

# CRITICALLY RETHINKING THE CORE MBA MARKETING COURSE: WHAT IS IT AND WHAT COULD (AND SHOULD) IT BE?

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## ABSTRACT

### OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE

In most MBA programs, the marketing function generally gets only one shot at providing value within the program – usually through a required core course that might be titled “Marketing Management” or something similar. This special panel session was designed to be provocative and challenge the norm, being of great interest to anyone involved in the graduate side of marketing education.

The panelists took a critical look at the place the core graduate marketing course holds in our MBA programs and the challenges faced in attempting to optimize the value it can add to an MBA student. Those in attendance heard about concerns and best practices for the course, gained insight from recent research on the course area, and joined in the discussion to share their ideas for maximizing the course’s impact and utility.

In some ways, this course gets lost in marketing departments because the bulk of enrollments are undergraduates. Also, we have observed that often faculty do not want to teach it because it is more work than typical undergraduate courses but with no added reward. Graduate students have higher expectations, leading to more critical evaluations of teaching. And in some schools the course is in jeopardy of actually being dropped from the MBA core requirements, leaving students with no requirement in marketing.

### KEY CHALLENGES

It is not uncommon for the required graduate marketing course to be viewed somewhat critically by MBA students (especially those from engineering and other technical backgrounds) in terms of its value added in the context of the overall MBA curriculum, notably when compared to the value added by finance and management courses. Why? Is it merely that we as graduate professors do a poor job of “marketing marketing’s value” to the MBAs?

Principally, the answer lies within two much deeper dimensions:

1. The composition of the typical MBA cohort, who may be vested heavily in quantitative and/or technology backgrounds and come into the marketing class with the stereotypical view of marketing as more “window dressing” than strategic.
2. The course is quite often taught as something of an advanced Principles of Marketing course, which in essence is a topical potpourri lacking the rigor and relevancy of application (at least as perceived by students) of other MBA core courses.

Other trends and factors impacting the course include:

- The rise of entrepreneurship and leadership track options in MBA programs and how the core marketing course fits therein.
- A general tendency toward more electives and fewer core courses in MBA curricula, putting more pressure on each required course to justify itself.
- Much variation in pedagogical approaches to the course, ranging from pure case-driven to pure lecture, and everything in between.
- Evidence that the delivery of this course often has not kept pace with the changing role of actual marketing managers in the marketplace.
- Lack of clear follow-up courses in marketing for MBAs – either as electives or requirements – which is quite different from how finance or management tracks are presented in most MBA programs.
- The rapidly changing nature of the practice of marketing challenges faculty to remain current while new areas such as marketing metrics require faculty to “ramp up” their knowledge base quickly.

## **CONCLUSION**

This session has wide appeal. Anyone who teaches, has taught, or may teach the core MBA marketing course attains benefit. In addition, other faculty members who teach MBA electives that follow the core course gain insight. Ultimately, marketing

faculty have an obligation to put the same energy and focus on ensuring that the marketing curriculum is as relevant and appropriate for their MBAs as it is for their undergraduate students – recognizing the very different needs, objectives, and learning preferences of these two groups..