

# **STUDENT LEARNING STYLE AS PREDICTOR OF INTENSIVE VS TRADITIONAL COURSE FORMATS**

Angelica Bahl and Gregory S. Black, Metropolitan State University of Denver

## **Abstract**

This study compared students' learning style in a set of marketing courses; the marketing courses included courses taught both in intensive (short) formats and those taught in a semester long (traditional) format. Based on Kolb's theory of learning styles and his measurable methodology, a survey was developed and administered to students in six different marketing courses at a western university. The results show that the majority of marketing students have an active experimentation learning style (AE); they "learn by doing" and they rely heavily on experiments in the classroom. The evidence also indicates that students who completed an intensive course were more satisfied with the course than students who took traditional long courses. In addition, results of this study indicate that student learning styles do not significantly influence student choice of course formats. In terms of student motivation, intensive course delivery motivates more students with the active experimentation learning style (AE), as well as the concrete experience learning style (CE), where students rely heavily on feeling-based judgments and learn best from specific examples and class discussion. Also, in this article, recommendations for educators in relationship to students learning styles and course formats are made.

## **Literature Review**

Learning style has long been a basis for understanding student preferences for various learning activities. Previous studies in marketing education literature have focused on the importance of the understanding of students learning styles (e.g., Morrison et al., 2003; Frontczak, 1991, 1999; Karns, 1993). The main argument that marketing educators should be extensively mindful of student learning styles when designing courses is a presumed relationship between learning style-based preferences and learning effectiveness (Karns, 2006).

One of the most popular models of experiential learning is the one developed by David A. Kolb (1984). Kolb suggests that we go through four stages of learning as follows:

1. Concrete Experience (CE): an actual, new experience in an individual's life.
2. Reflective Observation (RO): feelings, emotions, reflection related to the experience.

3. Abstract Conceptualization (AC): existing concepts and theories are applied to the experience.
4. Active Experimentation (AE): new concepts are generated and put into practice.

Based on Kolb's theory, first the student has the experience, which may be the actual student assignment. Next, the student reflects on his or her feelings and reactions related to this new experience. Third, and perhaps most important in the learning process, the student relates this experience to the knowledge, theory, and concepts learned in class. Finally, the student can discuss what he or she has learned from the experience (Frontczak and Rival, 1991).

This study examines the effects of a student learning styles, as described by Kolb (1984), on student learning satisfaction in two types of courses – intensive courses and traditional courses. Intensive courses are those that are taught in shorter periods of time, but are worth the same credit hours and include the same material and expectations as traditional 15-week courses. University business programs are recognizing that time management is critical for today's student. One way to try to help students cope with these issues is to provide classes of varying length. For example, some universities offer classes during a two or three week break between the Spring Semester and their summer classes (often referred to as Maymester). Other universities offer two week long classes during the first two weeks of January, just before spring classes begin (sometimes known as Winterim). Also, summer classes are often offered in a variety of durations, from four weeks to eight weeks. These shortened durations offer students additional opportunities to find class times that meet their busy schedules and to be able to take a class in a short length of time when they would otherwise not be able to. It also helps students who may need a specific course as a prerequisite for another course offered the next semester. These shorter classes are often referred to as intensive courses.

There is a large body of educational research examines the differences between various course formats. This research tries to answer several questions: what are instructional effectiveness, student attitudes and performance; student preferences and expectations; and instructor evaluations and grade expectations in an intensive course compared to a traditional course? Intensive courses have become a mainstay of higher education (e.g., Anastasi, 2007; Daniel, 2000; Reardon et al., 2008; Scott, 2003). It is obvious that the intensive course format is widely used and it is an alternative way to deliver quality teaching (Daniel, 2000). Other research found evidence that students display strong motivation and effort toward intensive course formats. It does appear that intrinsic motivation is higher in students whose took intensive courses. It

means that students from intensive courses feel more personal accomplishment and pleasure of learning (Bahl and Black, 2011).

### Research Model and Findings

Two groups were identified for the research. The first group includes the students who took the intensive courses – the two-, three-, and four-week terms with six, four, and two and half hours per class, respectively. The second group of students is made up of those who took courses during the traditional 15-week format, meeting twice per week for one hour and fifteen minutes per meeting, or three times per week for 50 minutes per meeting.

**Table 1. Summary of student learning style and student satisfaction in term of course formats**

Learning style	Students		Intensive course			Traditional course		
	#	%	# of students	%	Satisfaction level *	# of students	%	Satisfaction level *
CE	19	11.5	10	16.1	4.6	9	8.65	3.8
AE	81	48.8	24	38.7	4.3	57	54.8	3.3
RO	37	22.3	14	22.6	4.2	23	22.1	3.7
AC	29	17.5	14	22.6	4.2	15	14.4	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.65</b>

\*5 point scale (1-strongly dissatisfy to 5-strongly satisfy)

As a part of a large cross-sectional survey, students were asked to indicate their course satisfaction on a five-point scale (1 = strongly dissatisfied to 5 = strongly satisfied). Also, to identify a student's primary learning style, we used measurable methodology adapted from Kolb (1984). The responses to the survey were collected at a large western university. The data were collected from a convenience sample of 166 students taking undergraduate marketing courses. A total of six courses were examined, including Principles of Marketing, International Marketing, Marketing of Services, and Consumer Behavior. The students took the survey voluntarily and all courses were offered in both formats so students had the option to choose either one for the same course. According to Kolb's methodology, four learning styles - Concrete Experience (CE); Reflective Observation (RO); Abstract Conceptualization (AC); Active Experimentation (AE) - were the subjects of this research.

The results of the study indicate that students who completed the intensive courses were more satisfied with the course than were students who took traditional term courses, and the student learning styles did not have a significant influence on student's choice of course formats (Table 1). The results also show that the most common learning style for marketing students (48.8%) is Active Experimentation (AE); they "learn by doing," and rely heavily on experiments in classroom.

**Table 2. Summary of student learning style and student motivation in term of course formats**

I choose this course because:	Intensive course		Traditional course	
	# of students	%	# of students	%
I like this term,				
▪ CE	6	20.0	2	12.5
▪ RO	5	16.6	2	12.5
▪ AC	4	13.4	1	6.3
▪ AE	15	50.0	11	68.7
Total:	30	100.0	16	100.0
I would like to graduate as soon as possible,				
▪ CE				
▪ RO	10	20.0	4	8.9
▪ AC	12	24.0	12	26.7
▪ AE	7	14.0	6	13.3
Total:	21	42.0	23	51.1
	50	100.0	45	100.0
The course perfectly fits into my schedule				
▪ CE				
▪ RO	11	24.5	3	7.2
▪ AC	9	20.0	6	14.3
• AE	7	15.5	7	16.6
Total:	18	40.0	26	61.9
	45	100.0	42	100.0

These results correspond with another study that found marketing students are more accommodators with active experimentation style (Karns, 2006). The second largest group of learners (22.3%) has the Reflective Observation (RO) learning style where, according to Kolb, students have a tentative, impartial, and reflective approach to learning. These RO learners rely on careful observation in making judgments and prefer lectures as a learning environment.

In term of student motivation, the intensive course model motivates more students with the AE learning style as well as the Concrete Experience (CE) learning style where students rely heavily on feeling-based judgments and learn best from specific examples and class discussion

(Table 2). Interestingly, 42% of students who would like to graduate as soon as possible and complete intensive courses have the AE style, while 24% of respondents in intensive courses have an RO learning style.

Our study indicates that marketing students with the fourth learning style, abstract conceptualization (AC), are the smallest group in our sample. However, AC learners represent 22.6% of students who complete intensive courses and only 14.4% who complete traditional courses. This suggests that students with analytical, logical thinking, and impersonal learning skills who emphasize theory and systematic analysis prefer intensive over traditional marketing course formats.

### **Implication and Recommendations for Educators**

When teaching the intensive courses, marketing educators should consider the following:

- Student satisfaction is higher in intensive formats than in traditional formats;
- The majority of marketing students are classified as AE learners;
- Students learn best when they can engage in client-based projects, small group discussions, and other experiential learning activities;
- By using an experiential learning assignment, carefully organizing, planning, and coordinating every stage of the assignment and providing helpful, supportive assistance to students throughout the process is important (Frontczak, 2000);
- Lectures and text-reading styles of assignments and classes transmute from traditional passive nature to active-oriented learning (Karns, 2006);
- Technology helps student to collaborate and engage; for example, videos, simulation games, course websites, etc. (McCabe and Meuter, 2011);
- The majority of students tend to be extroverts;
- Students with the RO learning style carry feelings and emotions, and tend to reflect related to the experience in classroom; and
- Students who enroll in intensive courses are more likely to be motivated to graduate as soon as possible.

References available upon request