

## TESTING, GRADING, AND ASSESSMENT IN THE MARKETING PRINCIPLES CLASS: INSIGHTS FROM PRETESTING

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Education is rife with assessment. Educators measure students' success and learning through the grading of tests, papers, and projects. They may assess student participation by taking attendance and monitoring the quantity and quality of comments made in class or on a bulletin board. Further, students may assess one another as peers. The scores pile up, and eventually there is an overall grade for a course.

That's not all, of course. Accrediting bodies require educators to measure student learning in ways that go beyond traditional grading and evaluation. So, an extra level of testing may take place, sometimes with standardized tests, to determine what students have *actually* learned. Alternatively, or additionally, educators may set learning goals, create rubrics, and re-evaluate student work product to determine how well goals have been achieved.

And students aren't the only ones being assessed. The educators themselves are also assessed. They are assessed by peers and administrators. They are assessed by students, such that now the assessed become assessors, while the assessors become the assessed.

Through all of this, the central questions periodically re-emerge through the haze. What should students be learning? What are students actually learning? What can educators do better to close the gap between the objective and the reality? And, given that the gap may never be completely closed with every student, are enough of them learning enough to justify one's existence as a marketing educator?

One important piece to the puzzle of what marketing students are learning that is generally underappreciated is what students knew before marketing educators started teaching them. When a baby is born, it knows precious little. Measure what that baby knows a year or two later, and the learning that has taken place is phenomenal – and very apparent. On the other hand, college-level marketing students aren't babies anymore. They come to their first marketing class with 12-plus years of formal education and 18-plus years of life experience. Even a first-time marketing student is far from innocent to the world of marketing.

So, what are "Marketing 101" college students already likely to know? First, they know a great deal about buying and selling, having already been on the buying side of countless transactions, and probably the selling side as well. They know that products are exchanged for some form of money, and they have experienced both satisfying and not-so-satisfying exchanges. They know that price is an important component of those exchanges. They also know that a lot of marketing is about communication, having already been exposed to hundreds of thousands of advertisements. They have made hundreds or thousands of retail store visits, not to mention visits to retail websites. Finally, they have absorbed a fair amount of the lingo: demographics, targeting, positioning, value, etc.

Yet, as marketing educators, we tend to measure student learning as though students entered our classes with a *tabula rasa*, and we assume that everything they know at the end of the semester is due to our worthy efforts. What would it mean to us, instead, if we were able to determine incremental learning, or what students knew or were capable of after taking our course that they did not know or were not capable of prior to the course?

This paper takes a first stab at this question by introducing the results of a pretest and posttest in a marketing principles class. Various insights were gained by this exercise that also lend themselves to interesting issues for discussion in this session. First, how did the students

improve from the pretest – pre-learning – to the posttest – post-learning? Second, what potential problems with an examination can be identified with a pretest? Third, what are some other factors that we may be inadvertently measuring when we purport to be measuring student learning? Fourth, how can what learn through pretesting be employed to aid in the improvement of teaching and learning generally?