

## OPTIMAL CLASS LENGTH FOR MARKETING UNDERGRADUATE CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

Some educators believe that the longer instructors and students meet face-to-face in a classroom setting the more effective the learning experience. Alternatively, others point to the significant disadvantages of lengthier classes (e.g., student attention problems). The purpose of this paper is to assess which of three class formats (i.e., one hour/three times a week, one and a half hour/twice a week, or three hours/one time a week) is optimal in terms of student perspectives.

The sample for this study included a survey of 467 undergraduate students at four universities. The survey instrument included attitudinal items on each class format (short, moderate, and intensive), class format preference, and expected learning from each class format. In addition, students were requested to provide demographic and class standing information, such as major, classification, GPA, gender, work hours per week, and whether they were full- or part-time students. Students were asked four seven-point semantic differential scale questions about the desirability of the three class formats. These were followed with three seven-point Likert scale questions about how the class was conducted and how valuable it was for learning.

The results of this study show that regardless of major (marketing majors, other business majors, or other non-business majors), students prefer the moderate class format to the other two formats. Students may prefer this format because they may retain some of the flexibility in scheduling (three days are open for other activities) and yet may not be as stressed or fatigued as in an intensive three-hour once-a-week class, which allows for the maximum level of scheduling flexibility. As noted by Henebry (1997), even with a ten-minute break in the middle of a three-hour class, students struggle to fully attend to the content in the last portion of the class. This may in part explain why, regardless of major, students in this study believe the more

intense class format will result in lower levels of learning than the other two formats. The theory that there may be diminishing returns between classroom time and learning (Fredrick and Walberg 1980) or an optimal efficient class length (Grimes and Niss 1989) may be in effect.

Students, especially marketing majors, may also appreciate that a moderate class format can also accommodate a wider array of pedagogical techniques than is possible with a one-hour class. Marketing majors may better appreciate this than other majors because of the nature of the marketing major itself. The marketing major focuses on developing more behavioral/creative skills than other majors (LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999), skills that are more congruent with pedagogical variety. This may explain why marketing majors have stronger preference for the moderate class format than other majors.

The results of this study suggest that more moderate class formats should be offered to students, especially marketing students. However, there may be administrative constraints such as facility utilization that need to be addressed prior to implementation. Some administrations have suggested that moving from a five-day-a-week schedule (MWF and TuTh) to a four-day-a-week (MW or TuTh) leaves physical facilities underutilized. In fact, colleges with high facility utilization rates may not physically be able to accomplish this shift. However, this assumes that a one and a half hour/twice a week schedule mandates a four-day week, as opposed to scheduling classes MW, MF and WF, thus maintaining and even marginally increasing facility utilization, because it requires fewer breaks between classes.

**References Available on Request**