

TEACHING SUSTAINABLE MARKETING: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Elena (Kiryanova) Bernard and Diane Martin, Pamplin School of Business Administration,
University of Portland, 5000 N. Willamette Blvd., Portland, OR 97203;
bernarde@up.edu, martind@up.edu

ABSTRACT

Both the professional and the academic sides of marketing have been experiencing a paradigm shift to sustainable marketing. These changes call for a systematic re-evaluation of marketing curriculum to ensure a seamless integration of sustainability concepts with the marketing subject matter. However, this is easier said than done. The conceptual complexity of sustainable marketing and the dearth of teaching resources on this subject have made it a challenging endeavor. Marketing instructors who are brave enough to teach sustainable concepts must rely on their creativity and resourcefulness in creating and using new pedagogical tools.

In this paper we offer two approaches to meeting the challenge of teaching sustainable marketing. The first approach demonstrates how student research can be used to integrate sustainability concepts into traditional marketing pedagogy. It involves an undergraduate project that focuses on learning about sustainable practices of local entrepreneurs. The second approach demonstrates how systems level research of practitioner sustainability efforts led to a complete re-conceptualization of marketing and resulted in a new textbook for advanced undergraduate and MBA students. Both of these approaches demonstrate the scholarship of teaching.

We used Boshier's (2009) interpretation of Boyer's (1990) scholarship of teaching as an organizing framework for the discussion of projects and activities that were used in teaching sustainable marketing. According to this model, discovery and integration interact and occur in the context of teaching thus resulting in scholarship that informs teaching through its application to theoretical and practical problems.

During the discovery stage of the undergraduate project, students interacted with sustainable companies, gathering as much information as possible through interviews and secondary data research in order to provide a critical assessment of each firm's marketing strategy in relation to its sustainability goals. This was followed by the integration stage, during which the students watched a video explaining the externalities of materials economy as a product moves through a series of stages, including extraction of natural resources,

production, distribution, consumption, and disposal. After watching the video, the students were asked to reflect on the materials economy of products marketed by the participating companies and revise their assessment of each company's marketing strategy in light of new insights.

Judging by the students' feedback, this project added significant value to their learning. They enjoyed meeting local entrepreneurs and learning how they approach all aspects of marketing. In addition, many students mentioned that their perceptions of marketing changed dramatically after gaining a deeper understanding of its role in creating an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable world.

The second approach involved a research project investigating Wal-Mart's movement toward sustainability from a consumer culture theory (CCT) perspective (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The goal was to gain a better understanding of how motivations to deploy cultural resources, i.e., social values of sustainability, organic production, and waste reduction, change over time and how these changes might relate to value creation in the supply chain (Arnould & Faulkner, 2005). The discovery stage of this project included ethnographic research at Wal-Mart World Headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas and in Supercenters in Oregon and Arkansas. Data collection and analysis consisted of participant observation at the company's Sustainability Milestone Meetings, Wal-Mart Supercenters, and suppliers' sustainability fairs and demonstrations; review of documents from Corporate Strategic Planning, Transportation and Logistics, and Buildings and Facilities; multiple interviews with key Wal-Mart associates, suppliers, customers, detractors, and leaders from environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who were offering technical expertise to the firm. This faculty research project not only uncovered evidence of connections among consumers, the marketplace, and cultural meanings at the heart of CCT, but also opened our eyes to the depth and breadth of the shift toward sustainability as the new business paradigm.

References Available on Request