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## Sixty-Seven Students, One Baseball Park and Eight Hundred Fans: Experiential Learning in Marketing

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# Sixty-Seven Students, One Baseball Park and Eight Hundred Fans: Experiential Learning in Marketing

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**Abstract** – This manuscript presents a detailed look at a hands-on classroom project designed to involve students in a real-world marketing research project and which leads to those students making strategic marketing decisions based upon the resulting data. The project, which requires students to collect data from fans attending a Major League Baseball game, can be employed in a variety of marketing courses and across multiple sections of courses. In addition, the project can be readily adapted for application in a variety of organizations and settings, from professional or college sports teams to flea markets or rock concerts.

**Keywords** – consumer behavior, experiential learning, marketing education

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners** - This semester long experiential learning project provided students in a marketing class with an opportunity to integrate, apply, and enhance their knowledge bases. The educators and students learned more about an organization's priorities while the organization gained from fresh perspectives and novel solutions. The project provided potential benefits to educators, students and involved firms alike.

## Introduction

*Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand.* -- Chinese Proverb

*One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it-you have no certainty, until you try.* -- Sophocles 400 BC

*Experiential learning is an increasingly important pedagogy for business school programs as deans, faculty, and executives increasingly recognize that critical aspects of managing and leading are learned most effectively through practice rather than through traditional classroom-based pedagogies.* -- AACSB 2013

The quotations above aptly illustrate that hands-on experience is one way by which knowledge and understanding are achieved. This philosophy was echoed centuries later when David Kolb (1984) wrote, “Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” (p. 41). Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) reported that the incorporation of experiential learning techniques in the international business curriculum facilitated active learning and augmented the overall learning of students. In 2006 McCarthy and McCarthy noted that experiential learning activities “are among the most powerful teaching and learning tools available” (p. 204). In work conducted by Chavan (2011) student participants indicated that experiential classroom activities helped them learn and that they liked participating in the activity. Moreover, Morgan and McCabe (2012) noted that students appreciate experiential learning opportunities as way to develop the skills they will use throughout their future career and life. Not surprisingly, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), in their Curriculum Development Series, recently offered a seminar for curriculum development for experiential learning (2012 and 2013), noting that learning through experience is an important pedagogy for business schools and that critical aspects of business are most effectively learned via practice (AACSB 2012; 2013). In a study designed to investigate the impact of an experiential exercise on student experience and learning performance, Piercy (2013) reported strong empirical evidence supporting experiential approaches in the classroom. The value of experiential learning is echoed at the Experiential Learning Center in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University:

“(ELC)...students grow as leaders, team members and subject matter experts. They gain a better understanding of communication styles and the knowledge and confidence to interact with peers, faculty and real world business professionals.” (<http://www.cob.niu.edu/elc/index.asp>)

With these ancient and modern philosophies in mind, the authors of this manuscript set out to design an experiential learning project that could be readily

applied in a variety of marketing courses at the college/university level. In addition, we sought to develop a learning experience that could be taught in a single section of a course, across multiple sections of a course, or even team taught across various courses in the marketing curriculum. The project was also designed to fit a variety of real-world venues, from professional sporting events to college sporting events, from flea markets to rock concerts. The remainder of this manuscript presents the details of an experiential learning project for marketing students and suggestions for implementing this pedagogical tool in the reader's course and ways in which the learning experience could be adapted to fit different learning environments. The project requires students, working in 3 – 4 person teams, to participate in a real-world data collection with fans attending a Major League Baseball (MLB) game and to then use the information generated from those data to create a target customer profile. Finally, and using a data packet created by the instructor, each student team writes a final paper in which they use the data to make strategic marketing decisions designed to communicate effectively with and motivate their target customer.

## **The Experiential Learning Project**

The experiential project presented here was used in a junior level consumer behavior course at a state university located in the mid-western United States. Prior to enrolling in the course, all students have completed an introductory statistics course and many of the students are enrolled concurrently in a marketing research course. The project hinges on the instructor securing the cooperation and permission of a Major League Baseball (MLB) team located in a nearby city. In this project, the development of the cooperative relationship with the MLB team began by contacting the Vice President of Marketing, scheduling a face-to-face meeting with that VP and a small team of his associates and making a brief Power Point presentation outlining the details of the project. In this presentation, one of the keys was to discuss the data collection methodology, focusing on our request that the team allow our students into the ballpark to collect data as the fans were in their seats watching batting practice and/or team warm-ups and emphasizing that data collection would be completed each night prior to the announcement of the starting lineups. [This assured the VP and his colleagues that the fans would not be approached during the actual game]. In an attempt to encourage the participation of the organization, we offered to share the results of the data collection with the VP and his team. Finally, we invited the VP and his colleagues to submit a few questions or topic areas of specific interest to the organization for inclusion in the final questionnaire. In our case, the MLB team was very receptive to our presentation and allowed us to choose virtually any game(s) at which our students would collect data.

### *In the Classroom*

The project is introduced to the students during the first week of a fifteen-week term. The introduction outlines the overall project and includes a simple but important homework assignment:

*Each of you will bring an Interesting Baseball Fact (IBF) to the next class meeting and present your IBF to the class. You can use a variety of sources to garner your IBF, including but not limited to:*

*[www.factmonster.com](http://www.factmonster.com); <http://weirdfacts.com/weird-fact/3240-baseball-facts.html>; [www.diamond-sports.com/webpages/Fun\\_facts.html](http://www.diamond-sports.com/webpages/Fun_facts.html); or others.*

This homework assignment is used to create initial student interest, involvement and curiosity in and about the project. Students are informed that they will learn more about the project in the coming weeks and are reminded, as shown in the course syllabus, that the ‘opening pitch’ of the project will happen during the sixth week of the course. This later presentation of the project details allows the professor to cover key elements of consumer behavior, including the value framework and hedonic and utilitarian value, internal and external influences, motivation, and attitudes prior to the students participating in the experiential elements of the project.

In the sixth week of the course student groups consisting of 3 – 4 students are created and students then participate in an in-class ‘meet and greet’ activity lasting approximately 15 minutes. At the start of the activity, students are informed that the goal of the activity is to have members of each team learn something interesting and unexpected about each of their teammates and to be prepared to share that information with the other teams. At the end of the ‘meet and greet’, each student introduces another member of their team to the class and shares the interesting fact about that team member.

Upon completion of the ‘meet and greet’ activity, and while the students are still gathered in their groups, the following handout is distributed to each group. (The information on the handout is also provided to the class via Power Point slides):

#### **Handout #1.**

##### Real-World Marketing Project

*Your assignment is to put what you are learning in this course into action. Working together, we will travel to [insert name of ballpark here] to survey fans attending a major league baseball game and to learn more about their attitudes and perceptions about the team, the ballpark and the game of baseball. We will also explore what motivates the fans to attend the game and their loyalty to the team.*

*After we survey the fans, you and your teammates will use the resultant data to:*

- 1. Identify one target market and create a target customer profile of that target market (we’ll talk more about this later);*
- 2. Using the data generated from our survey, make several key marketing and promotion decisions;*

3. *Write a group paper in which you present your target customer profile and justify your marketing decisions.*

Immediately after students receive Handout #1, and during the same class period in which the handout was distributed, students participate in a question-and-answer period. Past experience has revealed that students typically have a variety of questions and concerns about the project and the logistics of the data collection. Typical questions raised by the students during this discussion include:

1. *How are we going to get to the ballpark...do we have to drive ourselves?*
2. *How many people do we have to survey?*
3. *What if I don't know anything about the game of baseball?*
4. *What questions do we ask of the fans?*
5. *When will we survey fans?*
6. *Do we have to come to class on the days we collect data?*

These (and other) questions lead to further verbal and written directions from the professor and to the distribution of Handout #2. The following information is included on the second handout:

#### **Handout #2**

##### Getting to the Ballpark and Gathering the Data

1. *How are we going to get to the ballpark?*

The University will provide transportation for you...from campus to the ballpark and back. We will be using 15-person passenger vans that will carry you, your teammates and the data collection materials.

2. *How many people do we have to survey? How many surveys do we need?*

Each member of your team will be required to collect a minimum of 10 completed questionnaires. So, if you have 4 members on your team, your team will be required to collect 40 completed questionnaires. Typically, you will find it quite manageable to collect more than 10 questionnaires and you are encouraged to do so. Remember: each 4-member team is responsible for collecting a total of 40 completed questionnaires. ***This does NOT mean that each member of the group must collect 40 completed questionnaires.***

3. *What if I don't know anything about the game of baseball?*

It doesn't matter whether you are a baseball expert or if you know absolutely nothing about the game. You'll be asking fans to answer questions or respond to statements about their perceptions of and attitudes about baseball. Past experience with this project shows that the fans are very willing to complete the questionnaire for you.

4. *What questions will we ask the fans?*

I will provide you with a questionnaire that you will ask fans to complete. We'll talk in class about the questionnaire and we'll discuss the questions/statements to which fans will respond. All fans participating in the study will receive identical questionnaires.

5. *When will we survey the fans?*

You will select one of those three [insert name of team here] games at which you will collect your data. We'll leave campus around 3:30 in the afternoon and will begin our data collection as soon as the gates at the park open (approximately 5:00 p.m.). We will complete the data collection process each night by approximately 6:45 p.m. After the data collection is complete, you will have the option of staying to watch the game or to return to campus (each night we'll have at least one van staying until the game is completed and one van returning to campus as soon as the data collection is complete). Those students opting to stay and watch the game will return to campus at approximately 11:00 p.m. Those students electing not to stay and watch the game will be back on campus by approximately 8:00 p.m. ***Remember, you are required to collect data at only one game, not all three games.***

6. *Do we have to come to class on the days we collect data?*

On the day on which you and your teammates collect data, you will not be required to attend this class during the regularly scheduled class time, but the other teams will be required to attend class to watch the film, as scheduled on the syllabus. On the days when other teams are collecting data, you and your teammates will be required to attend this class as watch the scheduled film. ***Bottom line: you will not attend this class on the day of your teams' data collection but you will be expected to attend all other regularly scheduled class sessions.***

This question and answer period, coupled with Handout #2, typically provides sufficient information so that the students are relatively comfortable with their project responsibilities and the time demands required. Invariably, additional questions will arise as the semester progresses and those questions are addressed, generally, during the first few minutes of regularly scheduled class time. In addition, students are now advised to retain Handouts #1 and #2 for future review and that such reviews might prove beneficial in terms of upcoming quizzes.

Again, past experience with this project shows that students tend to gather

informally to talk about the project details, their concerns, and unanswered questions. These discussions typically lead to one overriding question: “Why?” In an effort to provide an answer to that question, we as instructors involve the students in a “participative lecture” where students are encouraged to ask questions about the project. In order to stimulate questions and participation, we begin the lecture by distributing copies of the questionnaire used in the project to each student and by asking the students to take a few moments to complete the questionnaire. This activity is designed to increase the students’ involvement with the lecture and to help them feel more at ease with the questionnaire itself.

When the students have completed the questionnaire, we begin the lecture with a brief review of some basic marketing elements, including the 4 Ps of marketing, the marketing concept and market segmentation and target markets. (Most of the students enrolled in our consumer behavior courses have completed the basic marketing course in the prior semester). We then move on to a brief discussion of some of the consumer behavior topics covered in the first five weeks of the course, including value, consumer attitudes, and motivation. Upon completion of this portion of the lecture, students are asked to look again at their questionnaire and think about the questions/statements from a consumer behavior perspective. We then ask the students to consider two fundamental questions:

1. Who goes to Major League Baseball (MLB) games?
2. If you were the [insert the name of the MLB team here] how would you get consumers to come to [insert the name of the ballpark here]?

These two questions almost always spark a lively classroom discussion and students tend to vigorously share their ideas and opinions as they offer answers. As instructors, we listen to and observe this discussion and offer comments and further questions in an attempt to have the students challenge their own viewpoints as they answer the questions. We bring the participative lecture to a close by posing two additional questions:

1. How do you know who goes to MLB games? What information did you use to make this determination?
2. What information did you use to arrive at your decisions regarding how to get fans to the ballpark?

As the students consider these new questions, we advise them that, for the most part, their answers were based upon their own perceptions, opinions and biases and note that there is better way to understand consumer motivations. At this point we ask the students to look again at the questionnaire they just completed and remind them that this is what the project is all about: Developing a better understanding of the consumer the [insert the name of the MLB team here] are targeting.



## The Logistics of Organizing the Data Collection

In the business school where this project was implemented, we typically offer two sections of the consumer behavior course each semester and this project is coordinated across those sections. In the semester in which this project took place, we had a total of 67 students enrolled in the course (34 students in one section and 33 students enrolled in the other section). The number of students who may sign up for any given data collection date is limited to 20-24 students. This makes the data collection at the ballpark much more manageable and also avoids duplicate student coverage in a single section of the ballpark.

At the beginning of the class session immediately following the session in which the students completed the questionnaire, we present the students with a data collection calendar via Handout #3 and via Power Point slides. The following information is included in the calendar:

### Handout #3

#### Data Collection Calendar

You are required to select one of the following dates to travel with us, via University provided transportation, to [insert the name of the ballpark here] and to collect data from fans attending the game. Remember, we'll depart from campus at approximately 3:30 p.m. each day and will return to campus no later than 11:00 p.m. that evening. You and your teammates do not all have to attend the same game for data collection.

Here are the dates from which you can choose: [the reader should note that these dates are not the actual dates of the data collection presented in this manuscript].

***Day 1...May 4, 2012***

***Day 2...May 5, 2012***

***Day 3...May 6, 2012***

You have one week from today to make your selection. Sign-up sheets are available on my office door and it is your responsibility to indicate which of the three data collection days you have selected by signing your name on the sign-up sheet. (A copy of the sign-up sheet is presented in Exhibit 1 at the end of this manuscript). Remember: your sign-up sheet signature represents a contract between you and me and I expect you to honor this contract.

When you sign up for a data collection date, you will also be required to indicate choose one of the following options:

Option 1. *I want to stay and watch the game and understand that I will return to campus, via university transportation, at approximately 11:00*

*p.m.*

Option 2. *I want to return to campus, via university transportation, immediately following completion of the data collection.*

[Once students have signed up for a data collection date and have indicated whether they will stay and watch the game or return to campus immediately following completion of the data collection, this information is posted on the electronic classroom communication board. In this way, when students are checking the communication board for other course related information, they are also reminded of their data collection date.]

At this point, students are invited to ask questions about the data collection calendar. In most cases, few questions are raised and we move on to the initial data collection training session. The training session is presented in the following format and includes Handout #4, which is distributed to each student and is also presented via Power Point slides. The instructor then asks for two student volunteers, one who will play the role of a fan who agrees to participate in the data collection and a second who will play the role of a fan who chooses not to participate. The instructor plays the role of a student asking fans to complete the questionnaire. During this role-play, the instructor carries with him/her a data collection bag containing questionnaires, pens, and clipboards. The instructor also wears a baseball cap and polo shirt, both emblazoned with the university logo and reminds students that they should wear, during the data collection process, similar attire. With the data collection scenario established, the instructor begins the role-play by following the instructions on Handout #4.

#### Handout #4

##### Data Collection Training

**Step 1. (The instructor approaches the student volunteer playing the role of the fan who agrees to complete the questionnaire)**

Approach a fan seated in your assigned section on the ballpark and begins with the following introduction: *“Hello, my name is [insert student’s first name] and I’m here working with the [insert MLB team name here] and [insert name of the university here]. As part of a class assignment, I am asking fans like you to tell me about being a baseball fan. Would you complete a brief questionnaire for me?”*

**Step 2.** If the fan agrees to complete the questionnaire: *“Thank you. Here is a clipboard, a pen and questionnaire. Take your time and when you are done, I’ll be back to collect the questionnaire and the other materials.”* (The professor reaches into his/her data collection bag, removes the data collection materials and hands them to the student volunteer). Move to another nearby fan and repeat Step 1.

If the fan chooses not to complete the questionnaire: (The instructor approaches the student playing the role of the fan who chooses not to participate in the study). *“Hello, my name is [insert student’s first name] and I’m here working with the [insert MLB team name here] and [insert name of the university here]. As part of a class assignment, I am asking fans like you to tell me about being a baseball fan. Would you complete a brief questionnaire for me?”* (The student role player responds by saying *“No thank you.”*)

*“Thank you anyway. Enjoy the game.”* Move on to another nearby fan and repeat step 1.

**Step 3.** Repeat steps 1 and 2 until you have ten clipboards, questionnaires and pens distributed to ten different fans.

**Step 4.** Walk to the concourse directly behind the fans completing the questionnaire. Observe the fans and when you see that a fan has completed the questionnaire, approach that fan and say, *“Thank you for your help.”* Make sure that you collect the questionnaire, the clipboard and the pen from each fan, place the materials in your data collection bag, and return to the data collection starting point.

After the data collection role-play is completed and the instructions on handout #4 have been reviewed, students are asked to voice any concerns or questions they have about the data collection process. Typically few questions are raised at this point in the discussion and students are informed that they should keep Handout #4 for review and to prepare for possible future classroom quizzes covering the information. [And, yes, invariably future quizzes do cover the information presented on Handouts 1, 2, and 4]. For the most part, this is the last in-class discussion of the class project until about the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the course.

## **The Data Collection Methodology**

One day prior to each data collection date, the instructor contacts each student signed up to collect data on that date (about 20-24 students each day) via e-mail and reminds the student to meet at 3:20 p.m. on the following day at a prearranged location just outside of the business school building. (While the plan is to have all students on board the university van by 3:30 p.m. and to depart for the ballpark no later than 3:45 p.m., it is not unusual to have one or two students run a few minutes late. By telling the students to meet at 3:20 p.m., we build in a small ‘departure time cushion’). On the day of each game, once all the students who have signed up to collect data at that game have arrived at the departure point, the instructor and his/her faculty research team (we use a team consisting of the instructor and at least 2 colleagues to facilitate student transportation to and from the ballpark and the management of the student teams at the ballpark) load the data collection bags for each student (these bags are carried by the students as they collect data and each data collection bag contains 10

clipboards, 15 pens, and 10 questionnaires) into one of the two university vans. The students then board the vans (about 12 students in each van) and we depart for the ballpark.

### *At the Ballpark*

Upon arrival at the ballpark (approximately 30 minutes prior to the start of the game) the instructor and the students are met by the organization's VP of Marketing at the main gate to the ballpark. The VP distributes credentials to each student and to the instructors. These credentials allow the student and instructors a) entrance to the ballpark and 2) access to all levels (with the exception of executive suites and professional scout seating areas) of the park. Once the credentials have been distributed, one of the instructors gathers all students who opted to stay to watch the ballgame after completion of the data collection and takes the students to buy game tickets (students are required to buy their own tickets and, for logistical reasons, all students and the instructor(s) are seated in the same general area). These students are informed that they and the instructor will all meet at the 'data drop zone' immediately after the ballgame concludes.

The instructor and the 'stay for the game students' return to the main gate and rejoin the other instructors and the 'return to campus' students. All students and the instructors enter the ballpark and assemble as a group in a quiet area on the main concourse. Students are directed to check the contents of the data collection bags and to make sure that each bag contains the necessary materials. Student are then informed that each of them will be assigned to collect data from fans seated in a specific seating section of the ballpark and that they should collect data only from fans seated in the designated section. Copies of Handout #4 are distributed to each student and a brief role-play is conducted to remind the students of the data collection dialogue. (This role-play has also proven to increase the students' confidence as they move into the seating areas to collect data). Upon completion of the role-play, the instructors ask the students to voice any questions or concerns they might have before they 'go to work'. It is common for one or more students to voice trepidation regarding actually asking fans to complete a questionnaire. The instructors remind the students that in the past the fans have been very willing to work with students on similar projects and tend to be very friendly. We also encourage the students to relax, have fun, and enjoy themselves. Finally, we advise the students to remember that they are representing [insert the name of the university here] and themselves and to be courteous and professional. If there are no further questions from the students at this point, the students are directed to meet at the exact location where this final role-play has occurred as soon as their final questionnaire has been completed. This location is now dubbed the 'data drop-off zone'. One member of the faculty research team remains at this location until that day's data collection has been completed and all students have returned to the data drop-off zone.

The instructor and the students now move from the data drop-off zone to the first row of seats on the first level of the fan seating area and each student is assigned to a specific seating section for his/her data collection. [A different level/area of the

ballpark is targeted for data collection on each data collection day]. As the instructor and the students walk across the front of the seating sections, one student is dropped off at each section until all students have been physically positioned in each section. Upon placement in their assigned section, students are advised to 'go to work'. While the students are collecting the data, the instructor travels through the sections the students are working and makes him/herself available for student questions until all students have collected their ten completed questionnaires and have returned to the data drop-off zone. When all the students have returned to the drop-off zone the instructor collects all completed questionnaires and places them in one of the data collection bags. With all students and instructors gathered at the drop-off zone, the 'stay and watch the game' group moves to their seats and the 'return to campus' group departs the ballpark, returns to the university vans and return to campus.

## The Project

As noted in the opening discussion of this manuscript, the objective of the project is to have students experience the consumer research data collection process and to then make strategic marketing decisions based upon the information generated via that process. The following discussion outlines the steps leading up to the student decision-making.

The data collected at the ballpark are analyzed by the instructor using the SPSS statistical package. These analyses include cross-tabulations of fan responses to questions/statements about motivation for attending [inset then name of the MLB team here], frequency of attending games (past, present and future), fan loyalty to the team, perceptions of the ballpark and the team, and frequency distributions of fan demographics. The results of the analyses are then compiled into a Data Analysis Handbook that consists of detailed charts and graphs. Each student team receives a copy of the Data Analysis Handbook for use in making their strategic marketing decisions.

The Data Analysis Handbook is distributed to each team during a regular class session in the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the term. After the instructor provides a detailed over-view of the Data Analysis Handbook the students are engaged in a question and answer period. Student questions tend to focus in on one area of concern: "Now what do we do?" The instructor addresses this question by distributing Handout #5 (see below) in and via Power Point slides.

### Handout #5.

What Do We Do Now?

Based on the information presented in the Data Analysis Handbook, your group must make decisions related to a marketing strategy designed to attract, retain, and/or increase the number of games your target customer to [insert the name of the MLB team here] games.

Imagine that you are part of the marketing department with the [insert the name of the MLB team here]. Based upon the data you collected,

you must make the following marketing decisions:

1. For the target customer you selected, what types of message appeals will your team use in your marketing communications? It will be helpful if you consider what motivates your target customer to attend [insert name of MLB team here] games. Remember: I am not asking you to create advertisements or other promotional pieces...rather, focus on and tell me what how you will effectively communicate with your target customer and get them to more [insert name of MLB team here] games, keep them coming to the games, and so on.
2. You will want to consider the value/benefits sought by your target customer.
3. Remember the 4Ps of marketing...will the Data Analysis Handbook help you make sound decisions?
4. What motivates your target customer to attend [insert name of MLB team here] games and how could you use this information?
5. What do you know about the loyalty of your target customer? Could you use this information in your strategic decision-making?
6. The final piece of the project is a written report from your group. In that report, you will explain the marketing decisions made by your groups and provide statistical rationale for those decisions.

After providing them with a few minutes to review Handout #5, the students are dismissed and encouraged to meet with their teammates to further discuss the project by further reviewing Handout #5. As an added incentive for these team meetings, students are informed that there will be a quiz, covering the details of the project, given at the beginning of the next class session.

At the start of the next class meeting, the following quiz questions are asked of the students:

1. For your group project in this course, what are three demographic variables that describe your target customer?
2. For your group project in this course, what is one factor that motivates your target customer to attend [insert the name of the MLB team here] games?
3. For your group project in this course, what is your target customer's level of loyalty to the [insert the name of the MLB team here]?
4. For your group project in this course, how will you use the information

contained in the Data Analysis Handbook?

5. For your group project in this course, what is the final product that you and your teammates will deliver?

This quiz serves two main purposes. First, a quick review of the students' responses provides a snapshot of their understanding of the project and illuminates specific areas where the students may be unsure regarding the objectives of the project. The second purpose of the quiz is to make the students realize the value of meeting as a team and to begin working on the project. Students are informed that as a team, they can schedule one 15-minute consultation meeting with the instructor to discuss the information contained in the data analysis packet and to request up to two additional statistical tests/analyses of the data.

## **The Final Product**

The students now have all of the information needed to write their final paper for the course. No additional class time is devoted to discussion of the project but student teams do generally seek additional guidance and tend to ask further questions during semester. These questions are addressed during the instructor's scheduled office hours. During such office hour meetings, the instructor reminds the students that as a team, they are responsible for their strategic marketing decisions and that there are no 'right or wrong' decisions. One common question raised by the students at these meetings goes something like this: "How many pages does our final paper have to be?" The instructor emphasizes that each team must justify their decisions with the data contained in the Data Analysis Packet and reminds the students to cite the specific tables/charts used to make their decisions. It is noted that there is no required number of pages for the final paper/project. Rather, the students are encouraged to prepare a concise yet thorough paper which addresses each of the project elements as presented in Handout #5. [Typically, the final papers for this project consist of between 6 – 8 pages, plus title pages and references/citations].

## **Outcomes and Implications**

The classroom project presented in this manuscript was designed with several objectives in mind. The primary objective of the project was to provide a real world experience for students in a junior-level consumer behavior course, an experience that would involve the students in actual consumer oriented data collection, interpretation of the data analyses, and application of the resulting information to strategic marketing decisions. The project proved to meet that objective and feedback from the student participants revealed a positive and value-added learning opportunity. While no formal assessment of student learning as a result of the experiential activity was conducted, post-activity student comments were overwhelmingly positive in nature. In point-of-fact, in subsequent introductory marketing courses, students requested a

similar experiential learning activity as their semester-long project. When asked to explain their request, students indicated that they learned (via the student grapevine) that the activity was fun, interesting, useful, and that it made the concepts covered in class real and concrete. Furthermore, officials from the participating organization found the information generated in the project useful and timely.

A second objective in the project was to develop an experiential classroom experience that could be readily adapted in a variety of marketing courses. The activity has been adopted, and with only slight modifications (rather than a professional sports organization, students are collecting data from fans attending a series of college hockey games), is being considered for implementation in a marketing research course. The project may also be incorporated into a junior level product development course and in consumer behavior courses with resort owners and their patrons as the target market. In addition, discussions regarding the implementation of the project concurrently across marketing courses are underway. The authors are investigating the possibility of incorporating the project concurrently into consumer behavior courses, marketing research courses, and integrated marketing communication courses.

The project was also designed to allow for adaptation across data collection venues and consumer segments. The authors of this manuscript believe that with a bit of creativity and only slight revisions in methodology, the project could be applied at sporting events ranging from the NBA and the WNBA, the NFL, and the NHL to Little League. Students could collect data from restaurant patrons, vacationers at a resort, travelers at airports and train stations and more. A related extension of such experiential learning opportunities could involve approaching the firm (MLB team in this case) and floating the possibility of having that firm sponsor a competition where the student team with the best project would be rewarded either monetarily or provided experiential gratification.

In our city, season ticket sales and general interest in the city orchestra/symphony and local playhouse theatre have been waning and officials from each have been searching for strategies to reverse those trends. The authors recently presented the course project outlined in this paper as part of a service-learning/classroom project for a summer session consumer behavior course. Thus far the reaction of symphony and playhouse officials has been very positive and plans are underway to adapt the project to facilitate the collection of data from patrons of both entertainment venues.

In sum, the project and methodology presented in this manuscript could be applied at virtually any venue where consumers gather and enter into exchanges with marketers. Further, the project could be incorporated into almost any marketing course and could be used as an experiential learning tool for students enrolled concurrently in multiple marketing courses.



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