

HEY, WE MISSED THE EXIT: TEACHING MARKETING STUDENTS TO NAVIGATE IN A CHANGING BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

Students preparing for rapid changes in today's marketplace need to think of what could happen in the future and ways to deal with it (Ackerman, Gross and Perner 2000). In this study we explore the degree to which marketing instructors feel coursework can prepare students to think critically about the future and the extent to which they perceive that, when balanced with other demands on classroom time, this should be a significant course objective. This inquiry helps us understand instructor perceptions of both students and the curriculum.

We also sought to examine the types of approaches used by instructors. For example, Van Doren and Smith (1999) suggested using scenario planning to encourage experienced MBA students to envision multiple future environments. A survey of marketing educators by Smart et al. (1999) found that use of technology has increased and in-class lecture has decreased. Preparing students to be flexible and insightful in the face of rapid change while also providing the practical skills most entry-level jobs require is not easy. For example, considerable effort has been given to incorporating the immediate impact of e-commerce into marketing curricula. On the other hand, considerably less time has been spent on how to deal with the more basic marketplace changes this new technology has helped to create.

We conducted exploratory depth interviews with eight marketing faculty members from three universities. One university has a research focus while the other two are more teaching focused. Informants represented a variety of ages and lengths of experience teaching courses ranging from introductory to capstone marketing management courses as well as various specialized undergraduate and graduate courses. The researchers jointly drew up a list of issues or interview topics to be addressed. However, in an effort to encourage informants to

freely elaborate on any and all issues deemed relevant and important from their perspectives, interviews were kept loosely structured and questioning was relatively nondirective.

Informants suggested that teaching students to anticipate future change in business is a challenging but important task. With one exception, informants said it is possible but requires considerable work on the part of both instructor and student. There was quite a diversity of opinion as to when, where and how these skills should be learned. Some include assignments related to a future focus in every course. Others expressed the belief that it should not be taught in basic courses, but in upper-level courses specifically related to new product development or entrepreneurship. Generally, assignments paralleled instructor opinions. Projects specifically aimed at building students' skills in anticipating future change in business were given by those who were the most optimistic that those skills can be taught. These results provide the basis for future research on pedagogical methods that will lead to flexible, well-trained leaders in business.

REFERENCES

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