

**Developing Students Skills of Critical Thinking,
Communication and Creativity: Project based Pedagogical Examples**

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The mission of the Marketing Educators' Association is to help its members become more effective teachers of marketing theory and practice. It has always been a proud tradition of the MEA Conference to present a forum where teaching tips and creative activities are shared and discussed. In keeping with that spirit, this panel presents papers on a number of activities that can be used by other instructors to facilitate the critical thinking, communication and creativity skills of their marketing students. The activities have been tested in a variety of marketing classes from buyer behavior to marketing strategy and are guaranteed to be effective and engaging.

In "An Experiential Project For Buyer Behavior and Advertising," Dr. Dolores Barsellotti describes a project she uses to teach the undergraduate Consumer/Buyer Behavior course. This course is challenging because students have not readily linked the prerequisite courses into the field of marketing.

Students are provided with five categories and he/she should find two ads that are examples of each category. One of the categories is "open", that is, the student may design his/her own category and find two ads that exemplify it (a creative component).

The project requires a series of items that must be analyzed and explained. By the time all ten are completed, some of the analysis process has become internalized (many students seem to feel that they have an entirely different outlook when viewing ads after doing this project).

Each of the eleven items that the students analyze, are concepts that are being studied in the course, such as, perception, learning, involvement, family decision-making and target market analysis. The project may also be used in other courses such as a basic advertising or promotion course.

In "Self-Generated Case Studies," Dr. Susan Peters puts a novel twist on the use of cases, especially for graduate students. One of the ways to make courses real is to use case studies, particularly for upper level and graduate courses. This method, however, has several drawbacks. First is finding cases that are meaningful to students. Cases that appeal to someone in the aeronautical industry may leave a hospital administrator yawning. Additionally, most students do not have the time to adequately get up to speed on the ten to twelve different industries that might be covered in the course of a

semester/quarter. Then, when cases are assigned to groups, it usually means that the group assigned does reasonable preparation, but often the other groups are less prepared as they know they will be taking a less starring role.

The method proposed here works around some of these issues. First, the students are assigned to do an audit of their company because this is an industry in which they know more than the typical outsider and one in which they are able to access some of the "soft" issues—i.e., personalities, corporate cultures, group dynamics, etc. Then, students come up with a situation or problem to be resolved, which may be an actual problem that has occurred in the past or an area of potential future concern. From the data they have gathered, they put together a case study—the background information they believe is necessary to solve the problem as well as the situation as it stands. They are urged to put it into acceptable case format (e.g., WACRA, NACRA, HBS, etc.).

Their completed case is then given to another student – a consultant – who is tasked with resolving the case. Along with the more typical background research, the consultant is able to schedule an "interview" with his/her "client" in order to gather additional information. A written solution is given to both the instructor and the "client" student. In addition to giving the student a chance to practice the skills in a particular class, they are also able to work on communication skills, consulting skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking.

Dr. Debbora Whitson takes a different tact in her "Weapons of Persuasion." In a consumer behavior class students are exposed to the various techniques marketers employ to persuade buying behavior. Market segmentation is investigated by having students bring in their favorite brand of toothpaste. Students are instructed to analyze (1) the objective and symbolic attributes of each brand and (2) the consumer needs and benefits that are being targeted by the marketer. Per their analyses the brands represented are then placed on a product positioning perceptual map. This exercise enables an instructor to cover several behavioral techniques (i.e., weapons): segmentation, manipulation of product attributes, mapping strategies and product development.

The Color of Taste is an exercise used to examine the effects of perception on brand preferences. By performing blind taste testing of products, this exercise provides the perfect

opportunity to demonstrate the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic cues on consumption behavior.

The influence of family values is explored by having students complete an exercise entitled *I Spy in the Grocery Store*. This exercise requires students to watch and record shopping behavior. Their findings are examined to determine what if any family, cultural and religious practices influenced consumption behavior.

In a multi-culture, multi-ethnic class, students do not seem to have a strong grasp of American history or American culture. Thus, in "Teaching American Students about American Cultural Values," Dr. Juanita Roxas describes her project that ties in the evolution of American cultural values to American historical events. Changes in values are reflected in virtually all aspects of the culture.

Students form groups of three or four. Each group then chooses an item from a modified list of cultural universals. They take this and do research on changes in American values over the last century, i.e., 1900-2000. Each group must examine every decade of the century to find examples that illustrate changes in cultural values. For example, if the group chose music, they must find one example per decade of a song that illustrates changes in cultural values that occurred during the decade. Other choices include, dance, superheroes, food, dining, dress, etc. Each group writes a report and makes a presentation at the end of the quarter.

Groups have done a range of presentations from PowerPoint slides to films to skits and acting out scenarios and combinations of these. By the end of the quarter, all students know who Woodrow Wilson was because he was president at the start of the century. They are also familiar with historical events like the Great Depression, WW I and II, etc., as well as significant social events that have come up, events of national jubilation and tragedy. Students exhibit a deeper appreciation of their own rich culture.

As a change of pace from Buyer Behavior projects, Dr. Helena Czepiec presents "The 'Big Idea' Promotion Contest: Putting Punch into the Marketing Strategy Capstone Course." Teaching the marketing strategy capstone course can be daunting because instructors are expected to help students achieve a number of lofty goals. These include helping students learn: 1, to become more effective problem solvers; 2, to apply a variety of analytical tools to make and justify sound business decisions; 3, to think strategically; 4, to develop creative solutions; and 5, to develop written and oral communication skills.

The traditional case approach has many things to recommend it. However, it may not necessarily be the best way to improve students' ability to think creatively or help them implement their solutions. This paper presents an activity which is designed to

achieve these twin goals while at the same time energizing the class.

The technique is the "Big Idea" Promotion Contest. Students are given two weeks or less to provide a strategic direction for the company and a method for implementing it. They must brainstorm ways to increase sales of the product; develop a mini-promotional plan; and execute it in one of many ways, including a television or radio commercial, print ad, internet website. They must perform the creative solution. Possible products range from donuts to green ketchup. Cases may be ripped from the headlines or from ones that have been covered in the term. Prizes are awarded for performance in a number of categories, including most ideas and most creative presentation. Sometimes outside evaluators are invited to judge the competitive team performances. The class presentations are a lot of fun and the students surprise even themselves with how creative they are.

And finally, in "Statistical Inference: Marketing Friendly Applications," A. Andrew Truong presents his project in the Marketing Analysis and Control class. Students come to class with a rather muffled view of finance and statistics; some may not even have had the opportunity to take upper division courses in these subjects. As such, most have chosen marketing with the idea that courses in these areas of emphases are light.

From the start of the quarter, students are infused with statistical methods via the use of Excel to balance theory and application. Financial management and analysis are integral components from the first week of class with specific concentration on performance ratios. The intent of this project is to integrate all facets of statistics, finance and control and analysis covered in the 9-week duration. Each individual requirement of the project represents a module of topic covered during the quarter. Student groups are required to assess, collect, hypothesize, calculate and interpret all data relevant to the project. Students then present their findings and submit a written report.