

## BEYOND EXAMS: ACCOUNTABILITY THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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### ABSTRACT

Should marketing students have a critical thinking benchmark established prior to Principles of Marketing and a subsequent measurement in their capstone marketing class to establish their growth in the program?

### RATIONALE

Marketing professors are well aware of the growth curve that students experience from principles to capstone but often have no external measure of success of the entire program. With state legislators, AACSB and ACBSP accreditation programs requiring accountability, faculty are often overwhelmed in trying to validate their success within the classroom for multiple shareholders. Faculty have clear validation of their students' success in their acquisition of knowledge by course testing etc. However, there is some nationally normed evidence that students' critical thinking ability has great room for improvement. Thus, there is a continued outcry from accrediting bodies and state legislators to provide proof that students have the ability to think critically.

In working towards a solution, a mix of faculty, some of whom have administrative experience were solicited to share their views in a panel discussion format. It is the intention of the panel to leave adequate time for audience discussion and interaction.

### Accreditation and Legislative Demands

Following the recent report from the Spellings' Commission on Higher Education, regional accrediting associations are requiring colleges and universities to establish well-designed assessment processes and measures that can better assess the "educational quality" produced by higher education

institutions. These academic audits of program quality are likely to elicit thoughtful conversations about how to produce tangible improvements in education quality without having to spend more money. There are some policymakers that advocate this information should also be used to rank colleges and universities rather than using metrics related to the ratio of faculty members to students, disciplinary coverage, research prowess, and other matters relating to resources and prestige. By focusing on "education-quality processes," the key faculty activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of teaching and learning can be used by outsiders to gauge teaching performance and assess student learning. Ultimately what matters is the quality of student learning, not teaching per se. Learning should pertain to what is or will become important for the students enrollment in the program—not some "ideal" student. Exemplary departments determine their students' needs and work to meet them. This is why the marketing program should consider a critical thinking benchmark prior to the Principles of Marketing course. The application of marketing concepts and processes is dependent on the situational variables and it requires critical thinking about how these fit together for an effective marketing strategy to be carried out. The rate of intellectual growth among marketing students varies depending on their experiences, knowledge, and application of marketing concepts and practices. If marketing educators develop an assessment process with periodic, interval measures of student learning outcomes, then it can also motivate changes and improvements in teaching.

### CBK and Critical Thinking Assessments

Our experience in marketing education has taught us that we appear to have wondered into unknown

territory without even being aware that we may be lost. We have always assumed that our students knew certain material and facts, and that they possess certain logical and pedagogical skills. Our lectures, our texts, and even our approach to the entire curriculum are based on these assumptions. Recent experience has called these assumptions into question.

Isolated research is coming back with disturbing findings about the knowledge and skills of our students. We seem to be graduating a large percentage of our majors knowing practically nothing about anything. We assume that our students are learning in the classes we present, but are constantly amazed at what students don't know coming to us from other classes. This obviously creates a logical contradiction in the whole.

The nature of our lectures, our discussions of concepts, and our testing of material make assumptions not only on a general background of knowledge, but also on the assumption that our students have certain logical and problem solving skills.

Coping skills can become very complex. I know a retired man who, because of dyslexia, has never learned to read. He was the production manager of a company and a community leader. He managed to hide the fact that he could not read for all his working life. Students are equally proficient. Recently a student sat through two lectures and a quiz without knowing the meaning of a word that was used to describe concepts she needed to know. She memorized an answer related to an unknown word, and assumed that this would get her through. It almost did. She was a bright and pragmatic young woman who had learned to cope. She should not have to do this. We should be aware of her knowledge and skill levels and prepare an educational experience for her that would allow her

to learn without the burden of coping with a system that knows nothing about her.

We need pre-testing and post-testing on three general areas. 1) General Knowledge: Graduating students who don't know what state is south of Kansas, or who write advertising copy promoting "390 degree views" is simply unacceptable. We may not be able to change the world, but we can change our little corner of it. 2) Marketing Concepts and Skills: A marketing degree should have meaning and a value-added dimension. 3) Learning and Logic Skills: The ability to think and the tools with which to think are the most important thing we can give our students.

We have already implemented number two with exams used first in Principles and then given again in the Capstone course. We are in the discussion stage with numbers one and three. Even with administrative support, there is remarkable resistance among the faculty to change, especially with anything that could be even remotely called "rigor." Our next step is to obtain a consensus of what our students should know and the thinking skills they should possess. One of the goals is to keep the process grounded. There is no need to become Pharisees, or medieval philosophers arguing the number of angels who can dance on the head of a pin, or modern academics fearful to even define what "good" teaching is. We can use the water-engineering rule, determine where the water must be delivered and work backwards.

### **FINAL ANALYSIS**

As a profession, it is in our best interest to decide what a university, marketing major, normed critical thinking exam should assess, and to embrace a benchmark approach. If we do not, then others will decide for us or we will continue a "patch quilt" approach that leaves our good outcomes questioned and continually under attack.