

LEARNING MARKETING STRATEGY THROUGH CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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One of the main reasons students drop out of college is that they find it difficult to settle in at the beginning of their courses (Willing & Hohnson, 2004). Students also drop online courses for the same reason they drop residential classes: their belief that there are major differences between the two approaches of instruction (Carr, 2000). Whether students complete the same course in a residential or online setting each semester, there needs to be consistency among courses. The goal is improving student learning in the area of marketing strategy through case study analysis. More specifically, this was an examination of what was attempted in the course MBA 635: Marketing and New Media Strategy, a core MBA course. Although it is a required course in the MBA, regardless of concentration, many students lacked marketing knowledge and the ability to complete a case study.

It is commonly accepted that adult learners (graduate students) learn by doing and want to engage in topics that are relevant to them. Case study analysis is an appropriate educational tool to apply real learning for real life without precise answers. Also, case studies have the propensity to improve team building, critical thinking, and communication, and sharpen problem-solving skills that many employers seek from today's workforce (Nevadomski-Burdan, 2012). Hence, teaching the classic case study analysis was a logical solution facilitating their learning of marketing strategy.

Before engagement in case study analysis, an assessment of where students were in their stage of familiarity with marketing and their motivation to go beyond baseline disciplinary information was conducted. Many MBA students were not familiar with strategy, and spending time on the marketing fundamentals assisted in propelling them to a competitive level with the stronger students in the course. As marketing educators, simply adding two to four case study assignments to increase marketing strategy knowledge was an over-simplified solution that was doomed to fail. In essence, it was, at best, a misuse of a good learning tool. Therefore, it was advantageous to take steps to increase student buy-in of the case study analysis. Consequently, it was imperative that the instructors educated students on the benefits of case study analysis. The consistent application of this pre-work tended to gain their approval.

While there are many different approaches to case study analysis, allowing students to create their own format was not working, nor was there consistency in approach other than a SWOT analysis. To assist students, a standardized format was developed, and students were required to use it. In addition, a rubric was created outlining what was expected in each of five sections: (1) written presentation and APA; (2) case recap, problem identification, root issues uncovered and examined; (3) marketing mix, social media, and SWOT analysis generation; (4) sound alternatives/measurements; and (5) recommendation. Each of the five sections in the case study format was worth up to 20 points, with an overall total of 100 points per case. Earning points in each section of the rubric was identified, along with levels of achievement, verbiage to explain how work was being evaluated, and a point range in each area.

As part of the introduction to case study, students were given samples of exemplary case study work. Then, the format was broken into their distinct pieces, and each part was discussed and practiced (formative) in greater detail. For example, part of one evening's class was spent on a contemporary case reviewing the "case recap" portion of the format. In this section, the students worked individually and then as a group to refine their respective problem statements.

This process was repeated until each section had been examined. This entire selling, educating, and practicing of the case study analysis process took the first three weeks of a 12-week course to complete. Once the formative or partial practice sessions were completed, the students were given a larger (graded) summative case to analyze in its entirety; this case was due the fourth week of class.

It was concluded that this format gave the students guidance for organizing and analyzing their reports. Plus, special care was spent on revising and updating the rubric in an attempt to mirror the changes to the case study format. Thus, the learning matched smartly with the rubric. As a result, students gained a sense of confidence on the structure and priorities of scoring. As an added benefit, new adjunct instructors, also, became more confident in grading the cases as they were provided excellent examples and detailed rubrics.

The goal was to complete the entire grading process within one week of the next class meeting. The calendar was set so that there would be weeks between receiving feedback and submitting the following case, allowing students time to reflect upon and improve their analyses. Students could exercise the option to have offline conversations with their instructor to further clarify any outstanding questions.

The marketing educators, dedicated to continual improvement in MBA 635, introduced new cases to replace outdated studies. Part of keeping integrity in the system was to refresh the cases, which helped facilitate conversations on current issues plus reduce cheating; this part of the process continued to be a challenge. Overall, there has been an improvement in the consistency and quality of student work in both the residential and online courses leading to fewer drop-outs per section. A typical drop rate was about 20 percent per course; presently, the average is approximately five to ten percent per section.

References Available Upon Request