

COURSE PREREQUISITES IN THE UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

The design of course prerequisites for the undergraduate marketing curriculum is a complex issue. Frequently, student preparation must be balanced against student access. To assist in this process, types of prerequisites are identified and their relevancy for different types of students is discussed. Finally, recommendation on prerequisites for undergraduate marketing courses are presented.

INTRODUCTION

The question of course prerequisites in college curriculums is a many-sided and difficult problem. Questions about prerequisites revolve around three issues: Necessary preparation for the student; the level at which the course can be taught; and adequate access to courses for interested students. Frequently, faculty and administrators must balance the three factors. An ideal prerequisite set for the marketing curriculum may guarantee well prepared students but also make marketing classes so difficult to get into that student credit hours and perhaps even the number of marketing majors decline.

The problem of prerequisites within the business college is further exacerbated by accreditation requirements, pre-business and business major classifications and the recognition that business and marketing courses are currently in demand by many non-business majors. These factors along with the sequential nature of business common body of knowledge (CBK) and marketing requirements make the prerequisite problem a difficult one with which to deal.

The purpose of this paper is to provide some thoughts about undergraduate course prerequisites in general and about marketing prerequisites in particular. Types of prerequisites will be identified and examined and different course prerequisites for different types of students will be discussed. Finally, ideas on course prerequisites for the marketing curriculum will be presented.

TYPES OF PREREQUISITES

The word prerequisite generally means, "required beforehand" or "a necessary condition for something that follows" (Friend and Guralnik 1960). With respect to specific courses, the meaning is simply that one college course must be completed prior to completing a second or following course. The question that remains however, is why is one course a prerequisite for another? The answers to the question lead to the enumeration of various types of course prerequisites.

The first and most obvious answer to the question is that the knowledge or skill learned in course X is required to pass course Y for the normal or typical student. Numerous cases of this type of prerequisite exist. For example, the knowledge gained in the first statistics or accounting course is required for the majority of students to pass the second statistics or accounting course. A skill related example would be the writing and composition skills gained in Freshman English 1 and built upon in Freshman English 2. This type of prerequisite is not only logically defensible, but also easily enforceable. Students generally do not desire to get into courses for which they are not adequately prepared. Prerequisites of this type will be referred to as Type A prerequisites.

A second answer to the question of why one course is a prerequisite to another course also relates to skill. However, in this case, the skill is ancillary to the course content. An example of this type of prerequisite is the requirement that before students enroll in Business Communications courses, they must complete a block of study in word processing. Other examples include Business Communications as a prerequisite to Business Policy or in marketing, Statistics as a prerequisite to Marketing Research. This type of prerequisite will be referred to as a Type B prerequisite. Type B prerequisites are more difficult to enforce than Type A prerequisites because students frequently believe that the ancillary skill is useful but not necessary to get through the course.

A final answer to the question of why a course or a series of courses should be a prerequisite of another course does not relate to skill or specific knowledge but to maturity, general knowledge, perspective, and perhaps, judgement. In other words, prerequisites of this type allow the professor to teach the class at the appropriate level without being held back by students without adequate maturity and perspective. Examples of this type of prerequisite, a Type C prerequisite, would include the CBK requirements as prerequisites for Business Policy, or in marketing, Consumer Behavior, Channels of Distributions and Marketing Research as prerequisites for Marketing Management. Type C prerequisites are also more difficult to enforce than Type A prerequisites because students learn that they can get through the course without the various prerequisite courses.

PREREQUISITES AND DIFFERENT STUDENT TYPES

In addition to differing prerequisite types, students also differ in their objectives and reasons for taking various courses. Consequently, it is possible that different prerequisites should exist for different types of students. From a prerequisite orientation, the following categorization of students seems appropriate:

- (1) Business School--Marketing Majors
- (2) Business School--Non-Marketing Majors
- (3) Non-Business School--Marketing Minors
- (4) Non-Business School--Non-Marketing Minors

The first two categories include students who have completed CBK requirements and who are either marketing majors or other business majors (e.g. finance, accounting, CIS, etc.). The second two categories include students who are not business majors and who therefore have probably not completed the CBK requirements. In many cases, marketing minors have only completed one accounting and one economics course. The question then becomes, should prerequisites differ for different kinds of students who desire to take marketing courses?

The answer to this question must be a "yes." However, the "yes" must be qualified in many ways. Again, the three primary factors to consider when evaluating prerequisites for different types of students include students' preparation, the level at which the class should be taught and student access to marketing courses.

In general, the case that all students, regardless of major, should be required to complete Type A prerequisites seems sound. Students that lack adequate preparation for a course will be unprepared to contribute to the classroom experience and may have a tendency to impede the entire class progress, or to cause the professor to teach the course at a lower level.

More flexibility should exist for Type B and Type C prerequisites. In many cases, students outside of the business school may bring with them a perspective and outlook that is both different but adequate for many marketing courses. For example, students majoring in political science may bring many useful insights to a sales management course. Likewise, a student with a psychology background may be a positive contributor in a consumer behavior course.

In summary, prerequisites are a necessary element in all course descriptions. Type A prerequisites should be stated in absolute terms while more flexibility may be desirable for classes with Type B and/or Type C prerequisites. One way to accomplish this flexibility in business schools is to build it into the curriculum through such devices as recommended sequences of course, pre-business and business majors status requirements, and encouraging students through advising to complete specific courses at appropriate times during their college years.

Dealing with Type B and Type C requirements for non-marketing and non-business majors is more difficult. Central to the idea of teaching the class at the appropriate level while still maintaining some access to marketing classes for the non-marketing major is the role that the instructor or departmental advisor plays. This person(s) must evaluate the appropriateness of the background of non-marketing and non-business majors who desire to complete some marketing classes. Obviously the instructor or advisor must look at the student's academic and non-academic background and attempt to access whether

enough equivalent experience to the Type B and Type C prerequisites exists. If it does, and if Type A prerequisites have been met, the student should be allowed in the course (subject of course to enrollment restrictions).

COURSE PREREQUISITES IN MARKETING

Several issues related to course prerequisites for specific marketing courses need to be considered by the business and marketing faculty advisor. These issues, when considered by specific course type, may help the marketing department faculty to provide higher quality instruction for all student consumers.

The Principles of Marketing Course

The Principles of Marketing course, taught at the junior (i.e. 300) level in most four-year AACSB accredited schools needs two sets of prerequisites, one for business majors and one for non-business majors. Otherwise, the variety of students' backgrounds increases the difficulty in teaching the course and correspondingly, lowers the quality of the course. In many business schools, business majors must complete two accounting courses, two economics courses, and introductory statistics, business law and CIS courses before being allowed to register for the 300-level Principles of Marketing course. In contrast, unless there are course prerequisites for non-business majors, these students may enter the course directly without any business training. Not only do business students feel some sense of inequity in this, but the widely differing background of the students makes teaching the course difficult.

An approach to solving the problem is two sets of prerequisites, one for business majors and one for non-business majors. The required courses for business majors usually includes the lower division business core and mathematics courses. For non-business majors, a simple statement such as "at least one economics and one accounting course" can be very helpful in reducing the disparity in background among the students enrolling in the course.

How frequently are two sets of prerequisites being used? A study of basic marketing course prerequisites in a convenience sample of 84 catalogs of AACSB accredited schools revealed the information shown in Table 1. As indicated in the table, only one school was identified which publishes prerequisites for both business majors and non-business majors. The most common prerequisites were economics and accounting courses. However, a full 30 percent of the sample either had no prerequisites or only a junior level standing prerequisite for the basic marketing course. However, other screening devices may be used at the registration or instructor level to prevent unprepared students from entering the course.

TABLE 1
 BASIC MARKETING COURSE PREREQUISITES
 IN 84 AACSB ACCREDITED SCHOOLS

<u>Course Prerequisite</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
One Economics Course	21	25
One Economics and One Accounting Course	17	20
Two Economics Courses	13	16
None, Junior Level Standing Stated	12	14
None, Junior Level Standing Implied	8	9
None, Junior Level Standing Not Implied	5	6
Economics and Behavioral Science Course(s)	4	5
Other*	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
	84	100

* Includes one school that incorporates a dual set of prerequisites.

Other Junior Level Non-Quantitative Courses

A number of marketing courses exist in marketing curriculums which are non-quantitative in nature and which are usually taken during the junior or early senior year. Examples of this type of course would include Consumer Behavior, Marketing Channels, Retailing, Salesmanship and perhaps Advertising. Although these courses lend themselves to some skill development, and case studies work very well in all of the courses, the subject matter is for the most part conceptual in nature. Consequently, the prerequisite for this type of course should be limited to Principles of Marketing for all types of students.

Quantitative Marketing Courses

Quantitative courses in marketing curriculums include Marketing Research, Business and Market Forecasting, Physical Distribution/Business Logistics and perhaps others. These types of courses are those in which the most thought should be given to specific A Type prerequisites. The reason for this more rigid prerequisite approach is that students in these courses who lack the necessary knowledge and skills have the real tendency to lower the overall level at which the course is taught. Courses of this type usually require Principles of Marketing as well as various mathematics and statistics courses as prerequisites.

One useful procedure in preparing prerequisites for quantitative marketing courses is to list all

quantitative prerequisites and to not rely on student knowledge to know that prerequisites exist for one or more of the listed prerequisites. For example Principles of Marketing and Business Statistics may be prerequisites for Marketing Research. However, College Algebra may be a prerequisite for Business Statistics. By including College Algebra in the prerequisite list, students are less likely to attempt to enroll in Marketing Research without the necessary Business Statistics prerequisite.

Capstone and Senior Level Courses

Most marketing curriculums include a few senior level or capstone marketing courses. Example courses might include Marketing Management, Sales Management and perhaps International Marketing. The key point about these courses is that students should come into the course extremely well prepared to contribute to the classroom experience (e.g. participate in case discussions, etc.). Consequently, the kinds of issues that Type C prerequisites deal with are important for these type of courses. Maturity, perspective, general knowledge and judgement in students all serve to raise the quality of these courses.

One way to increase the probability that maturity will be achieved is by including a statement such as "senior level standing" along with the list of course prerequisites. A second way to insure that student preparation is appropriate for the class is to require instructor approval for all students who desire to take the course. Although this may seem like a burdensome procedure, it is probably far easier than handling unprepared students who are enrolled in the course.

SUMMARY

Course prerequisites can have a significant influence on the quality of the marketing program offered in the business school. The prerequisites decided upon by the marketing faculty should attempt to accomplish three objectives: insure adequately prepared students; facilitate course instruction at the appropriate level; and facilitate access to marketing courses for interested and prepared students. Recognition that different types of students may require different types of prerequisites should be built into the overall set of prerequisites. Finally, different general types of marketing courses exist within the marketing curriculum. Because of this, a somewhat different approach to prerequisites may be necessary for each general type of marketing course.

REFERENCES

- Friend, Joseph H. and Guralnik, David B., eds. (1960). Webster's New World Dictionary, Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing