

THE BEST WAY TO TEACH MARKET RESEARCH: A CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATORS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the techniques used by instructors in the United States to teach Marketing Research courses. After conducting and analyzing surveys, personal interviews from instructors and students, and through library and Internet research, several approaches to teaching Marketing Research were found that both instructors and students considered effective. Class format should be lectures, projects, and interactive sessions. The major topics that a Marketing Research course should cover include: research design, survey methods, analysis, questionnaire design, research plan, primary and secondary data, qualitative and quantitative techniques, data analysis, experimental design, and oral and written reports. The most effective technique to teach market research is a real-world client-based research project.

MOTIVATION AND SCOPE

The traditional method of teaching Marketing Research which involves the use of textbooks, lecturing, in-class exams, and homework assignments may not be the most effective technique for faculty to get students to maintain interest and focus and ultimately learn market research in this 21st Century. The need for a change is stronger than before for at least two reasons. First, marketing research courses have been criticized for its inability to respond quickly enough to changes in the real world as well as in the education environment (Smart et. al 1999 and, Orsini 2002). Second, while undergraduate enrollment has declined in the 1990s (Bridges 1999), the number of nontraditional students, who try to work as well as study simultaneously has increased. For this new breed of students educators need to abandon the concept of the "traditional students meeting in traditional colleges at traditional times" (Smart et. al 1999). Also, the changes that have swept the academic and technological worlds toward the close of the last millennium imply that educators need to tailor their courses in ways that are directly relevant to real business world situation. Therefore, the question that seems most appropriate to ask is: "what is the best way to teach a marketing research course" in this new era? To find an answer, this

paper examines the techniques used by instructors in the United States to teach Marketing Research courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Bridges (1999) attempted to find an answer to a similar question by considering students as customers and involving them as both researchers and subjects in her study. She investigates students' preferences for class time and grade point allocation. The present study bears similarity to Bridges (1999) in one sense that it uses students as both researchers and subjects to conduct the exploratory research. However, Bridges 1999 admits one limitation that it did not consider other customer groups in her study (page. 58). In that sense the present study complements the previous literature – it fills a void by investigating the ways of teaching marketing research from the other end of the classroom. In addition to considering students as subjects in the exploratory study the present study uses educators as subjects to complete the descriptive research.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

An undergraduate Marketing Research class of about thirty students conducted a research project to find answer(s) to the above question. In this research project, the students were divided in eight teams: Planning, Secondary Research, Internet Research, Expert Interviews, Survey Development, List Development, Computer Analysis, Visual Aid, and Writing. Each team wrote a report summarizing their activities and analysis including their recommendations. The writing team then integrated all the individual team reports into the master report. The visual aid team put together a PowerPoint slide show summarizing the analysis of the entire project. Below each team is described briefly.

Planning Team: The planning team performed specific tasks with corresponding dates to be completed by each group. Each week a designated team leader from each group would report to the Planning group, ensuring that adequate progress was being made. A timetable for the project was developed and put into Gantt and PERT formats. The planning team developed a budget showing the

anticipated costs for all items in the project. They also developed a research matrix, a planning tool developed by one of the authors to aid the decision making process; shows the decisions, alternatives, lines of analysis, needed information, data sources, and data collection techniques for the project in a matrix format (Beall 2001). Through brainstorming, the decisions that needed to be made were identified as follows:

- Issue 1: What teaching techniques are most effective for a market research class?
- Issue 2: What course content is most appropriate for a Marketing Research Course?
- Issue 3: How should grades be determined for a marketing Research classes?

All decisions were reviewed by the client and modified to the client's needs.

Expert Interview Team: The expert interview team conducted the exploratory research by interviewing marketing students, professors, and marketing research professionals. The expert interview team targeted 10 persons in each of the three categories. Time limitations and resource constraints reduced this to a total of 20 persons being interviewed. Students of a state university in the West making up 40% of the sample were interviewed in person on the college campus. But, with professors, research professionals, and students from other universities, interviews were conducted over the phone. Questions asked of students and professors centered toward their experience in taking or teaching a market research class. Professionals, on the other hand, were asked about their experience in college with relevance to what they are doing in their career and what their recommendations for a market research class would be.

Internet Research Team: The Internet research team began by using various search engines (Yahoo, search.com, Infoseek, etc.) on the Internet. The keywords used were "market research", "teaching market research", "market research class", "effective teaching", "marketing" and "how to teach market research". The search engines generated hundreds of website results for each keyword. As for related findings, most of the results were college syllabi of market research classes. Syllabi findings were so beneficial, that the Internet research team narrowed down the research to college's syllabi of market research classes. Syllabi were generated in two ways. One way was to search directly in the search engine by entering keywords "market research syllabus".

Another method was to search the marketing department of different universities. The Internet address, www.collegeview.com, is a website used to locate the websites of universities. Five colleges were randomly chosen that had market research class syllabi posted on the Internet. In fact, only a few universities post their market research syllabi online. A total of 25 syllabi were collected by the team, including both undergraduate and graduate market research courses. The team analyzed syllabi by a list of criteria, course objective, course content, research assignment, and grading.

Secondary Research Team: The remaining sources of information to be examined consisted of publications found in journals, books, and newsmagazines. The secondary research team researched data at Bay Area libraries and found books and web sites related to the topic area. The books referenced were about teaching methods, alternative-teaching methods, technology teaching methods, and books about effective learning. The team analyzed the findings from 70 different resources, 27 of which were marketing research textbooks. In particular, the team found a Business Week magazine that had an extensive article about the top ten business schools in the U.S. Efforts to locate the syllabi of marketing research courses offered by these universities were unsuccessful because although the web pages were accessible, the course syllabi were not. In addition to the inability to access private institutions via the Internet, the secondary research team also experienced a limited amount of information collected that was specific enough for the area of research.

List Development Team: The first step of the primary research was to obtain e-mail addresses of college and university professors from around the country. Using www.peterson.com as a guide, the list development team went to all business school web sites and acquired a list of 956 e-mail addresses of marketing research professors. E-mail letters were sent to each professor to verify that they indeed do teach marketing research and requesting additional e-mail addresses of marketing research professors. This process yielded a total of 363 e-mail addresses of professors known to be teaching marketing research.

This number was felt to be too small so the client purchased a list of market research professors from Jim Hasselback who has compiled a list of marketing professors including their teaching specialties. The two lists were merged together, cleaned, and again

verified to yield a total of 498 verified e-mail addresses of marketing research professors.

Survey Development Team: The next step was to develop a questionnaire for the survey. Firstly, the survey development team sent an e-mail explaining to the professors who they were and requesting them to take an on-line survey on "Teaching Market Research". It was recognized that the survey must be tailored specifically for the target audience. The survey must also be designed for ease of answering to promote a higher response rate, and be as short as possible while still allowing for the collection of necessary information. After several revisions, a final draft was sent to each professor on the list provided by the list development team. The final survey consisted of 5 pages with 12 questions. Major headings on the survey were demographics (such as describing their institution and class size), course content (such as how many hours do they spend on each topic, how effective the techniques are and how important is the use of computer software for assignments), grading (such as what weights they place on each topic to determine overall course grade and if they offer extra credit) and projects (what type of project they use). Finally, the survey asked the professors to provide their names, school, and e-mail addresses so that the client can acknowledge their assistance and send them a copy of the results.

The survey was implemented through NetReflector, which is located at www.instantsurvey.com. The team divided up the 498 professor's email addresses from the list development team and individually sent each letter personalized with the professor's name. Some emails resulted in being doubled, bounced and not market research professors. 78 responses were received. Due to this low figure, the client purchased a list of 409 market research professors, which were also sent the survey letter. Within six days, the survey development team received an additional 35 surveys bringing the total number of responses up to 113. The survey was closed and the data were given to the computer analysis team. The findings from the research were input into an Excel database and given to the computer analysis team.

Computer Analysis Team: The computer analysis team analyzed the data from the online survey using Microsoft Excel 2000. It allowed the team to analyze the data and to graph the results easily and quickly, including cross-tab bar graphs in which the averages of a series of questions for different values of demographic variables were graphed. All of the charts were transmitted to the visual aid team.

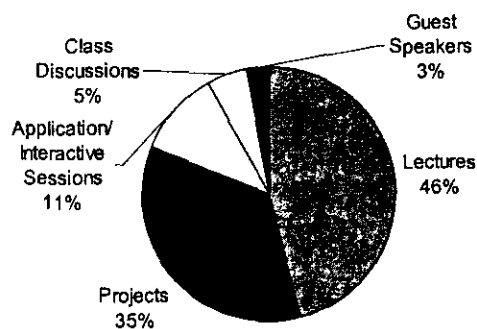
Visual Aid Team: The visual aid team then presented the research studies, findings, recommendations, and conclusions to the client via Microsoft PowerPoint. The basic task of the team was to transform corresponding information into a business presentation format after the survey data had been analyzed and interpreted into various types of graphs and charts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Issue 1: What teaching style should be used in order to be most effective?

As said earlier, professors are changing their methods of teaching a Marketing Research course to reflect the needs of the students today. Illustrated in Exhibit 1 are some of the techniques that most marketing research courses are using in this new century.

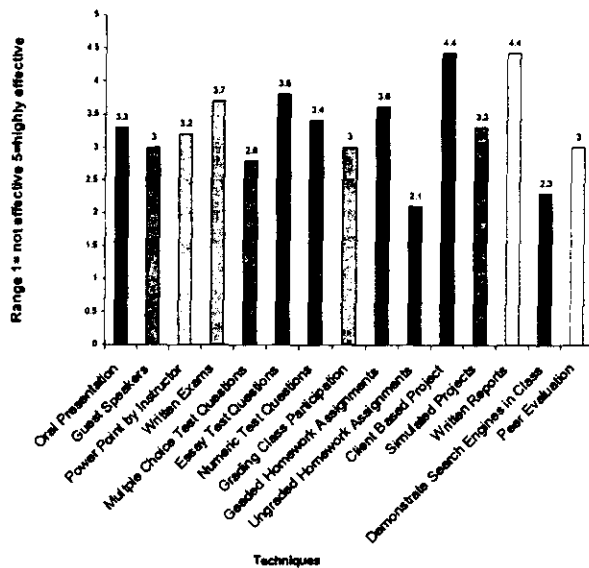
EXHIBIT 1: CLASS FORMAT



Most professors (46% and 36%) preferred that class format should be either lectures or project. Clearly, the primary teaching format is lectures combined with a project. While lectures provide discipline-related knowledge (basic theories and concepts), projects provide discipline-related skills through experience and practice (McCorkle et. al 1999). The findings clearly indicate that class format has evolved with the change in technology and characteristics of students, from the use of only textbooks, chalk, and traditional in-class tests to a combination of lectures, projects, class discussion, and interactive sessions. Marketing research professors do recognize the institutional and corporate objectives (Carr 1996) and seem to be doing the "right" things under the current circumstances (Carlgren 1996). They also seem to be responding well to challenges anticipated in the new millennium (Smart et. al 1999).

Exhibit 2 graphs the effectiveness of numerous teaching techniques as measured in the survey.

EXHIBIT 2: EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING STYLE



The top two methods ranked equal in effectiveness as indicated in the survey are:

- Client-Based Project
- Written Reports

Significantly below these but still rated highly in effectiveness are:

- Essay Test Questions
- Written Exams
- Graded Homework Assignment

Most other standard techniques rated in the high 2's or low 3's indicating low to moderate effectiveness except for ungraded homework and demonstrating search engines in class which were rated in the low 2's, relatively ineffective.

Information gathered from different sources indicated that the project approach is one of the best techniques and is one of the highly recommended methods for students to learn about Marketing Research. A research project is an important tool that can provide students with practical hands-on experience, which students can best learn important concepts. In addition to helping students relate to real world issues and situations, projects have been found to help students develop their quantitative analysis and computer skills. With the project approach, students are much more motivated to

learn the subject matter. Projects that are client-based and accompanied with written reports are found to be the most effective technique in teaching students about marketing research. 66% of the projects were client-based and 34% were simulated. There are some additional benefits as well. "These benefits include significant client-university contact, a challenged and stimulated faculty, and most important, the development of students' abilities in areas that are crucial in today's marketplace" (Kennedy et. al 2001). With any type of project, there will always be a cost associated with it that needs to be taken into consideration. Given the limited focus of this paper this issue is not discussed in details.

Two other approaches also evaluated as being effective for teaching Marketing Research are written work and exams that are graded. Even though these two approaches are not as effective as the project approach, they should be also be used in the course. Not only do written homework and exams help students improve their writing skills, professors believed that they would also help students develop analytical thinking and problem solving skills. By writing, students can learn to write convincing project proposals or analysis of an issue as a businessperson would normally do for top-level management teams.

Along with these approaches, a Marketing Research course should have a combination of lectures, collaborative learning and student-centered discussion. If professors teach their marketing research courses using these methods, they are doing their best in promoting an environment of learning and preparing students to face the future ahead of them. Nowadays, many professors are turning their classrooms into business-centered classrooms because everything that occurs in a classroom is business-like. For students to better understand the business environment, everything that is said inside a classroom or use has to be related to the business. For example, professors need to be updated with the latest technologies, such as presentation and data analysis software because if businesses use them in their everyday functions, the students would expect to learn them inside the classroom. In other words, many professors' teaching styles has to satisfy the needs of the students or else students' interest for the course wouldn't be as high.

Issue 2: What content should be included in a Marketing Research Course?

Since Marketing Research involves a wide range of topics, it is good to provide instructors with information such as how most courses are structured. When such information is given to instructors, they can see where their focus should be. When asked what should be heavily emphasized in both the undergraduate and graduate Marketing Research courses, the responses from the majority of the professors strongly indicate that the content should help students learn effectively the techniques that receive higher ranking in the previous section (and are shown in Exhibit 2). Specifically, the ranking of the contents is:

- Market research design
- Survey methods
- Ethics in marketing research
- Internet research
- Secondary research

Most professors feel that research design and survey methods should be heavily emphasized. These two areas deserve the highest instructional hours as compared to other areas. Once these topics are included in a marketing research course and taught with a focus on their practical application, students can effectively learn the techniques that are emphasize in Exhibit 2, such as, oral presentation, written report, Internet research, secondary research, etc. Bridges (1999) finds somewhat similar picture (Figure 1, page 58). Students prefer that 50% of class time should be allocated hands-on-work, lecture, and "real world" cases. Such preference for time allocation indicates that in order for students to learn hands-on-work, analyze real world cases effectively professors need to emphasize market research design and survey methods.

Issue 3: How should grades be determined for Marketing Research classes?

What percentages should be assigned to each factor of the student's grade? The survey showed that Group Projects, and Tests (including midterms and final), should have the highest weights. Exhibit 3 compares the results of the Survey with the findings of the Secondary Research and Internet Research teams based on course syllabi. Fortunately, both had the same trends although it is clear that the Secondary/Internet Research teams found more emphasis on projects (both group and individual) while the survey found a higher emphasis on individual items (class participation and tests).

EXHIBIT 3: RECOMMENDED GRADING FOR MARKET RESEARCH COURSE

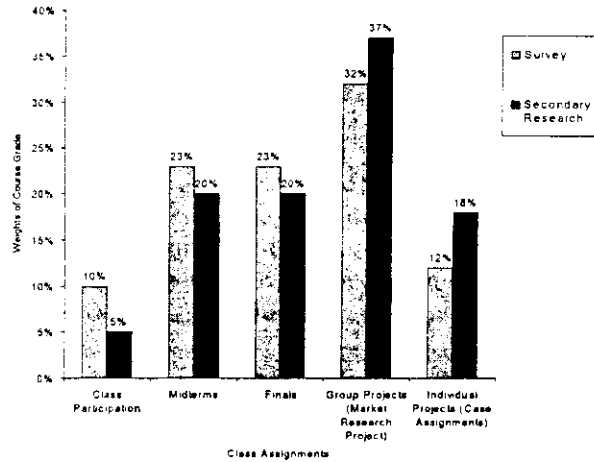
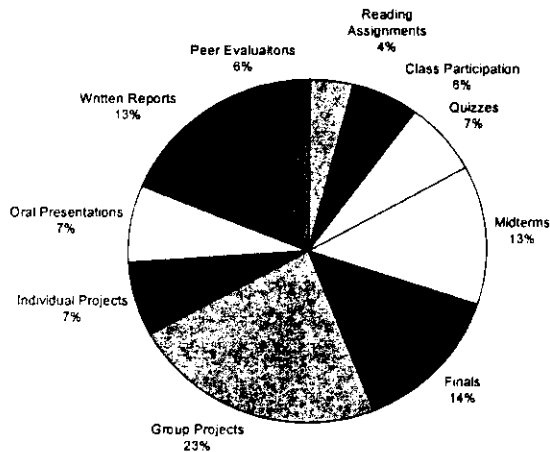


Exhibit 4 shows that the most heavily recommended weights for course grade is for group projects, which has 23% of the total. Next is the final examination, accounting for 14%. Midterms and written reports both were recommended at 13% of the total course grade. The least weights for grades recommended are individual projects, oral presentation, and quizzes at 7%, peer evaluation and class participation were at 6%, and reading assignments were at 4%.

EXHIBIT 4: RECOMMENDED WEIGHTS OF COURSE GRADE



Some professors may prefer to have both a group and individual project, where the student can experience working alone and in a group environment. When professors only assign a group project, they may include a peer evaluation to

ensure that each student is participating in the group activity. Professors may assign the projects to include a written project and an oral presentation. According to Bridges (1999), students preferred 31% and 21% of total grade to be allocated to exams and projects. Interestingly, these results match fairly closely with those presented in Figure 2 (page 58, Bridges 1999).

CONCLUSION

Based primarily on the survey and other qualitative information, the ideal Marketing Research class size is between 21-40 students. Class format should be lectures, projects, and interactive sessions. The major topics that a Marketing Research course should cover include: market research design, survey methods, analysis, questionnaires, research plan, focus groups, primary and secondary data, qualitative and quantitative techniques, data analysis, experimental design, and oral and written reports. The most effective technique to teach market research is a real-world client-based research project. Projects should be weighted 40% of the course grade, midterm 30%, and final examination 30%.

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