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Abstract

Initial research findings are presented on the benefits of a guest lecturing program currently being implemented by a School of Marketing at an Australian University. The program entails establishing relationships between the Marketing School and leading marketing corporations. Individual employees from these companies are matched to appropriate marketing subjects and asked to deliver a lecture demonstrating theory in practice. Academics have the opportunity of building research contacts with guest lecturers which may result in linkage grants, thus improving the research-teaching nexus. The development process and initial outcomes of establishing the program could be used by other Universities to improve their marketing students knowledge of contemporary business practices and career prospects.

Keywords

Guest, Lecturing, Program, Improve, Students, Applied, Learning

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A Guest Lecturing Program to Improve Students' Applied Learning

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Abstract

Initial research findings are presented on the preliminary stages of a guest lecturing program currently being implemented by a School of Marketing at an Australian University. The development process and initial outcomes of establishing the program could be used by other Universities to improve their marketing students' knowledge of contemporary business practices and career prospects. The program entails establishing relationships between the Marketing School and leading marketing corporations. Individual employees from these companies are matched to appropriate marketing subjects and asked to deliver a problem based learning (PBL) lecture demonstrating theory in practice. Academics have the opportunity of building research contacts with guest lecturers which may result in linkage grants, thus improving the research-teaching nexus.

Introduction

The implementation of a structured guest lecturing program for marketing schools seeks to improve students' first-hand knowledge of contemporary business practices. This can be achieved by establishing relationships between Universities and leading marketing corporations thus also improving each University's involvement in the corporate environment. This is becoming increasingly important for participation in tasks such as AACSB and ARC Linkage Grants.

At the University where the program is now being implemented the traditional use of guest lecturers was sparse and arranged by individual lecturers. A structured and funded program enabled the previously ad-hoc approach to be replaced with a professionally coordinated and appropriately resourced effort that is available across many subjects within the School of Marketing. It is hoped that academics from other Universities will be able to learn from the process and initial outcomes detailed in this paper to help with obtaining funding for a similar program at their University, and to understand the stages required for implementing the program.

Literature Supporting the Benefits of Guest Lectures

The program is expected to enhance students' learning experience by providing current and relevant examples of the practical applications of theory they are learning in a particular subject. The pedagogical strategy of using guest lectures in business education can be classified as substituting for experiential learning and related to a vicarious apprenticeship model of learning (Bell, 2006). In essence this method of teaching provides the students with an understanding of professional activity by providing a 'real-life picture' of theory.

Karns (2005) study suggests that "students' perceptions of learning activities are now structured by the degree to which the activities are enjoyable, challenging, and real world"

(p.170). Through his research on pedagogical tools in marketing education, guest speakers were found to be stimulating (versus dull), requiring less effort (versus much effort) and applied/concrete (versus theoretical/abstract) (Karns, 1993). In this study, guest speakers were the most preferred method of learning, however, internships were not part of the 1993 study, and when they were included in the 2004 study they became the most preferred method of learning (Karns 2005). He concludes that "marketing educators should continue to imbue all learning activities with an applied, real-world orientation" (p.163).

Internships (work placements or work experience) are classified as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and are an ideal method to help marketing students learn how to apply theories and concepts. Corman, Walls and Cook's (2005) paper discusses the positive outcomes of an experiential 'active' learning project undertaken in a single subject at Fort Lewis College in the USA whereby individual students were directly involved with a local business and had to produce a business plan for assessment. The project undertaken was extremely labour intensive for the academics, requiring human resources that would be beyond the budgetary constraints of most universities (for example, there would not be enough funding to co-ordinate and manage 200 students' work placements per session per subject). There are several substitute methods of experiential learning, such as case-analysis, role-playing, simulations and guest lecturing that can provide more cost effective ways of helping students understand the application of marketing theory. A method similar to experiential learning discussed by Sherwood (2004) is problem-based learning (PBL), which entails "placing students in a relevant situation where they can solve a specific problem" (Corman, Walls and Cook, 2005 p.51). Andruss (2002) discusses several methods that have been implemented in US universities. At one end of the spectrum is the relationship that exists between Laws Hall and Associates at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. They have initiated a complex program where cross-functional teams are brought together from several departments and given a business problem from a company that has paid a fee to be involved in the program. The teams are then pitted against each other to "win" the business. Clemson University in South Carolina have created a program where marketing executives visit several times during the semester bringing real life examples, or problems for teams of students to try to solve.

These types of non-traditional pedagogical strategies, such as experts, experiential exercises have been shown to be more effective with marketing students (Ulrich, 2005). In the proposed program discussed in this paper a form of PBL could be used by guest lecturers if they 1) explain to students some of the problems their company were faced with (for example, a market research problem) 2) seek student input into the best ways for overcoming the problems (for example the marketing research process) and 3) reveal the strategies chosen by the company (for example the details of the research design and research findings).

Preliminary Research Supporting the Benefit of Guest Lectures

Exploratory research was undertaken with students attending a Consumer Behaviour guest lecture. The research entailed students completing a short questionnaire at the end of the lecture. The questionnaire contained both open and closed-ended (yes/no) questions. An in-depth interview was also conducted with the Guest Lecturer.

In total, 80 students returned their questionnaires (with approximately 100 attending the lecture). Students were first asked whether they had any expectations of the guest lecture. The 60% of students who indicated they had expectations of the lecture were then asked to list

their expectations. The responses of this open-ended question were analysed and coded. The findings include: 66% of the comments were in regard to expecting to learn about real-world/practical applications; 16% of the responses were related to the anticipated presentation style of the guest lecturer (to be engaged, interested); 9% hoped that the lecture would help with their assessment tasks and; 9% thought that the guest lecturer may promote the company they were employed by.

83% of the students with expectations had their expectations met by the guest lecturer. Again, these students were asked to list which expectations had been met, with the open-ended responses again being analysed and coded. The main categories were: 64% of the comments directly expressed that the students expectations had been met ('met expectations'); 28% of the comments were stating that the guest lecturer was 'helpful', 'engaging', 'well prepared', 'knowledgeable' and other related positive comments; 5% were slightly negative in nature, and 3% were 'other' general and positive comments.

The participants' responses to the closed-ended (yes/no) questions were: 98% felt that the guest lecturer helped them gain a better understanding of how marketing concepts are applied in "real-life" situations; 86% indicated that the guest speaker inspired them to learn more about careers in marketing; 99% considered the guest lecture to be a positive experience. 65% had previously attended other guest lectures; and 96% expressed that they would like to see more guest lecturers in other marketing subjects.

To gain further insight into students' opinions of whether or not the guest lecture had been a positive experience an open-ended question was used (why or why not?). The main categories of responses were: 64% felt the guest lecturer provided real-world and practical knowledge; 20% of the comments related to positive impressions of the presentation style (engaging, inspiring); 12% used the word 'interesting' in their description; 3% 'other' positive comments; and only 2% (meaning one student) provided a negative comment.

From the perspective of the guest lecturer, the response was also positive. It was the first time he had lectured to undergraduate students, although he did have extensive experience in public speaking and has an ongoing relationships with the Australian Graduate School of Management's MBA program. He acknowledged the value in breaking an issue down to its fundamentals to help people gain a better understanding not only of the issues, but of the methods that could be used to address them. He would encourage his company to be involved in a formal guest lecturing program. When asked about the potential for involvement in course content, he showed little enthusiasm, but was more interested in the potential opportunities for continued association with the alumni through work experience programs. He noted the difference in presenting to students, rather than executives, or even customers and saw this as an opportunity to "give something back" to the students and his profession as a whole.

The Need for a Formal and Funded Program

The traditional way guest lecturers were 'recruited' at the authors' University were through: 1) personal contacts 2) former students and current alumni members and 3) cold-calling. Opportunities across the whole School were limited by the lack of incentives provided to guest lecturers and often new staff members did not have established contacts with former students or business contacts. Thus currently only a few lecturers were able to offer this

benefit to their students. Additionally, a funded scheme provides a better quality experience to these important corporate contacts, and helps them feel part of the academic community, similar to the courtesy extended to visiting academics.

Peterson Kramer, Johnson, Crain and Miller (2005) explore the benefits of structured partnerships between practitioners and professors (lecturers) as an effective way to prepare students for accounting careers. From a student perspective it increased their placement rates, practitioners felt they improved the work ethic and technical competency of future employees and an advantage to the University included being kept informed with current developments in the profession. It can be seen how these advantages could easily be extrapolated to the marketing field.

Objectives of the Program

There are several objectives of the program including: 1) improved knowledge of students in terms of how theory is applied in practice; 2) improvement of the relevance of subjects for major employers of marketing graduates; 3) building relationships with companies for potential research projects (linkage grants); 4) research output can be fed back into the subjects being taught to address the Teaching-Research Nexus; 5) potential work experience for students and; 6) improved quality of graduates and maintenance of graduate placement rates.

Implementation of the Program

There are two stages required for the implementation of the program – Stage I 'Recruitment and Matching' and Stage II 'Maintenance and Research'.

Stage I - Recruitment and Matching

Relevant companies should be approached to participate in the program and then individual employees from participating companies need to be appropriately matched to a selection marketing subjects offered. Thus the launch and co-ordination of the program requires a project manager who the authors recommend to be a motivated marketing student who would welcome the work experience and, if funding is available, could be offered monetary support for their time on the project.

The student project manager would be required to undertake the following tasks: 1) E-mail to marketing academics calling for current or potential guest lecturer contacts for their subjects; 2) compiling a database of appropriate marketing companies through discussion and surveying of staff members plus devising lists of top Marketing companies; 3) cold-calling companies to find the appropriate contact person to address; 4) follow-up letters/e-mails to companies inviting their participation in the program and answering enquiries; 5) matching company responses with appropriate subjects and finalising acceptance letters and ; 6) co-ordinating information dissemination between the lecturer and guest lecturer

Stage II - Maintenance and Research

The lecturer for each subject is responsible for communication with the guest lecturer/s to make arrangements to determine appropriate content for the lecture, plus other details such as scheduling of the lecture. The lecturer is also expected to discuss graduate opportunities and

potential research, as well as gaining opinions on course content, design and assessment tasks with the guest lecturer. A relationship should be built with the company over a period of at least two years (the first year a financial incentive could be given while the second year could be based on intrinsic rewards only).

From the company's perspective, they could receive a certificate of appreciation for their relationship with the School and the provision of their guest lecture. Some extrinsic incentives would initially be essential to the success of the program. These incentives may include a gift of appreciation and lunch or dinner. Companies may also see the program as an opportunity to display good corporate social responsibility behaviour, as well as exposure for their company, input into teaching content and practices, access to good graduates and access to research opportunities with academics.

During this stage of the program the project manager should be responsible for 1) organising certificates of recognition for companies; 2) undertaking research to obtain feedback from students regarding learning outcomes from and satisfaction with guest lectures; and 3) undertaking research to obtain feedback from lecturers and companies on their involvement with the program.

Discussion

"Recognising that theory is of value only if it can be applied, academics must envision the world beyond the classroom and prepare students to compete in a market-driven world" (Sutliff, 2000, p.1). Sutliff's paper also reinforces that industry can benefit from better relationships with Universities by having a 'voice' in their academic programs. The program presented in this study supports this innovative approach to teaching by encouraging guest lecturers to provide feedback and input into the subjects being offered which means that industry is engaged to determine teaching content, method and assessment practices to improve the quality of teaching programs.

A more formalised engagement with industry is particularly important if various forms of accreditation are desired by a University. The guest lecturing program also has the potential to further internationalise the curriculum through the incorporation of international perspectives and examples. It is also anticipated that research projects funded by linkage grants could develop from this program. Research findings would then be fed back into the teaching thus improving the link between the two fields of academia (that is, the Teaching-Research nexus).

The program should also provide students with a better idea of attainable career prospects of their degree as well as improve students' employment prospects by providing up-to-date information on what companies are looking for from graduates. Consideration should also be given more flexible delivery of these guest lectures, for example evening lectures may better suit guest lecturers, and could also be advertised to a wider audience.

Conclusion

The outcomes of preliminary research undertaken for this paper and evidence from academic literature support the use of guest lectures in marketing (University) courses. The processes

involved in formalising the guest lecture program discussed in this paper may assist other marketing schools to introduce their own program. The strategic aims of the program introduced at the authors' university are to assist in creating an inspirational learning environment for students, nurture individual creativity and growth, build social capital, and engage with the community through fostering diverse partnerships.

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