

ABSTRACT

THE INTRODUCTORY MARKETING COURSE: IS IT TIME FOR CHANGE?

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As a course normally required for all business majors, the introductory marketing course plays a key role in the business curriculum. As we rapidly move into the 21st century, this article examines the basic course in an effort to offer some suggestions for improvements. With a static approach that has lasted for more than thirty years and the movement to new pedagogy in the form of the large class format of instruction, the introductory course in marketing may be a prime candidate for change.

The contention here is that the basic course must change to meet the needs of a changing environment. This paper examines this contention through five major sections:

1. The historical perspective is presented through a discussion of the early roots of the basic course prior to the introduction of the managerial approach. The course is viewed as one driven by the introductory marketing textbooks that evolved from a functional/institutional approach that was largely descriptive of how and by whom marketing activities were conducted.

2. The current situation discusses the contemporary introductory marketing course as it is currently offered utilizing the managerial approach. In its present format, the basic course is identified as one that begins with a micro orientation and unfolds into a managerial framework that focuses on how marketing managers analyze marketing opportunities and plan marketing programs.

3. The need for change is defended on the grounds that the introductory course does not meet the needs of the diverse audience of students in the class. While the use of the managerial approach in the basic course may provide a solid base for the development of functional specialists in the field of marketing, the approach is viewed as one that is incongruent with the needs of other business majors and those non-

business majors taking the course as an elective. Thus, the product, or the output, of the basic marketing course is the key issue.

4. The impact of the introductory course on the student is explored from the perspective of students as products and students as customers. When viewed as products, marketing majors in the basic course are appropriately served in the goal of turning out functional specialists. Other majors in business and those majors in non-business disciplines are customers that require a broader education in marketing that must be concerned with providing an understanding of marketing in a changing environment and less with the practice of marketing. Several shortcomings of the contemporary introductory marketing course are identified as follows:

- little change in course literature
- too much emphasis on the "four Ps"
- too much emphasis on marketing activities
- too much emphasis on "what" versus "why"
- poor integration of other subject areas
- little help in "soft skills" development
- little help in developing communication skills

5. Some points to ponder are offered as ideas to promote debate and possible changes in the introductory marketing course as we deal with the changing environment. Specifically, these points raise a number of issues pertaining to:

- course content
- out-of-date course literature
- continuing education
- large class instruction
- faculty qualifications
- market requirements
- soft skills development
- research in marketing education
- rewards for quality teaching

In the form of a summary, the final section of the paper attempts to provide a positive answer to the question posed in the title of the paper. For many marketing educators, it is time for change in the introductory marketing course. For others it is mandatory that we improve the course and bring it forward into the 21st century. While not prescriptive in nature, the ideas presented in this paper may serve as the basis for evaluating the introductory marketing course with an eye toward change.