

LASTING EFFECTS OF THE FIRST DAY IN PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Marketing professors often face the challenge of motivating students who seem disconnected, apathetic, and lack a basic understanding of marketing principles. This article continues from previous research investigating the influence of active learning on the first day of the Principles of Marketing course on student enthusiasm. The current study examines the lasting effect of the first day of class exercise. The results suggest active learning on the first day may influence initial student motivation and achievement. They also indicate that continuous active learning experiences throughout the semester have a positive influence on student performance and student evaluation of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Many Principles of Marketing professors face student apathy in the classroom. It often starts on the first day of class and the negative inertia created by disengagement with the instructor and the course content can be difficult to overcome. Thus marketing professors routinely use active and experiential learning to combat student apathy (Kennedy, Lawton, and Walker 2001; Smith and Doran 2004; Wright, Bitner, and Zeithaml 1994). One approach is to introduce an interactive in-class activity on the first day of class and continue with frequent use of active learning exercises throughout the semester. Unlike passive learning which primarily involves in-class lectures, active learning reduces student apathy by enhancing critical thinking and positive attitudes toward the course (Becker and Watts 1995).

Active learning encourages interactions between the professor and students: an important component to student learning in business courses (O'Toole, Spinelli, and Wetzel 2000). It also requires students to apply knowledge which also influences learning (Young, Klemz, and Murphy 2003). Active learning approaches can provide students with a better understanding and retention of the material (Smith and Boyer 1996). This is particularly relevant to marketing professors given that the lack of student knowledge at the outset of the course. A study by Ferrell and Gonzalez (2004) investigating over 300 students found that 60 percent of students attending a Principles of Marketing course on the first day describe marketing as selling and/or advertising.

It is clear that active learning activities are more effective than passive forms of learning (Brozik and Zapalska 1999). Role playing, case studies, games, and internships are some examples of active learning activities (Drea, Tripp, and Stuenkel 2005). Role playing and case studies may involve a few students in class but games are often designed to engage the entire class in the learning process while maintaining a lighter group atmosphere.

Games have been routinely used to introduce course content (Bergstrom and Miller 1997; Wells 1991). Common forms of games include game show adaptations, question and answer contests, simulations, or other creative ventures. Regardless of the format, in-class games have a positive impact on student learning (Drea, Tripp, and Stuenkel 2005). Students view games as fun and a casual atmosphere where students are comfortable laughing and smiling diminishes apprehension regarding speaking out in the class (Wycoff and Pryor 2003). Moreover, student interest and participation increases in the casual atmosphere involving laughter (Shatz and Loschiavo 2005).

Active learning addresses student apathy and student performance. Smart and her associates (1999) suggest that students are poorly prepared for tests because of a high level of apathy. Further, a decline in test scores can also be attributed to a general lack of active involvement (Kothari, Rana, and Khade 1993). Activities or instructional approaches that enhance student outcomes are particularly relevant to marketing education research (Drea, Tripp, and Stuenkel 2005). Thus those using new teaching innovations should provide scientific evidence that they are improving student learning (Chonko 2004). As a result, using in-class assessments such as tests or exams to demonstrate the influence of active learning on student performance is necessary. Feedback on teaching evaluations also provides evidence that students are learning (Shanahan, Hermas, and Haytko 2006).

FIRST DAY OF CLASS ACTIVITY: THE EXCHANGE GAME

A description of how to administer the exercise on the first day of class is replicated here for ease of reference. The exchange game class activity is played on the first day of class in the Principles of Marketing course and is designed to encourage class participation, to help students to get to know the instructor and each other, to build

enthusiasm for the course, and to increase student understanding of basic marketing principles. The activity demonstrates to students how products flow through a traditional distribution channel from manufacturer to wholesaler to retailer to consumer. Several students win small prizes as a reward for their achievement in the activity. The activity is followed up by an extensive debriefing period to address the questions outlined below.

This activity takes five minutes to explain to the class, 15 minutes to execute, five minutes to select winners, and up to 25 minutes for debriefing and discussion. The discussion can carry over to the second day of class if more time is needed. This is particularly helpful for those who hold class on a 50-minute schedule and for those who have students who add the class to their schedule after the first day. The instructor must provide 8.5 x 11 sheets of sturdy paper to represent units of product. These sheets can be any color except green. The number of sheets of paper required will depend on the class size. The instructor should also prepare many smaller squares of green paper to represent units of money. The number of units of money is also dependent on class size. A few small prizes (such as candy) are optional.

The instructor is the sole manufacturer of the product, represented by sturdy sheets of paper. Student volunteers who stand at the front of the class are assigned the role of wholesalers. Additional students volunteer as retailers and will be allowed to move freely around the room. The remaining students in the class will play the role of consumers and will stay seated throughout the activity. The number of wholesalers, retailers, and consumers varies by class size and is outlined in Table 1 below.

The instructor gives each wholesaler three units of money; each retailer receives five units of money; and each consumer eight units of money. Although this is not announced in advance, half way through the activity consumers are given an additional unit of money as

consumer income. When the activity begins wholesalers purchase units of product (sheets of paper) from the manufacturer. The price is not negotiable; each sheet costs 3 units of money. Wholesalers then fold the product in half lengthwise and then in half lengthwise once again. They then tear at the folds to make four smaller strips of paper which represents breaking bulk. Wholesalers sell each smaller unit of product (strip of paper) to retailers for a negotiated price. Retailers fold and then tear each purchased product in half (to make two square shape pieces of paper) to sell to consumers for a negotiated price.

Wholesalers continue to purchase product from the manufacturer and continue the process of folding, tearing, and negotiating a sales price to retailers. Retailers continue purchasing units of product from wholesalers, folding, tearing them in half and selling each half to consumers. The activity runs for 15 minutes, which actually goes quite quickly.

Before commencing the instructor should inform the class of how to win the rewards that will be given at the end of the activity. The wholesaler with the most units of money at the end of the activity is deemed the best wholesaler and receives a reward. The retailer with the most units of money at the end of the activity is deemed the best retailer and also receives a reward. Left over units of product held by wholesalers and retailers have no value. There are two ways to win for consumers. One winner is the consumer with the most units of product. Leftover units of money have no value for consumers. The other winner is the consumer with the best quality product unit as judged by the straightness of the product's edges.

Consumers who wish to compete for the best quality unit of product write their name on one side of their piece of product and submit it to the manufacturer. The manufacturer places these pieces on a flat surface with the names face down and then lets the wholesalers select the best quality product. The instructor can collect the units of

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT ROLES

Class Size	Wholesalers	Retailers	Consumers
10–14	2	4	4–13
15–19	2	5	8–12
20–29	3	6	11–20
30–39	4	8	16–27
40–49	5	10	25–34
50 +	6	12	25 +

money for future use after distributing prizes to the winners.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Strategy Questions

1. Wholesalers, what strategy did you use to maximize generating units of money?
2. Retailers, what strategy did you use to maximize generating units of money?
3. Retailers, how did you determine what consumers wanted in terms of price, speed, and quality of product?
4. Consumers, what strategy did you use to maximize generating units of product?

Place Questions

1. Did the seating arrangement in the room have an influence on transactions?
2. Retailers, did you find out from consumers what strategy other retailers were using in terms of price and quality? If yes, how did that information affect your approach?
3. In what industry would location be rather unimportant?
4. In what type of industries do manufacturers generally charge the same price?

Marketing Channel Questions

1. In this activity wholesalers and retailers primarily performed the role of breaking bulk. What other functions do wholesalers and retailers often perform?
2. How could manufacturers avoid using wholesalers and retailers in getting their product to the end consumers?

Time Sensitivity Questions

1. If more time was allotted, how would your strategy differ?
2. What industries are very dependent on time constraints?
3. What industries rely on time to increase the value of their product?

Ethics-Related Questions

1. Wholesalers, retailers, were making the most units of money the most important aspect of this activity? What other aspects of marketing are important in business?
2. Retailers, if you found out the selling strategies

of your competition from the consumers, would it be ethical to use this information to amend your selling strategy? Would it matter if the information you came upon was not publicly accessible?

3. Wholesalers, how can you ensure that the retailers you sell your product to conduct themselves ethically in business? Does conduct in their personal lives matter?

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted over one semester with two sections of the Principles of Marketing course taught by the same instructor at a small, public, liberal arts college in the east. The Principles of Marketing course is required of all students in the Accounting, Business Management and Sport & Recreation Management majors, as well as students in the Business Management and Marketing minors. One section (the control group) was provided with a basic overview of the course as well as a thorough review of the course syllabus on the first day of class. The other section (experimental group) received the same instruction as the control group as well as *The Exchange Game* interactive activity and debriefing session as described above.

Both sections then experienced the same in-class active learning exercises throughout the semester. Some examples of the activities include student discussions, case analyses, role playing, and group exercises which applied concepts presented in the course textbook. Every activity was designed to encourage participation by all students. Active learning was complemented by a combination of instructor mini lectures, student presentations, and student assessments such as quizzes and feedback on presentations.

Students in both sections were administered two tests and one final exam in the course, as well as weekly quizzes, four written case analyses, and two group presentations. The first test took place after the completion of one third of the course: the second test was administered at the two-thirds mark and the final exam at the end of the semester. All three assessments included multiple choice and short answer questions.

Short answer questions were the same for both sections. Although multiple choice questions varied between sections, everyone in the same section was administered a test or final exam with identical multiple choice questions. All multiple choice questions in both sections were selected from a test bank and were of equal difficulty. Having multiple choice questions on a test or final exam for one section that differed from those for the other section did not result in a significant difference in student scores for the multiple choice portion with an average of 75.1 percent for one section and 75.4 percent for the other. The assessment periods were timed, but in each testing situation every student completed in the time allotted.

Student scores were recorded to allow for further analysis of the results.

Course evaluations which included items relating to teaching effectiveness were given in both sections on the same day with two weeks remaining in the course. Results of the course evaluations were recorded. Final grades in the courses were also noted. Analysis of variance was utilized to determine if student performance on assessments, final grades, and course evaluations differed based on whether or not the students experienced a first day of class interactive activity. Analyses were conducted at the .05 alpha level.

RESULTS

There were 57 students enrolled in the course; however, only the results of 50 students were recorded for the purpose of this study since two students withdrew from the course before taking all three assessments, four students were transfer students in their first semester of attendance and thus had not established a cumulative GPA at the institution, and one student was a post-master's student seeking continuing education. As a result for the control group $n = 25$ and for the experimental group $n = 25$.

An analysis of variance was conducted to determine if the two sections were comparable in academic ability. The difference in average cumulative GPA for each section was not significant with a 2.768 average cumulative GPA for the control group and 2.801 for the experimental group. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that differences noted in student performance in the course were not preconditioned.

An analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between the two sections in their performance on each of the two tests and the final exam. Table 2 shows the results of the three major assessments in the course. It is clear that student performance in the control group improved while student performance in the experimental group declined somewhat

over the three assessments.

A difference in final grades earned in the course was also noted. The average final grade in the experimental group was 82.1 percent whereas the average final grade in the control group was 76.9 percent. The difference was not significant ($p = .07$).

Twenty-five students in the experimental group and 23 students in the control group completed the course evaluation. Students were asked to indicate the amount they have learned compared to most other courses they have taken. In the experimental group 24 percent indicated much more, 43 percent somewhat more, and 33 percent about the same. No students in the experimental group indicated learning somewhat less or much less than other courses they have taken. In the control group 21 percent indicated much more, 54 percent somewhat more, 17 percent about the same, and 8 percent somewhat less. No students in the control group indicated learning much less than other courses they have taken.

On the course evaluation students were also asked to indicate if they would recommend the course and the instructor to other students. The results are shown in Table 3.

Finally, students were asked to rate instructor effectiveness. Students were provided with a five-point Likert scale with 1 = ineffective, 2 = only fair, 3 = competent, 4 = very good, and 5 = excellent. The average instructor rating for both the experimental group and the control group was 4.13.

DISCUSSION

Active learning approaches to teaching are designed to address student apathy that often accompanies passive learning experiences characteristic of a straight lecture-style approach to teaching (Shanahan, Hermans, and Haytko 2006). The results of this research demonstrate that an active learning experience on the first day, as well as throughout the semester improves student motivation and performance. More specifically, the significant dif-

TABLE 2
STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING
ASSESSMENTS BY PERCENT

	Experiment	Control	Difference	Significance
Test 1	81.9	71.7	+12.2	$p = .04^*$
Test 2	81.3	74.9	+6.4	$p = .07$
Final Exam	78.4	74.8	+3.6	$p = .38$

*Significant at .05 alpha level

TABLE 3
COURSE EVALUATION RESULTS BY PERCENT

	Recommend Course			
	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
Experiment (<i>n</i> = 25)	0	0	74	26
Control (<i>n</i> = 23)	0	4	44	52
	Recommend Instructor			
	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
Experiment (<i>n</i> = 25)	0	13	52	35
Control (<i>n</i> = 23)	0	12	32	56

ference in student scores on the first test shows that the first day of class experience can have a lasting effect on student enthusiasm to learn the course material. However, this difference in student performance on assessments diminished throughout the semester. This may be partially explained by the fact that all students were regularly exposed to active learning activities after the first day. Thus, the initial enthusiasm demonstrated by the experimental group could be compensated by building motivation for students in both sections throughout the course.

Although the difference in final grades between the experimental and control groups was not significant ($p = .07$), practically speaking, earning a B- (experimental group) in a course rather than a C+ (control group) does make a difference in student GPA, possible athletic and scholarship eligibility as well as the ability to progress toward graduation. Thus those in the experimental group may have benefitted more from the active learning exercises throughout the semester because they had the first day of class active learning experience to build on. In other words, those students who were enthused by the positive first day of class activity may have immediately formed a more positive overall impression regarding their interest in the material and the expectation that they could learn the course content better by engaging in the active learning experiences.

Student evaluations regarding how much was learned in the Principles of Marketing class compared to most other courses students had taken were mixed. Seventy-five percent of the students in the control group indicated that they had learned somewhat more or much more than most courses they have taken compared to only 67 percent in the experimental group. At the same time 8 percent of those in the control group indicated that they had learned

somewhat less compared to most courses they had taken whereas no students in the experimental group indicated such. Thus, although the results are not as strong for the experimental group, every student in that section gave a neutral or positive response demonstrating that the active learning approach initiated on the first day enhanced the learning experience of everyone in that class. This is not too surprising given that marketing students learn best when presented with activities that apply course concepts to real-world scenarios (Karns 2005).

Most indicators on the course evaluations show that student evaluation of the course was not significantly influenced by their first day of class experience. However, the active learning activities throughout the semester, which was consistent for both groups, resulted in positive evaluations with 100 percent of the students in the experimental group and 96 percent of the students in the control group indicating that they would probably or definitely recommend the course to other students. Instructor evaluations were also not largely effected by the first day of class experience. Although they might reflect student appreciation for active learning activities as 87 percent of the students in the experimental group and 88 percent of the students in the control group indicated that they would probably or definitely recommend the instructor to other students.

The results derived from this study should be viewed as suggestions rather than definitive conclusions given the research was conducted at one institution with one instructor. The students in this study are probably rather representative of students at many institutions. However, there is likely to be some differences in course content. Studies have shown that the instructor's personality as perceived by the students often drives the outcomes of

student evaluations of teaching effectiveness (Clayson and Haley 1990; Clayson 1999). Thus, a limitation to generalizing the results of this study is the inability to replicate the course instructor.

CONCLUSION

The results of previous research (Vander Schee 2007) suggest that using an interactive first of day activity increases student enthusiasm, helps students to get to know the instructor, and increases student understanding of marketing principles. The lasting effect of the first day was analyzed in the current study. The results indicate that

the influence of the first day of class experience on course and teaching evaluations is minimal. However, it is clear that using an interactive in-class activity on the first day, such as the one outlined above, along with active learning exercises throughout the semester also has lasting effects. Increases in student learning as demonstrated by stronger performances on assessments and final grades make this combination a sound pedagogical approach. Therefore, professors can mitigate the influence of student apathy and disengagement on the first day and continue to motivate students to master the course content by maintaining active learning exercises throughout the Principles of Marketing course.

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