

MARKETING EDUCATION IN A LIBERAL ARTS SETTING: A PRACTICAL APPROACH USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Marketing educators have an arsenal of instructional techniques available to aid student learning. The traditional format of the university lecture can be augmented or replaced by a combination of pedagogical tools such as guest speakers, videotapes, marketing films, field trips, computer-based cases and projects. Experiential learning is recognized as an effective means of exposing students to real-life problem solving. Research has shown that experiential learning is utilized in a variety of college marketing courses.

Although experiential learning techniques are widely used and an extensive body of literature exists concerning the use of group class projects, research is limited in terms of inter-university comparative studies. Little work has focused on the environment that is conducive to maximizing the effectiveness of experiential learning. Few studies have examined the issue of department size and the effect that it has on the ability to undertake live-case projects. This paper discusses limitations associated with using experiential projects in the marketing program at a small liberal arts university. Examples are cited of successful projects and suggestions offered to overcome limitations inherent in a small business program.

The definition of "small" or "large" has no common standard in the research. A number of studies have explored the interrelationships between factors such as research productivity and faculty size, presence of a graduate program and number of graduates. The little work done in terms of size, does not directly relate to marketing programs but indicates that differences do seem to exist between various large and small sized university programs. These findings may be extrapolated to the situation found within marketing departments.

Although a small institution may be more teaching oriented and thus a suitable environment for client-based projects, numerous obstacles must be overcome to implement such pedagogical methods on an ongoing basis. It has been pointed out in the literature that

professorial administrative workload tends to decrease as the size of the department increases. The implications are that an instructor in a small sized marketing program will have less time to spend on teaching and research activities and will experience time limitations when implementing live-case projects.

Resource constraints such as limited staffing contingents, lack of graduate students, and financial constraints can all impinge upon the ability to offer experiential learning. A supportive Dean can assist in delivering such pedagogical methods, but if they come from outside the business area, as often occurs in small institutions, they may not assign sufficient resources to allow for such projects. In addition, the geographical location of the institution may work against it. An isolated community may result in a smaller base of clients from which to draw. Local businesses may also be relatively small in size. Research has pointed out that the degree of cooperation increases along with the size of the organization.

Due to problems associated with offering a marketing program in a small post secondary institution, extra effort must be expended to nurture successful experiential projects. The instructor must be committed to the pedagogy in order for it to succeed. As a result, leadership and support are needed from both the instructor, Dean, and/or department. The department should recognize the extra efforts of the instructor, understanding the benefits that accrue to the university as a whole. Coordination with other faculty members is important. With a finite pool of clients to draw from, the small department needs to discuss pedagogy amongst courses. Experiential projects cannot be attempted in all courses. Not only is the instructor restricted in terms of time commitments, but the base of potential clients will quickly erode.

Both environmental effects and the large versus small department dichotomy are two areas needing further research in marketing education.