

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF LARGE CLASS SIZE ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS MARKETING

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For decades, college administrators have faced the problems of allocating faculty resources to achieve goals without diminishing quality education. The problem often centers on determining appropriate class size for certain courses. Intuition and experience leads many to believe that certain courses lend themselves to larger classes, and therefore, will tend to use faculty more effectively. This seems to apply to several introductory courses in Schools of Business, such as the introduction to marketing course. Yet some argue that a large class may diminish the quality of education, what students learn, and create negative attitudes toward learning and the subject matter.

In this area, as one would surmise, most of the research has focused on student achievement or performance between large and small classes. Other studies examined the effect of class size on students' rating of instruction and preferences for class size. A neglected area is the impact of class size on students' attitude toward the discipline. Since the principle course is often a candidate for large sections and because it is the first marketing course that can impart favorable attitudes toward marketing and motivate students to declare marketing as a major, it is important to know what impact large classes have on students' attitude toward the field.

Objective and Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the impact of a large class on business students' attitudes toward marketing. Besides determining if students' attitudes toward marketing changed during the course, it also compared marketing majors with non-marketing majors, male vs. female students, and across ethnic groups (Asian and Whites). One large introductory marketing class was selected to study (n=142). Students responded to a series of 20 randomly ordered Likert statements regarding different aspect of marketing. It should be kept in mind that the study has all the limitations of a simple pre-post test.

Findings

Cornbach's coefficient alpha was calculated on the pre-test data to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The result was an alpha of .63, which is acceptable. Factor analysis was used to classify the 20 items into six components - career opportunities, social effects, consumer benefits, social responsibility, role of marketing, and economic aspects.

First, students have a positive attitude toward marketing. The grand pre-test mean for the 20 items was 2.29 while the post-test grand mean was 2.24. It appears that the large class had little or no impact on students, attitudes toward marketing. There were

no significant differences between male and female students. For marketing and non-marketing majors, the only difference is due to the students' perceptions of career opportunities in marketing. One should expect to find that marketing majors have a more positive attitude about careers in marketing than do non-marketing majors. Finally, there are no differences between ethnic groups on pre and post test measures.

Conclusions and Implications

This study found that business majors have a favorable attitude toward marketing. While there were differences relating to career opportunities, overall there were no statistically significant differences in students' attitudes toward marketing between the pre and post measures.

One needs to keep in mind the limitations inherent in this study. This was a study of one large class at one university. Also, students were not randomly assigned to the large class. Yet, the study did show that students' attitudes toward marketing did not change during the term. While other studies using a pre-post with control group need to be conducted, this study supports the notion that a school can use its limited resources more efficiently by using large sections without affecting, positively or negatively, students' attitudes toward marketing.