicki Eveland, Seattle Pacific University
Gary Karns, Seattle Pacific University
Tammy Crutchfield, Mercer University

Abstract

Student persistence, engagement and learning outcomes are critically important concerns for marketing educators in this environment of public scrutiny and doubts about the value of higher education. Student integration with the academic and social culture of an institution through contact with peers, faculty, and learning has been found to be an effective approach to improving persistence, engagement, and learning. This paper describes an innovative approach to the design and instruction of a marketing principles course which integrates students academically and socially through an intensive, residential off-site experience with a faculty member and an engaging blended, flipped, problem-based approach to the classroom.

Introduction

Facing increasing accountability for positive student outcomes, schools have begun to pursue student engagement which is positively tied to increased learning, persistence, and graduation rates (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). After matriculation, students facing issues of poor academic performance, adjustment and fit problems, and lack of direction often do not flourish (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1982; Mangum, Baugher, Winch, & Varanelli, 2005). Research indicates that the first year is crucial in developing connections that increase retention (Tinto, 1993). It is imperative for faculty to devise ways to increase student persistence and success through curricular, co-curricular, and instructional practices. This paper describes an innovative social and academic integration effort to increase engagement, persistence, and student learning.

Background

Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) provides a framework helping students succeed. It indicates that students fare much better if efforts are made to integrate them into an institution's academic and social culture. Most institutions begin the process of academic and social integration through orientations and general education programs provided in the first year of school. According to Tinto (2003), five conditions promote student persistence: expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning. First, high expectations are a necessary condition for student success. Second, students are also more likely to flourish where academic, personal, and social support is provided. Third, students are more easily retained where frequent and early feedback about their performance is given. Fourth, students are more likely to remain in settings that treat them as valued members of a community. This feeling of value is impacted significantly by the frequency and depth of the contact with faculty, staff, and other students. Finally, students are more likely to be successful in settings that foster learning. Social integration, measured through peer group and faculty interactions and academic integration, measured by academic and intellectual development, faculty concern for student development and teaching, and institution and goal commitment, are the latent phenomena connecting these five conditions with success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993; French & Oakes, 2004). Berger and Milem (1999) indicated that in-class and out-of-class interactions with faculty impact both social and academic integrations. Additionally, they found that both social and academic integrations were influenced by peers and the general institutional environment. Noel, Levitz, &

Saluri (1985) and Tinto (1993) identify faculty, academic advisors, and the classroom as playing important roles.

The overarching theme from this stream of research indicates that connection and involvement are crucial to student success. This relational connection occurs on three levels: with peers, with faculty, and with learning. The importance of these connections has also been supported throughout the larger business education literature. Gruber, Lowrie, Brodowsky, Reppel, Voss, & Chowdhury (2012) found that marketing students prefer professors who sustain the human interface within the learning environment. Rapport between students and faculty increases student motivation and is a key trait of master teachers (Granitz, Koernig, & Harich, 2009; Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Tomkovick; 2004; Huff, Cooper, & Jones, 2002).

Positive connections with peers are associated with student well-being (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005), professional commitment (Daily, Bishop, & Maynard-Patrick, 2013), and institutional commitment (Daily, Bishop, & Maynard-Patrick, 2013; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Additionally, cooperative learning that incorporates active, social, and constructive interaction with peers is linked to positive student achievement in over 600 studies (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). Engaged students devote a significant amount of time and effort to their tasks and apply higher-order thinking skills to address problems and see more academic, personal, and social success (Kuh, 2009; Pscarella and Terenzini, 2005; Pace, 1990).

Developing Integration & Engagement in New Business Students: A Case Study

There is often little effort made to continue the integration process throughout a student's college tenure or within their academic major. Business schools often don't begin a relationship with students until they are officially admitted to their program late in their sophomore year and students have little opportunity to interact meaningfully with business faculty or other business students (Crutchfield & Eveland, 2008). The innovation discussed below occurred at a school wanting to improve.

A required introductory marketing course at a small, AACSB business school in the Pacific Northwest was used in our effort to apply the Integration Model in pursuit of integration, engagement, and success for newly admitted business majors. Enrollment was capped at 25.

To provide opportunities for formal and informal interactions between the instructor and students as well as among the students the course was formatted as a week-long, off-site intensive residential experience. Prior to the residential intensive, students were asked to read the textbook, interact with learning materials in the Blackboard® course management system, and complete the Big 5 Personality Test and the Social Style Inventory.

The students and instructor lived together as a collaborative learning community for five days (Sunday night until Friday afternoon) at the university's conference center, a turn-of-the-century, former military installation, located in a beautiful, natural setting on an island in the Puget Sound. We incorporated student-centered and process-based instructional delivery, shared responsibility for learning, and an interactive learning environment through using collaborative teams and problem-based learning. This approach increases skills in creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking (Kennedy, Lawton, and Walker, 2001) as well as builds integration and engagement. Shared responsibility for student learning is positively connected to better grades and improved attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral responses in marketing education (Sierra, 2010). Students developed a comprehensive marketing plan as their problem-based project which was sub-divided into problems that were addressed across the intensive's sessions. When students arrived, the instructor led some ice breaker activities, discussed the syllabus and the schedule for the week, facilitated other activities related to the personality assessments, and

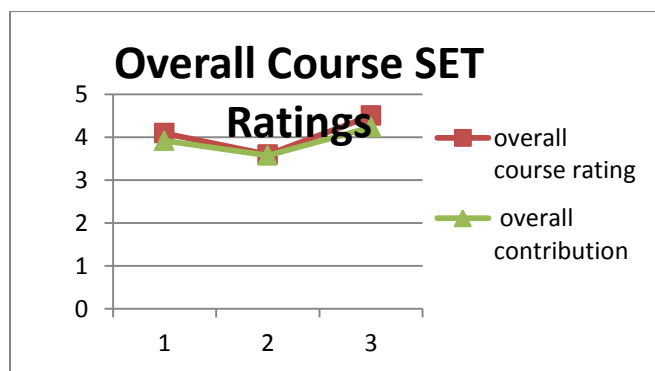
assigned students to teams. The schedule was intense for the remaining days: breakfast at 8:00, class from 9:00-12:00, lunch at 12:00, group work on assignments from 1:00-5:30, dinner at 5:30, and class again from 6:30-8:30. Generally, the morning sessions consisted of topic introductions, discussion and short group assignments. At the end of the morning session, groups were given assignments tying the morning topics to their marketing plan project. Evening sessions focused on student presentations of their assignments. In spite of the intensity of the course, students had some free time to enjoy the beach, play games, and socialize. The instructor ate with the students, shared one-on-one conversations, provided coaching to the teams, and participated in games, and a beach bonfire one night.

Over the remainder of the fall term, the teams continued to meet and had opportunity for coaching from the instructor. Social gatherings of the class were organized as well. The projects were due at the end of the regular term. Grades were based on an engagement score earned through class participation, assignments, and exercises during the intensive, a comprehensive exam, taken after completion of the intensive, the comprehensive group project, and peer evaluations of contributions to group assignments.

Conclusions & Lessons Learned

While at the conference center, student groups worked well together and completed assignments on time. There were strong and enthusiastic discussions which indicated that they had invested time and effort into the assignments. Additionally, the students and the faculty member developed interpersonal bonds similar to those arising from a study abroad trip. Anecdotal student feedback on the course evaluation indicates that they enjoyed the experience, felt connected as a community and as teams, felt engaged by the hands-on nature of the course, and recommend its continuance. The SET ratings for the course increased compared to the instructor's prior on-campus, regular format offerings. Concerns raised by students centered on the heavy emphasis on teamwork, the information overload during the intensive, the timing of cues to accomplish the pre-reading assignments and the lack of post-intensive structure for completing the project which allowed them to procrastinate or for it to get lost in the flow of the regular coursework they were taking (out-of-sight, out-of-mind).

The experience was both exhilarating and exhausting for the faculty member. It was a joy to connect with the students and to be able to focus their attention on the subject matter. However, being "on" for five straight days was demanding. Teaching the course did provide free space on the instructor's calendar for other pursuits during the regular quarter. Subsequent offerings need to employ a team-teaching format. Also, stronger compliance with the pre-intensive reading assignments needs to be obtained.



References Available upon Request