

## AN INVOLVEMENT-ORIENTED APPROACH TO TEACHING A MEDIUM-SIZED MARKETING PRINCIPLES CLASS

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### INTRODUCTION

While it is possible for some level of student understanding to occur through passive learning (e.g., lectures), a deeper level of understanding is more likely to occur in the mind of the active learner. An active process involves "digestion" of knowledge, thinking that results in understanding, and ultimately, an application of the newfound understanding. The position taken by the authors and others (Settle 1990; Cohen 1988), is that this deeper level of understanding can best be accomplished through practical application and involvement. Special problems exist in creating student involvement when the class size increases beyond 25 to 50 students. In-class discussions can become unmanageable, and out-of-class assignments and essay/involvement types of exams are spurned due to the excessive grading time required.

### PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to present an involvement-oriented approach to teaching Marketing Principles to medium sized classes (50-100 students). Four basic "involvement-oriented" methods are explained and their use rationalized. In addition, a student evaluation regarding the effectiveness of these methods is provided. The methods used were developed by the authors over a three-semester period, with an enhanced version employed in each new semester. The evaluation of these methods consisted of a survey of 70 students enrolled in a Marketing Principles course at a northeastern school.

### EXPLANATION AND EVALUATION OF METHODS

The first involvement-oriented method, "in-class involvement exercises," consisted of using activities such as mini-cases and role-playing exercises during the regular class meetings. After a brief summary (15-20 minutes) of the day's reading assignment, students were divided into groups (3-4 each) and assigned a particular problem or topic. After allowing for sufficient group

interaction, a group representative later shared and defended their results in front of the class. The activities were designed to give each student the opportunity to think and then share their thoughts, if not to the entire class, at least to their group. Such activities expanded and reinforced learning from the lecture and reading assignments by "forcing" students to apply the material. Student evaluation of these exercises was extremely favorable.

The second method, a "participation incentive program," was designed to motivate students to spend additional time with the assigned material prior to class. Students were allowed to submit one-page chapter summaries to the instructor prior to in-class discussion of the topics, and were later returned the notes to use as an aid during course exams. Based on the type of exams given, the notes themselves did not contain any direct answers to exam questions. Students felt that the program encouraged advance preparation (95.7%), more even-paced studying (87.1%), and less memorization (68.6%), while better preparing them for exam questions (85.7%) and giving them more confidence during the exam sessions (91.4%).

The third method, "application-type, multiple-choice questions," was designed to encourage and reward active learning while also limiting the amount of grading time required by instructors. Each course exam consisted entirely of questions that required students to apply the learned concepts. Student evaluations were mixed. Respondents indicated that such questions were a better test of understanding of course material (78.5%), and resulted in longer term retention of course material (68.5%). Only 43 percent preferred these questions, yet 78.5 percent felt that the method should be used in subsequent semesters.

The final method, the "exam written appeal process," was designed to help students understand why they had missed questions. Students were

allowed to defend, in writing, the answers to missed questions. The process required students to spend additional time with the material that had given them the most problems on the exam, thereby enhancing understanding. More than 90 percent of the students responded that the process taught them to express their position more clearly and required them to think more closely about the course material.

### CONCLUSIONS

Presented in this paper was a proposed involvement-oriented solution to the lecture/discussion and multiple choice/essay dilemma confronting instructors of a medium-sized Marketing Principles class. Based upon student evaluations and implementation of this approach it was concluded that active learning required increased effort from the student and the instructor. However, it was the consensus among students that these methods helped them better to learn the course material and to improve in other skill areas as well (e.g., oral and written communication). In the instructors' opinions, the results were well worth the additional effort required.

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