

DIFFERENTIATING INTRODUCTORY MARKETING FOR NONBUSINESS MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptual framework and supporting rationale for differentiating the introductory marketing course for nonbusiness majors. Its two main purposes are to (1) present the case for differentiating the introductory course as part of a response to the potential of segmenting the audience served by the course; and (2) consider some limitations of the nearly universal acceptance of managerial approaches and single basic course offerings at the introductory course level in marketing.

COURSE BACKGROUND, PREREQUISITES AND AIMS

The introductory marketing course is usually offered at the upper-division or junior level in four-year institutions. Few prerequisites are made explicit, but business majors will commonly have completed a pre-business curriculum that includes one or more courses in economics, accounting and management as well as supporting work in quantitative subjects and the behavioral sciences. Nonbusiness majors typically have relatively little exposure to such marketing-related courses, except for general college or university requirements in quantitative subjects and the behavioral sciences. They may also have rather different interests, educational needs and expectations regarding future uses of marketing concepts and methods. Selected comparisons of both groups are shown in Figure 1.

The primary aims of the introductory marketing course appear generally to be as follows:

1. Provide fundamental knowledge of marketing as the process of analyzing, influencing and managing market exchange transactions, relationships and organizations.
2. Introduce students to marketing methods and techniques that will aid them in preparing for future employment in business.
3. Help students develop conceptual and analytical skills which will be useful in completing further courses in business administration.
4. Develop an understanding of the relationships between marketing and other management disciplines as well as the understanding of marketing as part of a college education in business administration.

It is almost axiomatic for these aims to be interpreted as being best represented in the teaching of managerial and micro perspectives in marketing. On the contemporary educational scene, managerial approaches to the study of marketing dominate the teaching and learning process from the introductory course all the way through the capstone case/policy course for marketing majors.

The appeal of managerial approaches to the study of marketing can be explained largely in terms of their focus on practicality, problem solving and decision making. These features capture the essence of the main tasks and responsibilities of managers in business firms. But as noted below there are some limitations in their exclusive application at the first course level.

FIGURE 1
COURSE-RELATED BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS
OF INTRODUCTORY MARKETING STUDENTS

Characteristics	Business Majors	Nonbusiness Majors
Completion of Pre-Business Courses	Accounting Economics Computer Programming Management	Usually none
Specific Prerequisites	Junior standing, admission to the business program and at least one course in economics	Junior standing
Completion of Cognate Courses	Most will have completed one or more courses in finance and other upper-division business courses	Usually none, except for students in communications and arts and sciences majors with an interest in economics
Basis for Selecting the Course	Mostly as a business program requirement	Mostly as a program requirement in communications; or as a business elective for nonmajors
Subject Interest; Relevance to Expected Future Employment	General orientation as to future job prospects; some focus on first job preparation	Except for communications students, less likely to know expected area of future employment; generally less focus on first job preparation
A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION FOR MARKETING EDUCATION: SHOULD THERE BE JUST ONE INTRODUCTORY COURSE FOR ALL?		

Despite the acknowledged popularity and success of managerial approaches to the study of marketing over the past thirty years, they have some important limitations. First, as observed by Kramer (1972) "in order to fully perceive complex marketing subjects we must not approach them from a single viewpoint but should allow for the application of several approaches." This brings to mind that marketing is both a managerial and social process as well as an interdisciplinary field of study. As such it extends beyond the boundaries of marketing management. A micro-managerial bias to the study of marketing may omit or obscure a number of important topics. Thus, topics such as market structure and the external effects of consumption decisions as well as a host of macromarketing and public policy issues such as distribution costs, advertiser support of mass media and efficiency in the marketing system may be crowded out in the quest to acquaint beginning students with the successful and unsuccessful marketing efforts of various firms and industries. Further, the gains from illustrating basic principles that underlie observed behavior in the marketplace may be sacrificed for more "realism" and ad hoc examples of marketing practices. There also tends to be an underemphasis of students' current and future roles as consumers and citizens who will be expected to help decide a wide range of public policy issues affecting the marketplace. To a considerable extent, then, heavy reliance on managerial marketing at the first course level may detract from the educational value of introductory marketing. To use an analogy: just as introductory economics is not taught to help the student become an economist, there is a place in teaching introductory marketing for reasons other than to help students become marketers.

Several alternatives should be considered.¹ Functional and systems approaches provide a broader context for marketing analysis. But current and effectively written textbooks which use these approaches are extremely hard to find. Consumer and societal perspectives also offer a potentially challenging focus for the introductory course targeted for nonbusiness majors, especially. Of course the textbook situation does not improve much in a move in that direction either. Whatever the label, nonbusiness majors should be helped to learn how to learn and analyze exchange relationships in both a micro and macro context. With a more balanced treatment of micro and macro aspects of marketing, students would be helped to understand some of the ways in which consumers are ill-informed, misinformed and as a consequence, exhibit a tendency to oversimplify choices and decisions in the marketplace. Using broader, comparative and behavioral views of the subject, its entire scope and importance can be presented more accurately than often occurs in the present emphasis on managerial and micro views of the marketing world.

RATIONALE FOR COURSE DIFFERENTIATION

In addition to the limitations which may be identified with the dominant managerial approaches, there are a number of other factors which support efforts to differentiate the introductory marketing course for nonbusiness majors. For the sake of brevity, several are summarized in Figure 2. In the marketing education literature, theoretical as well as empirical support for differentiation

¹The helpful comments of the reviewers are acknowledged with special thanks in connection with the portion of the paper devoted to alternatives and responses to student educational needs.

FIGURE 2 DIFFERENTIATING INTRODUCTORY MARKETING: SUGGESTED RATIONALE AND RESPONSES	
RATIONALE	RESPONSES IN MARKETING EDUCATION
1. Recognition of Student Differences	Determination of the extent of differences in courses of study, expectations in the course, subject matter interests and career objectives.
2. Consideration of Student Needs	Periodic student needs assessment; segmentation in teaching strategies; expanded effort to serve different student audiences. Included here could be consultation with faculty from areas served by the course for non-business majors.
3. Broadening of the Boundaries of Marketing	Expansion of marketing into the public and nonprofit sectors; acquainting students with the influence of marketing outside the traditional areas of commerce and for-profit applications.
4. Exploration of the Academic Substance of Marketing in Areas Beyond Management and Micro-Perspectives	Social and behavioral aspects can be emphasized along with the methods and technology of marketing practice; impact of marketing on society; socialization and public policy aspects of marketing; efficiency and other macro marketing issues.
5. Application of a Marketing Orientation to the Design of the Marketing Curriculum	Matching the marketing course as a curriculum "product" to two or more student segments; doing a better job of marketing marketing to different groups of students.
6. Expanded Contribution to the Service Mission of the College or University	Adapting course content to respond to the needs of such areas as communications, pre-professional areas in forestry, pharmacy and related fields as well as in arts and sciences generally.

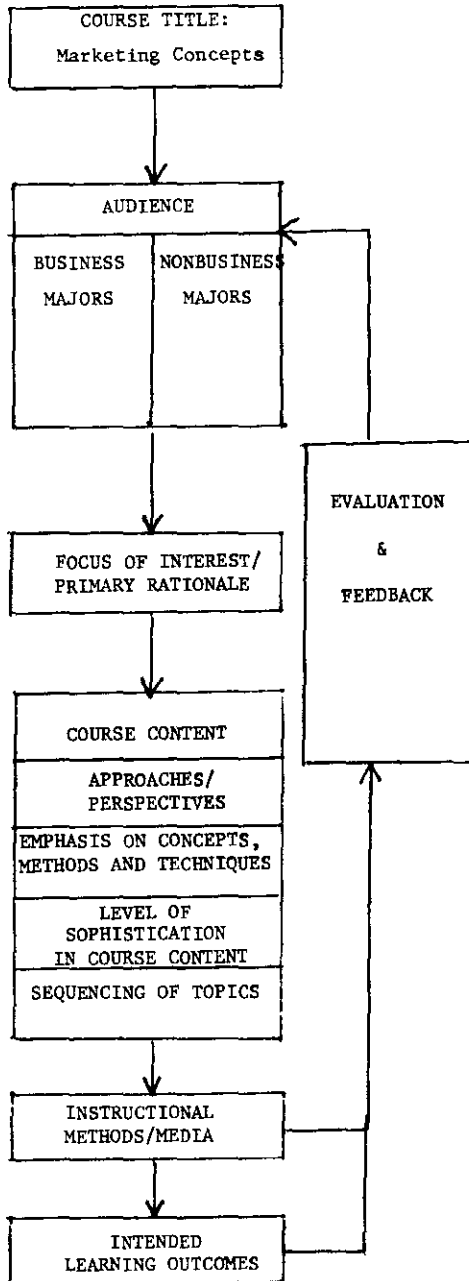
has also been presented in the work of Dwyer (1977, 1982) and in Laric and Tucker (1982).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND GUIDELINES FOR COURSE DIFFERENTIATION

In addition to the literature in marketing education, the work of Posner and Rudnitsky (1982) has been used in formulating the conceptual framework and guidelines that are presented. The fundamental steps in course design are illustrated in Figure 3.

Audience characteristics, needs and interests provide the foundation upon which the differentiating process is designed and implemented. Some of the background considerations were summarized earlier in Figure 1. Of course they should be made institution- and group-specific in the actual course design process.

FIGURE 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR
DIFFERENTIATING INTRODUCTORY MARKETING



The fairly eclectic and conceptual approach of Nickels (1982) is currently preferred as a textbook for the course for nonbusiness majors taught by the author. Previously, the integrated approach of McDaniels (1979) and the shorter, applied-management-methods orientation of Boone and Kurtz (1980) have been used. But the search is continuing for a textbook that serves an even wider range of student interests among nonbusiness majors.

Determining the proper emphasis on the concepts, methods and techniques of marketing can be guided by the types of analysis reported in Dwyer (1982). The small sample of nonbusiness majors (12 of 53) indicated an importance ranking of topics as being of greater importance to them than to 41 of 53 business majors. Included were consumer motivation and decision making, evaluation of advertising, market structure and problem recognition. About the same importance ranking as business majors was indicated for branding strategies, distribution channels and research techniques of experimentation. Nonbusiness majors expressed as being of lesser importance than business majors all of the remaining topics commonly covered in the basic course. These findings suggest clearly the need for more extensive use of such comparative analyses in differentiating the introductory marketing course.

CONCLUSIONS

Formal, systematic and sustained efforts are needed to properly design and appropriately differentiate the introductory marketing course for nonbusiness majors. A framework that highlights various aspects of the course design process has been proposed. Appropriate rationale for differentiating the course along with the recognition of some of the background characteristics of nonbusiness majors were presented. Educational rationale as well as some limited evidence were provided in support of the case for differentiating the introductory course for nonbusiness majors. As the proposed framework is more extensively developed and used, impressions and personal preferences of marketing teachers can be replaced with information and personal preferences of beginning marketing students. When considered along with the content that is of interest to faculty in areas served by the course outside the business program, the process will yield a sounder basis for course as well as curriculum design than we generally employ at the basic course level.

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