

The Pros and Cons of “Starting from Scratch” Marketing Research as a Tool for Teaching the Marketing Research Process: Questions Related to Developing Team Cohesion and Maximum Participation Among Members

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ABSTRACT

The importance of college student engagement in classroom instruction has long been considered an essential part of the college educational experience. Indeed, an Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) 2007 report identified promoting student learning via student engagement as a national imperative. As most instructors understand, however, the larger the class size, the more difficult it becomes to engage students, particularly when using engagement exercises that require the simultaneous management of multiple groups (Taylor, Hunter, Melton, & Goodwin, 2011). Despite the importance of engaging students in education via student led projects, limited research exists to substantiate the effectiveness of requiring students to participate in original marketing research as a method of furthering student understanding of the marketing research process. The purpose of this article is therefore to explore the effectiveness of including a group marketing research project as way to improve both overall student engagement as well as improve the student’s “take-away” from the course. In addition to exploring the positive aspects of “starting from scratch research” where students design their own research agenda, the research will explore the various pitfalls associated with managing multiple groups. This abstract thus focuses on the author’s continuing efforts to integrate marketing research projects as a method of enhancing undergraduate marketing student learning experiences.

A plethora of educational research (in the area of marketing instruction) includes team projects as an effective pedagogical tool for both teaching students the rewards of teamwork and serving as a method of material retention (McCorkle, Reardon, Alexander, Kling, Harris, &

Vishwanathan 1999). As could be anticipated, however, team based projects possess a multitude of downsides that ironically include *non-participation* on the part of some group members resulting from scheduling and personality difficulties associated with working with one's peers (Graeff 1997). Bridges (1999) provides one of the few articles specifically related to teaching a marketing research class, using the input/marketing research efforts of those enrolled in the class to promote student engagement that ultimately leads to improvements in the course itself. In order to improve the quality of instruction and promote the learning experience for *all* students enrolled in the class, the author presents a number of different pedagogical approaches to instruction---with the central effort devoted to developing an assessment tool to determine whether incorporating original marketing research as a component of the course actually increases engagement for all students. Further, the research explores whether conducting original research adds to the overall learning environment for the typical marketing student. The current research thus intends to address the following questions:

- *Does participation in an actual, original marketing research project measurably contribute to student understanding of the marketing research process in general, and:*
- *Do original marketing research projects increase student understanding of data analysis in particular?*
- *What is the best method of measuring actual (as opposed to group evaluations) of student participation in the group process?*
- *What is the best method of assigning students to groups?*
- *What is the best way to reduce team conflict and ensure maximum participation among marginal students?*
- *When to teach what? Should the marketing research project begin at the beginning of the course and proceed sequentially (i.e., after each section of the process has been covered), or, should the "lecture" portion of the class take place first and then commence with the actual project?*

Anecdotal results suggest that incorporating an original marketing research project as part of the course improves students' understanding of the material, promotes student engagement, and provides utilitarian type motivation to the most engaged students because it provides an example to future employees of the student's exposure to data analysis and report write-up (Dahl, Peltier, and Schibrowsky 2018). Initial evidence suggests that students who truly engage do value the experience and that most students do attempt to participate, regardless of their limited knowledge of the process and unfamiliarity with basic data analysis. Based on the author's observation of student participation, those who are actively involved in completing the group project appear to perform better on written examinations covering similar type analysis, than students who fail to fully engage in the project.

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