

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF INTENSIVE VS. TRADITIONAL COURSE FORMATS

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ABSTRACT

The number of students in higher education is growing at an exponential pace. Colleges and universities must continue to explore methods to increase student satisfaction as well as meet student learning needs. An ever-increasingly popular method is to offer flexible schedules. This study investigates how undergraduate student characteristics influence student selection of either intensive (compressed) or traditional semester course formats. The results indicate that student age and current work status have statistically significant influence, while student major and work experience come close, but do not significantly influence these decisions. Further, student gender, ethnicity, and educational level also have no influence on these student decisions. Our research shows that intensive marketing courses are more attractive to young students, age 21 and 29 with no work experience, and possibly, other business majors or minors than marketing.

Keywords: Traditional course, compressed course, intensive course, student characteristics, student demographics

INTRODUCTION

As a result of increased tuition fees and higher costs of living, many students face significant time management pressures because they are working more part-time hours than in the past (McInnis et al., 2000) in an effort to fund their education. Often, this necessity of students to work outside of their educational goals is seen by faculty as a point of frustration, believing that students are looking for a more passive role in their learning and hoping to avoid intellectual challenges. Students may well wish to do better, but do not have sufficient motivation or belief that more time is necessary to achieve adequate results when compared to their peers (Wetsch, 2009).

On the other hand, students have the obligation to fulfill course related tasks during this time period and are often obligated to be present and interact actively with the other students for team

assignments and to participate in lectures (Svensson, 2007). Several studies supported that students are not only obligated, but they also appear to favor interactive classes that engage student learning (Nilson, 2003; Appleton-Knopp and Krenler, 2006; Paladino, 2008). Difficult enough to achieve during a regular-length traditional course, but can educators achieve this interactive class that students favor during a compressed-length intensive course?

Research, supporting common sense, shows that effort students expend on their academic work leads to higher performance and higher grades (Wetsch, 2009). Young et al. (2003) suggested that if students have a clear recognition of time commitments and quality expectations, their performance can be improved.

Referred to in a variety of ways, such as traditional versus intensive, long versus short courses, or traditional versus accelerated or compressed formats, these different course formats have been explored in business education (Swenson, 2003; Ho and Karagiannidis, 2007; Scott, 1994, 2003; Seamon, 2004), including recent research in marketing education (Ho and Polonsky, 2009; Reardon et al., 2008). No matter how these different course duration formats are known, the concepts and understanding of intensive and traditional delivery remain the same. Duration of study is taken to be period of learning engagement, the time students spend in valuable reading and studying (Ho and Karagiannidis, 2007). Typically, the traditional delivery takes place twice a week for a total period of three hours of student-professor contact time over fifteen weeks in the traditional semester system. The intensive delivery takes place from three to five times a week for a period up to six hours classroom time over two-, three-, four-, or five-weeks. In many major American universities, these intensive format courses are most commonly offered during the summer or sometimes, a short winter semester (Seamon, 2004; Scott, 1994; Wlodkowski, 2003).

The Swenson (2003) study discovered that these innovations in higher education reengineered the business programs in higher institutions. The pressure for innovation in higher education usually comes from those who set out to serve the needs of new and diverse student populations. And it comes from realization that traditional means of instruction and program design are inadequate. Two studies, Svensson (2007) and Ho and Karagiannidis (2007), suggested the need to make universities more entrepreneurial, economically efficient, and industry oriented through experiential-knowledge based learning, and these intensive courses are one way to begin to achieve this objective.

Another aspect of changing the duration of a course is the implication of the new generation of students. Generation Y students are forcing universities to revise the educational curriculum and deliver more flexibility for students (Cuevas et al., 2010; Kretovics et al., 2005; Swenson, 2003). Intensive delivery of marketing subjects is one option of dealing with innovation in higher education and flexibility for student learning.

The literature suggests that intensive format courses are offering qualitatively different student learning experiences than semester-length classes, and under certain circumstances, these experiences

RESEARCH MODEL

The literature review above identified a variety of ways that student decisions about the duration of a course can be influenced. The model in Figure 1 was developed to provide a more comprehensive framework to examine the convergence of influence related to the issue of these student decisions, and provides a model of the hypotheses this research addresses. This model was developed based on previous research and shows that certain student characteristics discussed above will influence a student's decision toward the duration of the course. The variables included in the research model have been identified through the literature and our teaching experience. The following relationships are hypothesized and will be tested using chi-square statistical analysis.

Hypothesis 1: Student age has an impact on selection of course duration (intensive versus traditional), with younger students (Generation Y) selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 2: Student work experience influences student selection of course duration, with students with work experience in their

major/minor field selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 3: Student gender influences student selection of course duration, with females selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 4: The current work status of students influences student selection of course duration, with students currently not working selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 5: The education level of students influences student selection of course duration, with seniors (more educational experience) selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 6: Student ethnicity influences student selection of course duration, with Caucasian students selecting intensive courses more frequently.

Hypothesis 7: Student major influences student selection of course duration, with marketing majors selecting intensive courses more frequently

METHODOLOGY

The primary objectives for this study are to test the hypothesized model diagrammed in Figure 1. Capturing the students' status depends on the course duration students chose, so our sample included two large groups of students. The first group includes the students who took the intensive courses, from two to four weeks in duration. The second group of students is those who took the traditional fifteen-week courses. This is a traditional semester at most major universities. These two, three, four, and fifteen-week courses were chosen as the focus of this study. In order to test the hypothesized model, student feedback was collected for Spring and Summer semesters of 2010 at a major western university. The data was collected from a convenience sample of 170 students taking undergraduate marketing courses. There were a total of eleven classes in four marketing topics that were included in the sample – Principles of Marketing, International Marketing, Marketing of Service, and Consumer Behavior. For details about the sample, see Table 1. The hypothesized model proposed in Figure 1 was tested by using chi-square statistical analysis because our variables are categorical variables. The chi-square method seeks to reject that hypothesis in favor of supporting evidence for a relationship between variables (Churchill, Iacobucci, 2005).

A measurement model was constructed to determine the correlation between variables, such as student status and the duration of the course the student selected. For each of the seven variables, the chi-square index (χ^2), the correlation coefficient was calculated (Churchill, Iacobucci, 2005). For the variables having a significant influence on student selection, we have calculated the contingency coefficient (C), which measures the strength of the correlation between variables.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the final results of the measures of influence of the student characteristics on the course format. The seven independent variables, as student demographic characteristics, were measured: age, work experience, gender, current work status, education level, ethnicity, and major. As you can see, a total of seven correlations were calculated. The analysis shows that only two variables, student age and student current work status had significant influence on the course formats: intensive versus traditional.

**TABLE 2
THE FINAL MEASURE: INFLUENCE OF THE
STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS ON THE
COURSE FORMAT**

Variables	Chi-square, χ^2 Correlation coefficient	Contingency coefficient, C	Influence
H 1: Age	$\chi^2= 10.4575$, correlated	C = .2407, small strength	Significant influence
H 4: Current work status	$\chi^2 = 6.5025$, correlated	C=.1925, very small strength	
H 7: Major	$\chi^2 = 3.986$, no correlation		No Influence
H 2: Work experience	$\chi^2 = 2.5178$, no correlation		
H 3: Gender	$\chi^2 = .5246$, no correlation		No influence at all
H 5: Education level	$\chi^2 = 4.333$, no correlation		
H 6: Ethnicity	$\chi^2 = .5246$, no correlation		

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The chi-square index for the student age is 10.4575 ($\alpha= .05$, $df= 2$, critical value of $\chi^2= 5.9915$, $10.4575 > 5.9915$). It means that student age is correlated to the course format students chose. There was correlation that it is mean student age in intensive course would

significant affects on students' decision. This result was supported by previous research findings (Seamon, 2004; Burton and Nesbit, 2008). Also, we calculated the contingency coefficient (C) which measures the strength of association between the variables. The contingency coefficient (C) is 0.2407. The weak association between variables indicates if contingency coefficient is zero (Churchill, Iacobucci, 2005). Because, the calculated value, 0.2407, is less than halfway between the limit (0.816) and zero that means these two variables have a small strength. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. We found that the current student work status (working now/not working now) is correlated and has a significant influence to the course format students chose ($\alpha= .05$, $\chi^2= 6.5025$, $df= 1$, critical value of $\chi^2= 3.8415$, $6.5025 > 3.8415$). At the same time, the research indicated that 83% of current working students chose the traditional courses and only 66% of current working students chose the intensive courses. It is not supported by previous research conducted by Burton and Nesbit that the busy students prefer intensive courses over traditional. The contingency coefficient (C) is 0.1925. The same as the previous variable, students' age, it indicates a very small strength between the current work status and the course formal students chose.

Hypotheses 7 and 2 were supported. The chi-square for the student major is 3.986 ($\alpha= .05$, $df= 2$, critical value of $\chi^2= 5.9912$, $3.986 < 5.9912$) and for the student work experience is 2.5178 ($\alpha= .05$, $df= 2$, critical value of $\chi^2= 5.9912$, $2.5178 < 5.9912$). Those indexes indicate that statistically both variables, major and work experience, did not have influence on course format students chose. At the same time, in our case the chi-square indexes are close to the critical value, we can assume that the student major and work experience have a very, very small influence. Finally as expected, Hypotheses 3, 5, and 6 were supported. The student gender ($\alpha= .05$, $\chi^2= 0.525$, $df= 1$, critical value of $\chi^2= 3.8415$, $0.525 < 3.8415$), student education level ($\alpha= .05$, $\chi^2= 0.4333$, $df=1$, critical value of $\chi^2= 3.8415$, $0.4333 < 3.8415$), and student ethnicity ($\alpha= .05$, $\chi^2= 0.524$, $df=4$, critical value of $\chi^2= 9.4877$, $0.524 < 9.4877$) did not have influence on student decision toward the course format at all. Our findings support previous research that student gender does not affect student decision toward course format. Also, our research is first to identify that student ethnicity has no influence on student decision toward the course format. It was obvious, because of some number of students based on different ethnicity group chose the traditional and intensive courses.

There was no significance in course format according to student ethnicity. Regarding student education level, we analyzed the junior and senior students from different marketing courses. The survey includes 58% senior and 42% junior students. In general, student education level does not influence students' decision about the course format. Also, our research did not find significant differences between senior and junior students' preferences regarding the course format. Both groups give an equal favor to intensive and traditional course formats.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study offers useful findings for marketing educators. The first important finding of this study pertains to support of Hypotheses 1 and 4 and failure of Hypotheses 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. When considered in relationship with one another, the findings concerning these seven hypotheses seem to suggest that student age and current work status has a significant influence on student selection of the intensive or traditional course. In particular, the matured marketing students who are 30 years and older, and students who are currently working, show less of a tendency to select intensive marketing courses. This finding contradicts an earlier study. Seamon (2004) found that the average age of students in intensive courses is not higher than in traditional courses.

This difference may be accounted for because our study used business students, with most of them being marketing majors.

At the same time, our study discovered that student gender, ethnicity, and educational level have no influence at all on student selection of either intensive or traditional marketing courses. However, it is not supported by Scott's 1994 study that student ethnicity does have an impact on these student decisions. Scott's findings indicated that summer intensive classes were typically much more diverse with many more nontraditional students compared to traditional, semester-long courses.

The second important finding of this study is that it makes it clear that future research is needed in the area of these intensive courses. Though this research indicates that intensive marketing courses attract more young students, age 21 and 29, with no work experience and other business major or minor than marketing, much more work is required in this area. For example, student learning styles may also have a major impact on the course selection. Comparing the outcomes, such as grades, retention of knowledge, skill development, etc., between these two course formats is also important.

References available on request