

## **USING BUSINESS CASES AND A PRACTITIONER'S APPROACH TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES**

Candy Lee, Northwestern University

Knowles (1978) originally coined the term 'andragogy' to describe a model of learning that he felt was distinctive of adults. He contrasted it with 'pedagogy,' which he felt was more concerned with the learning of children...It attributes to adults a rich social and cultural reservoir of meaningful experience, a readiness to learn characterized by a real need to know and do; a life-centered, problem-centered and task-centered orientation to learning; and intrinsic, personal and emotional motivators such as confidence and esteem. (Light, Cox and Calkins, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Sage, 2009, Second Edition.)

Graduate students earning a master's in integrated marketing communications at the Medill School at Northwestern take four core subjects in the first quarter: finance, statistics, marketing management and customer insight. In the second quarter, the students take a course that pulls together these four subjects into an understanding of integrated marketing. The degree is oriented toward quantitative analysis so the course, IMC 460, has been traditionally taught with one or two sample companies as the focus and the students move from marketing objectives to looking at data, creating communications, analyzing and understanding if metrics have been met. The goal is to have students emerge with an overall view of how the marketing process is built on metrics.

As a new professor planning to co-teach with a statistics professor, we took a look at what the course did not offer: a global viewpoint, a utilization of qualitative methods, and other approaches to address specific problems in marketing and management.

Both of us had used teaching case studies (Harvard, Ivy, etc.) in previous courses but wanted something that would create a less rigid mechanism for creative problem-solving. We kept as part of the class an in-depth look at one company's data, so the students could use it to create analysis and subsequent communication concepts followed by further analysis. For a broader survey of marketing and methods, we investigated using the WARC database, one of the world's largest databases for cases and industry content. After evaluating many of the cases and articles available, we selected supplemental content, including about a dozen short cases, to address the following topics:

How to build objectives for a campaign

Cause-related marketing

Acquisition/Retention/Loyalty

Service industries growth

Local vs. Global marketing approaches

We found it necessary to change how we implemented exemplary business cases vs. teaching cases in the classroom. First, with teaching cases, there was always a pre-designed problem inherent in the case. Not so in business cases. The background, problems, objectives, solutions and results are included.

Second, current, relevant and engaging real-world scenarios had to be matched with the course topics and learning objectives. This was less difficult than we had imagined with access to a large database of cases and the ability to search and filter on specific marketing topics (and/or campaign objectives.)

On each topic, we assigned several short cases, which included both analysis and creative video from actual marketing programs or ad campaigns. Students were tasked to review each case and answer, in bullet points, questions about hypothetical scenarios or specific insights pulled from the case(s). The questions we developed were typically one or two paragraphs.

There were several side benefits with the redesign. First, we noticed early in the course roll out that this new format increased the demand on students for critical thinking and creative problem solving. Second, student involvement increased dramatically. We had a very interactive classroom full of discussion and debate. With 50 people in an amphitheater setting, this is quite unusual. Third, the students' answers provided insight into an even broader view of marketing, bringing up issues such as distribution, pricing on expiring inventory, measurement on loyalty programs, etc.

These exercises spawned many hours of discussions and the students came to class with strong views; every student became a passionate marketer through the course. The students used the case write-ups to jump-start their thinking about a variety of integrated marketing issues.

We also utilized the WARC industry sector briefings and company profiles to look at several different markets and brands from a global perspective. Students read industry and company reports on a variety of verticals, including beverage, social causes, and tourism. Interestingly, many students asked if they could access the database to research other industries and companies that interested them personally.

At the end of the course, students evaluated the content and instruction. We supplemented our normal course evaluation materials with an anonymous survey about the cases. 85% of the students

considered the cases somewhat helpful to very helpful. For a small minority of students, it was a challenge because they were not used to formulating their own insights and engaging in open discussion. Even for those students who were pushed beyond their comfort zone, they benefited personally and professionally.

Here are some comments from the anonymous student survey:

- I am impressed by most of the cases and learnt a lot of them.
- Some of them were definitely more helpful than others, but I liked reading them because they helped give really concrete examples of how to be an innovative AND creative marketer and provided results to go along with the cases.
- Based on the class discussion, I think the cases gave us some really good background but also sometimes swayed us to answer the case questions similarly to the cases we read, and may have limited our creativity in some respect (although I know that wasn't your intention.) But they were vital to learning.
- Most of these were very interesting.
- When thinking of my own ideas, it helped to hear what others had done. Then I felt like I was starting from somewhere, I could expand on their ideas or take a new direction instead of starting from a whole wide world of possibilities to choose from.
- These cases helped me visualize some of the concepts in its applications. We usually learn based on a lot of theory, but in few occasions we've seen such implementations.
- The cases were a fun way to try to synthesize all of our learnings. I would absolutely keep them for future classes.
- I love most of them! They are really great!
- I thought the class discussions on the cases were very thought provoking and I really liked hearing my classmate's opinions. I thought talking through the cases and questions and hearing others opinions helped me a great deal.
- I like that they are fairly short and varied.