"Making Marketing Connections" (MMC) to Enhance Student Learning

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Abstract: AACSB Standard 8-Curriculum Management and Assurance of Learning (AoL) has a major impact on business program development. It allows for the use of direct measures which include projects, presentations and portfolios as evidence of learning. The consensus is that direct measures that prepare students for real-world experiences will increase learning and aid in their ability to secure employment. The challenge is to "close-the-loop" between what students learn and what the marketing profession needs. Unfortunately, most marketing students see their marketing program as a series of independent marketing courses, and fail to see the interrelationship among the courses and cumulative effect of the knowledge to be gained, thus limiting their understanding of the comprehensiveness of the marketing profession. Like the "running case" found in some textbooks, "Making Marketing Connections" (MMC) seeks to overcome this challenge by using a case and related projects to connect major marketing courses, enhance learning, and increase the employability of the students. This integrated learning approach has application not only for undergraduate marketing programs but for every business program.

Key words: critical thinking; AACSB; case studies; project-based learning; portfolios

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1. Introduction

Adopted by the Council in April 2013, AACSB Standard 8-Curriculum Management and Assurance of Learning (AoL) has a major impact on business program development (Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010). This Standard allows for the use of direct measures as evidence of learning (Martell, 2007) and includes projects, presentations and portfolios (Luescher & Sinn, 2003; Helle, Tynjala & Olkinuora, 2006; Pringle & Michel, 2007; Savage, Chen & Vanasupa, 2007; Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010). Direct measures that prepare students for real-world experiences increase learning (Anselmi & Frankel, 2004; Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010) and aid in their ability to secure employment. The goal is to "close-the-loop" by eliminating the gap between what students learn and what business needs (Marquand, 1985; Clarke, 2007; Buttermore, 2011). Unfortunately, most marketing students see each course in their major in isolation (i.e., a series of independent courses) and fail to see the interrelationship among the courses, and their synergy and cumulative effect of the knowledge to be gained, especially relative to the marketing profession (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp, & Mayo, 2000; Anselmi & Frankel, 2004). Business schools continue to face challenges in meeting the requirements of AACSB Standard 8-Curriculum Management and Assurance of Learning (AoL), and innovative pedagogies are needed to solve the problem (AACSB, 2013).

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2. The Innovation: "Making Marketing Connections"

"Making Marketing Connections" (MMC) is a teaching innovation that attempts to address the problem business schools face. It serves a vital function in explaining the comprehensiveness of business by integrating the various marketing activities (Athavale, Davis & Myring, 2008). MMC can have a major impact on AoL by directing activities to the major level (considered more effective) than the degree level (Marshall, 2007). It connects courses in the marketing curriculum using related class projects to enhance learning and increase the employability of the students. MMC focuses on addressing two major business school concerns:

(1) The challenges in meeting AACSB Standard 8-Curriculum Management and Assurance of Learning (AoL) (by using cases, class projects, presentations and portfolios to provide proof of the marketing programs' compliance), and

(2) The need to enhance and reinforce student learning in preparation for their marketing careers (by using related projects to connect major marketing courses and the compilation of their projects into student portfolios).

As to student learning, the goal of MMC is to:

(1) Help students understand the interconnectedness of and think holistically about the various marketing courses in their program;

(2) Enhance student learning from each course as the foundation for the capstone course (giving it more meaning);

(3) Give students an opportunity to enjoy a comprehensive real-world marketing experience in preparation for their marketing careers; and

(4) Help support compliance with AACSB Standard 8.

Thus, MMC will not only connect the various marketing courses to enhance student learning and meet AACSB requirements, it will also connect students with the marketing profession.

3. Justification for Using MMC

In justification for using MMC, the marketing profession offers majors a variety of employment options. Regardless of the option the student chooses, there is a need for a high degree of proficiency in all aspects of marketing because:

(1) Once employed, the student will be working with individuals from other marketing areas (i.e., advertising, marketing research, consumer behavior, sales), and

(2) Students must understand the interconnectedness of the various marketing areas in order to fully understand the profession.

The core problem is that many students are challenged to remember concepts learned in prior courses and apply those concepts in future courses. In addition, they rarely focus on the course objectives (what they should learn). Instead they tend to look more to the course requirements (graded assignments) for each course in hopes that they can do well enough to "pass the class". Although admirable, this approach overlooks the need to connect the knowledge to be learned in each of the marketing courses as the courses are taken. Therefore, students fail to see the "big picture". The marketing capstone course, Marketing Policies & Strategies, attempts to make the connection by integrating all areas of marketing. However, this course is taken as a stand-alone course in the last semester of their marketing program. Not only is there an assumption that students remember what was taught

(learned) in each prior course, but that they understand the interconnectedness of the courses as they were taken. MMC was developed with the idea that this assumption may not hold true.

Based on observation of students in two earlier classes, students conducted a consumer research project and wrote an advertising plan, with each course and project treated independently. Although students may have understood consumer behavior concepts, they did not fully grasp the need to apply those concepts in the Advertising course. Instead, in writing the advertising plan they would attempt to address each item in the outline, choose a couple of media forms and create a few advertisements. When asked to explain the target market used for the advertisements, and their motivation and/or justification for using various media forms and creative work, they struggled to explain.

4. Implementation of MMC

In addition to marketing management as a foundation course, marketing majors are required to take eight (8) marketing courses: Advertising, Retail Management, Marketing Research, Consumer Behavior, Marketing Channels, Personal Selling, International Marketing and Marketing Policies & Strategies. Each course has a set of course objectives (learning outcomes) as developed by faculty and mandated by AACSB. The objectives are well-established and are generated as part of the program development process. However, professors are free to develop their own course requirements as long as they comply with the course objectives. Although each of the eight marketing courses is taught in isolation, it is valuable to student learning if each course is linked as they are taken (so students will understand their interrelatedness).

4.1 Case

The best way to link courses is by first developing a comprehensive case, one that encompasses the learning objectives of each course. Lawrence (1953) offers a case study definition:

> A good case is the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations. It is the anchor on academic flights of speculation. It is the record of complex situations that must be literally pulled apart and put together again before the situations can be understood. It is the target for the expression of attitudes or ways of thinking brought into the classroom. (p. 215)

An excellent example is a case study that was developed by DePaul University's Center for Sales Leadership. Although written to teach the CRM technology course, it could also be used to teach Marketing Research, Consumer Behavior, and Sales Management (and with a little creativity Advertising, International Marketing and Retail Management). According to Millar (1999), case studies help develop students' skills in the follow areas:

(1) Identifying and recognizing problems,

(2) Understanding and interpreting data,

(3) Understanding and recognizing assumptions and inferences, as opposed to concrete facts,

(4) Thinking analytically and critically,

(5) Understanding and assessing interpersonal relationships,

(6) Exercising and making judgments,

(7) Communicating ideas and opinions, and

(8) Making and defending decisions. (p. 13)

Of critical importance is the quality of the case used. Therefore when attempting to write a case study, Millar

(1999) further specifies the following elements:

(1) Introduction — defines the problem; explains the parameters or limitations.

(2) Overview/Analysis — provides a scenario of the situation including key issues, graphics and visuals (i.e., budgets, organizational charts, mission statements or technical specifications); offers details about various players.

(3) Status report — describes the organization's current situation; includes statements from employees about actions and intentions; results in one or two key problems.

(4) Case problems — May either: (1) Give a situation and ask learners what they would do, (2) Set a task like preparing a recommendation for higher level review, or (3) Illustrate a scenario for analysis of flaws and recommendations.

(5) Appendices — additional information, i.e., documents, charts, technical specifications, etc. (p. 19)

4.2 Course Projects

A second step in linking courses is in developing course projects. College students are often required to complete a course project (as explained in their course syllabus). Early work by Gardner (1993) established that students benefit from learning strategies and processes for writing, problem solving, researching, analyzing information and documenting their observations. The new term for this pedagogy is "project-based learning" (PBL). With #1 and #3 as key, Adderley et al. (1975) provide a still widely accepted description of PBL as:

(1) Involves the solution to a problem.

(2) Requires initiative and includes a variety of educational activities.

(3) Results in an end product.

(4) Work continues for a considerable length of time.

(5) Professors serve as advisors (versus authoritarians) throughout all of the stages — initiation, conduct and conclusion (p. 1).

Heitman (1996) offered four motives for using PBL. Included in the four are the professional (based on practice), to foster critical thinking, and pedagogic (for a better understanding of the subject matter). ll are valuable to the MMC process. The continuous call for students to meet professional requirements and possess professional skills elevates the "professional" motive to the highest status (Foster and Stevenson 1998; Ma¨kinen, Olkinuora, and Tynja¨ la¨, 1999). More specifically, research by Helle, Tynja La and Olkinuora (2006) identified the benefits of PBL to the student as: (1) a concrete and holistic experience, (2) the integration and application of subject material, and (3) guided discovery learning (for deep-level learning).

In writing course projects, the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) has developed a list of essential elements as:

- Significant Content — focused on required course knowledge and skills.
- 21st century competencies — problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity/innovation.
- In-Depth Inquiry — requires rigor in asking questions, using resources, and developing answers.
- Driving Question — focused by an open-ended intriguing question; captures their task or frames their exploration.
- Need to Know — students desire to gain knowledge, understand concepts, and apply skills.
- Voice and Choice — students make some choices about the products to be created, how they work, and how they use their time; teacher as guide only.
- Critique and Revision — continuous feedback on quality of their work; allow for additional inquiry and

revisions.

- Public Audience — Oral and written work presented to others.

Including course projects should have a positive rather than a negative effect on students' success. Although projects take time to complete, their value outweighs the cost. For maximum value, in all cases there should be oral and written components. On the other hand, faculty will have to devote time to the development of innovative and creative course projects (and monitoring and grading them) to ensure that they will connect and address their various course objectives, and reflect real-world experiences in the profession. For example, the following are projects for four marketing courses:

(1) International Marketing: Analyze the international marketing opportunity and develop a marketing strategy for the product.

(2) Consumer Behavior: Develop a consumer profile (target markets) for the product.

(3) Advertising: Develop an advertising plan and budget for the product.

(4) Personal Selling: Develop a B2B strategy to sell the product.

4.3 Portfolios

A third step is the development of student portfolios to demonstrate the successful completion of their projects in each course (Syre & Pesa, 2001; Campbell & Brummett, 2002). Unlike the resume, Luescher and Sinn (2003) describe the student portfolio as hard evidence of what students can do; a visual document that demonstrates rather than discusses. They further identify four checkpoints in student portfolio development: (1) Initial phase (collect and organize work); (2) Portfolio assessment (planning and evaluation); (3) Portfolio refinement (design and production); (4) Graduation (present the professional portfolio).

Either via hard copy or e-portfolios, students can use them in seeking employment (to demonstrate their proficiency in the various marketing areas). However, it is important to continue updating the portfolio as additional class projects are completed. On the other hand, according to Luescher and Sinn (2003) academic institutions are using student portfolios as administrative tools for assessing whether they are meeting institutional goals, accountability reporting, and program evaluation. In addition they can be displayed during the AACSB site visit as a direct measure of student learning.

5. Pilot Study

The courses that were used for the pilot study are taught by the author and included Consumer Behavior (Fall 2013) and Advertising (Spring 2014), and the problem was identified by observing marketing majors in those prior courses. There were 20 students in the Consumer Behavior course and 20 in the Advertising course. However, only half of the students in the Spring course were in the Fall course. Using the MMC concept, each student-team was assigned a foreign product in Consumer Behavior class and required to develop a comprehensive consumer profile (primary and secondary target markets) using data from the DDB Life Style Study (as found in the Consumer Behavior textbook by Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, published by McGraw-Hill). Unfortunately, only two team profiles were sufficient enough for further use. In the Advertising course the following semester, students were placed in 2-person teams and the two profiles were distributed. Although there was a duplication of profiles, the creative nature of the project made it difficult to justify any two plans being the same. For those who were not in the Fall course, a brief presentation on the Consumer Behavior project was given by the students who were. Results showed that students who were in the Consumer Behavior course (and

completed the consumer profile project) showed an increase in comfort level, accuracy and success in writing the advertising plans. This was attributed to their familiarity with the scenario, product and consumer profile development process. More importantly, they had a better understanding of the interrelatedness between Consumer Behavior and Advertising, and saw the advertising plan as the "next step" in the marketing process and profession. With these positive results, the second phase of the pilot study will include International Marketing and Personal Selling. Although MMC's effect on the capstone course has not been tested, students' performance should be enhanced due to the thoroughness and connectedness of the projects (and discussions) in prior courses.

6. Challenges, Concerns and Solutions

Like any new innovation in teaching, there are challenges and concerns. However, it only takes a little effort to find viable solutions for each. A MMC challenge is in developing a comprehensive case, and meaningful and challenging course projects that incorporate the learning objectives from each course. Faculty may need assistance in both areas and there are numerous online and publisher resources that can be used. Most noteworthy are the collection of cases from Harvard Business School. Another MMC challenge is in coordinating class projects across multiple sections of a course. Given AACSB's requirement of a "common syllabi", this should not be a major issue. Although using the same case, faculty will not have to sacrifice their "academic freedom" relative to course requirements. They are still at liberty to develop their own class projects (understanding the value of these projects to enhancing student learning). However, MMC will probably work best in smaller programs which will require less coordination among faculty. Its true value is for those first generation and underrepresented groups who may not have exposure to and/or a grasp of the marketing profession as a whole.

A major concern, as with all course requirements, is in getting students in each course to do the work. For example, if students do not get a good grasp of the concepts and/or complete the project in a prior course, they will be handicapped in future marketing courses. As a solution, it is critical that courses be seen as a "collective" and that the importance of their connectivity is thoroughly and continuously discussed in each course. A second concern centers on the products to be used for the class projects. They should be innovative foreign consumer products that have never been sold in the U.S. This limits the amount of existing marketing information that students can find and use in completing their projects. A third concern is that more than one marketing course is taken during a given semester, and/or that students do not take marketing courses in any particular sequence. For this innovation to work best, International Marketing should be the first course in the sequence. Preferably, Consumer Behavior, Advertising and Personal Selling would follow (in this order). However, with a little creativity, MMC can still work regardless of the sequence by modifying the projects. Lastly, there may be students in a latter marketing course who have not taken a prior course. An excellent and simple solution is to have students who were in the prior course give an overview of that course and their project (at the beginning of the semester). In addition to enlightening those students who were not in the course, it will reinforce the learning for those students who were.

7. Example of Case Theme and Integrated Course Projects

Case Theme: While traveling in Japan you observed numerous consumer products that were selling well there but unknown to the U.S. market. You are considering the possibility of entering into a deal with the foreign manufacturers to import and market their products to the U.S. There are a myriad of issues to be addressed and

this will require thorough research and analysis focused on international marketing challenges. In addition, the potential U.S. consumer markets, and advertising and sales strategies for the products must be identified and developed.

Table 1   Integrated Course Projects

	Course Objectives	Course Projects
International Marketing	1. Understand the differences between marketing in the U.S. versus in a foreign country. 2. Identify sociocultural, governmental/legal, political, ecological, technological and diversity and ethical strategic decision making issues.	Each student will be assigned a foreign country and will identify a foreign product that has the potential to be successfully marketed in the U.S. You will conduct research, and discuss/justify your proposed marketing strategy (product, price, promotion, distribution), identifying environment issues and challenges. Compare and evaluate the effectiveness of the foreign marketing strategy for the product with your proposed U.S. strategy.
Consumer Behavior	1. Discuss the role of internal and external influences on buyer behavior. 2. Explain how consumer behavior affects marketing strategy, i.e., advertising, pricing, personal selling, distribution, product development. 3. Compile and analyze profiles for target market/s using demographic and lifestyle databases.	Develop a comprehensive consumer profile for the primary and secondary target markets for your product in the U.S. Using the DDB Life Style Study, gather information on the groups and explain their behavior in comparison to others in the study. Address the internal and external influences, i.e., why they will or will not purchase the product; and how their behavior affects the marketing strategy (product, price, promotion, distribution).
Advertising	1. Write an advertising plan with storyboard, media plan, budget and creative samples for various types of media. 2. Conduct research on the U.S. advertising environment.	Research and write an advertising plan to include a storyboard, media plan (for TV, radio, print and digital), budget and samples of creative work for promoting your product to the U.S. market. Plans should demonstrate that sales, revenue and market share will increase.
Personal Selling	1. Demonstrate an understanding of the steps in the sales process applying questioning and objection handling techniques. 2. Develop supplementary sales materials. 3. Make a sales call presentation using questioning and objection handling techniques.	Working in 2-person teams and assuming the role of salespeople, students will prepare and present a B2B sales call presentation. Supplementary materials must be gathered and developed for the sales call, i.e., the telephone script, introductory letter, sample sales scripts with questions and objections, sales agreements and a pitchbook which may be electronic. Professional dress required.

8. Adaptability to Other Marketing Courses

Other marketing courses can be included into the overall MMC concept by simply expanding the case to include material relevant to those courses, and developing appropriate class projects. For example, the same product selected for International Marketing can be used for an assignment to write a retail management plan for the Retail Management course or a channel management/logistics plan for the Marketing Channels course. Rather than require a separate project, Marketing Policies and Strategies could develop a course project that will encompass or extend projects from the prior marketing courses. The same MMC concept can be applied to other business programs (i.e., finance, accounting, economics, management, entrepreneurship). The challenge for faculty will always be in writing the comprehensive case and in developing creative and interesting class project that will facilitate integrated learning.

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