

## **PASSIVE AND ACTIVE METHODS IN MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT CLASSES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

**Gregory S. Black and Sue Stewart Wingfield, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, College of Business, 6300 Ocean Dr., Corpus Christi, TX 78412; (361) 825-3619, (361) 825-5560**

### **ABSTRACT**

To determine the degree to which professors are likely to utilize either passive or active teaching methods, 522 responses to a survey of management and marketing faculty across the country were analyzed. Comparisons were made between marketing and management faculty, between faculty teaching at private and public institutions, between male and female faculty, and between tenured and non-tenured faculty. Other independent variables were also assessed, including faculty age, number of years of teaching experience, average class size, and average number of course preparations. Results indicate that faculty at private universities, faculty with less teaching experience, and faculty with fewer class preparations are more likely to use active methods in their classrooms.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The view that business education needs to be revised and revamped has become more noticeable since the turn of the century (Leavitt 1989), with much attention being focused recently on business education due to the rash of businesses being exposed for engaging in unethical business practices. Business schools must adjust their curriculum to deal with an environment that requires employees to ethically maximize profits. In addition to a strong ethical content, the curriculum must also equip students with strong communication skills, flexibility, and decisiveness. Students must be taught to maintain the highest ethical standards while they analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources, make decisions, and implement courses of action. They must also be prepared to apply knowledge in diverse situations, remaining ethical as they implement key programs within their companies.

Business schools today must therefore accept the responsibility of providing students with these necessary skills and focus on teaching methods that emphasize and include the most effective elements for student learning. Faculty must concern themselves with a dual purpose: imparting knowledge and developing the skills required in today's dynamic business environment. Identifying and utilizing characteristics or styles of education

that can have the greatest and most permanent impact on business students is therefore becoming an increasingly crucial issue.

Are we, as faculty, designing courses with the most effective elements for learning and influencing our business students to become the world's next business leaders? This study reviews current literature to identify the most effective teaching and learning elements and methods that should be included in our classrooms. It then reports the results of a comparative study of 522 marketing and management faculty across the United States to determine if these methods are being used in our university classrooms and to begin to identify variables that predict the frequency and amplitude of these active learning methods.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of the existing teaching styles literature indicates a clear distinction exists between active and passive types of teaching styles. Active course design, in all its forms, incorporates increased student involvement in the classroom, whereas passive designs are more instructor-centered. Active course designs are based on the assumption that an active learner, or one who is more engaged in the learning process, learns much more effectively and the learning experience is more intense and permanent than passive learners enrolled in a traditional lecture-style course (e.g., Allegretti and Fredrick 1995; Derrick and Carr 2003; Hargrove 2003; Klein et al. 1997; Kolb 1983; Labinowicz 1980; Orsmond and Stiles 2002; Sharan 1980). Recent research has specifically examined business students in colleges and universities and shows that course design and teaching styles can significantly impact student performance (Black and Wingfield 2006; Filbeck and Smith 2001; Keltgen 2006; Laditka and Houck 2006; Sims 2002; Smith 2005; Tucker et al. 2003; Wingfield and Black 2005).

A preponderance of recent business education literature suggests business school curriculums are experiencing a shift from passive course designs to active course designs (e.g., Frontczak 1998). Empirical evidence suggests business students prefer designs that are active over more passive designs (Nulty and Bennett 1996). Evidence also

suggests that favorable attitudes toward course design lead to higher achievement (Young et al. 2003) and that matching course design with learning styles results in greater learning (Dunn et al. 1990; Prosser and Trigwell 2006).

### **Active Learning**

**Experiential Learning.** Experiential learning is a type of active course design. It can be defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb 1983, p. 38). Kolb indicates the crucial first step is to provide the experience from which the learning comes. Experiential educators are generally aware that experiences alone are not inherently good for learning. The experiences have to be relevant to the learning goals and then the learners must have time and opportunity to reflect on the experience. Experiential learning can encompass a wide array of methodologies from outdoor, adventure-based learning, such as Outward Bound, to other forms that are more conducive to a classroom setting. Case studies are commonly used in many business classes. In addition, giving students self-learning instruments also provides experiential learning opportunities. Many universities offer business credit for internships which are also effective experiential learning experiences. Also, many in-class activities are experiential in nature. In addition, assignments can be experiential if they require students to apply concepts learned in the classroom to things they will be expected to do in the "real world" after they graduate.

**Participative Learning.** Participative learning is also a form of active learning. It can be defined as engaging the learner in the learning process (Mills-Jones 1999). Participative learning gives students the opportunity to take an active role in determining the types of activities and/or assignments they perceive will best help their learning. Methods that can be utilized in the classroom to assure participative learning include student participation in syllabus design, students writing potential exam questions, student participation in determining the grading scheme for a course, etc. By involving students in these decisions, participative learning theory suggests the students will feel more accountability for completing assignments, etc. (Mills-Jones 1999).

### **Passive Learning**

Passive learning is best exemplified by traditional lecture classes. This teaching style emphasizes learning of conceptual knowledge by focusing on

facts and theoretical principles (Jones and Jones 1998; Thornton and Cleveland 1990; Whetten and Clark 1996). The conceptual emphasis of this design can be important to the development of a strong theoretical foundation upon which students can build in future courses. This design typically involves few opportunities for students to learn experientially or to participate in the decisions in the classroom. Professors or instructors basically provide a syllabus and class schedule, they deliver daily lectures, and the majority of grades are based on exams, especially exams made of multiple-choice, true-false, and matching items. See Table 1 for a summary of these three designs and the types of classroom activities each employs.

### **The Evidence**

It has been suggested that students learn more effectively when they are able to experience learning through active participation in the learning process (Allen and Young 1997). Active learning has also been linked to critical thinking (Paul 1990), experiential learning (Kolb 1983), and reflective classes, in the past, appears to be modest, at best (Whetten et al. 1991). Understanding the extent to which active learning methods are used in the business classroom should provide key information to assessing the impact of business classes on student learning and preparation for the business world judgment (King and Kitchener 1994; Kitchener and King 1981), which are all important educational concepts (Allen and Young 1997). Research also suggests experiential learning leads to higher levels of retention for student learning (e.g., Van Eynde and Spencer 1988). Because of the empirical evidence, it is still generally accepted that active learning methods are more effective, but their use in business classes, in the past, appears to be modest, at best (Whetten, et al. 1991). Understanding the extent to which active learning methods are used in the business classroom should provide key information to assessing the impact of business classes on student learning and preparation for the business world.

### **HYPOTHESES**

The previous discussion suggests that active learning methods examined in this research are more effective than are passive learning methods. Some hypotheses assessed in this study have no precedent in previous literature, so the resulting proposals may hypothesize that there will be no differences in the utilization of active course elements that are caused by the various independent variables. A general model

representing the hypotheses to be examined in this study is presented in Figure 1. Reviewing recent relevant literature suggests the following relationships.

- H<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences between marketing and management faculty in using active learning methods in their classes.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Marketing and management faculty from private universities utilize more active learning methods in the classroom than do those faculty from public universities.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Female marketing and management faculty utilize more active learning methods in the classroom than do male faculty.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Non-tenured marketing and management faculty utilize more active learning methods in the classroom than do tenured faculty.
- H<sub>5</sub>: As both marketing and management faculty get older, they will be less likely to use active learning methods in the classrooms.
- H<sub>6</sub>: As both marketing and management faculty gain teaching experience, they will be less likely to use active learning methods in the classroom.
- H<sub>7</sub>: As class size increases for both marketing and management faculty, the likelihood of active learning designs being used in the classroom decreases.
- H<sub>8</sub>: As the number of course preparations for both marketing and management faculty increases, the likelihood of active learning designs being used in the classroom decreases.

## METHODOLOGY

Data were collected to determine the extent to which these different designs are used in marketing and management classrooms in the United States. The investigators gathered data from a random sample of 522 management and marketing faculty across the United States. The sample was drawn from membership rosters of the American Marketing Association and the Academy of Management. Marketing and management faculty members were asked to indicate on a five-point scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) how often they used each teaching method in their respective classrooms. Table 2 reveals there were six passive elements and thirteen active elements. The composite measures of passive and active learning methods were computed by summing the various items for each

and dividing by the number of items. After creating the composite variables, the dependent variable to be assessed in the hypotheses was computed by subtracting the composite passive methods score from the composite active methods score.

Table 2 is a summary of the data collected from these faculty members. As can be seen from this table, the response rate was acceptable with a 43.83% overall rate (522 usable responses). Of those responses, 247 (47.32%) were from management professors and 275 (52.68%) were from marketing professors. Other notable information includes the proportion of male (317, 60.73%) vs. female professors (205, 39.27%); the proportion of tenured (279, 53.45%) vs. non-tenured professors (243, 48.55%); and the proportion of professors employed by public universities (265, 50.77%) vs. those employed by private universities (257, 49.23%).

In addition to the general demographics of the respondents, as summarized above, Table 2 also reveals the frequency of marketing and management professors' utilization of various elements associated with passive and active learning. One should exercise care in interpreting these results because though nearly 90% of management and marketing professors employ at least one passive element in their course designs, 96.36% are also using at least one active element in their course designs. These numbers are of further interest when they are compared to the self-reported course descriptions of these professors where only 12.84% classify their overall course designs as passive, while 7.66% classify them as participative, and 79.50% classify their courses as being primarily experiential in design, making an overall 87.16% classifying their classes as active in design.

## RESULTS

Results of hypotheses testing are found in Table 3. Regression analyses shows support for H<sub>1</sub> by indicating no statistical difference between marketing and management faculty in their use of active and passive learning methods ( $t = .982, p \geq .10$ ). Simple linear regression also revealed support for H<sub>2</sub> by indicating a significantly higher usage of active learning methods by professors from private universities ( $t = 1.783, p \leq .10$ ). Support was also found for H<sub>6</sub> by revealing a significant difference in using active learning methods based on faculty teaching experience, where faculty with less teaching experience use more active learning methods in the classroom ( $t = 1.844, p \leq .10$ ). Finally, support was found for H<sub>8</sub> by a statistically

significant difference in the use of active learning methods based on the number of preparations, with faculty members with lower numbers of preparations utilizing more active learning methods in the classroom ( $t = 1.708, p \leq .10$ ).

Faculty gender, tenure, faculty age, and average class size had no significant impact on the use of active learning methods in the classroom. Thus,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$ , and  $H_7$  are not supported.

Another interesting result is related to how the faculty classified their own classes. As presented in previous discussion, 87.16% of all marketing and management faculty respondents classified their own classes as being overall active in nature. However, based on the results of the composite measures used in the statistical analysis of this study, only 27.78% of the professors actually have predominantly active learning classrooms.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Much research has been performed in the area of active versus passive educational methods, resulting in empirical evidence that active methods are more effective in terms of student outcomes. Even with the overwhelming evidence that such is the case, it is interesting that research actually assessing the frequency and amplitude of the utilization of these methods has been largely neglected. This study is one of the first of its kind in which actual usage of active versus passive methods in university business classrooms is assessed and factors that influence that usage are examined.

As predicted, and as common sense suggests, there is no difference in the utility of active methods between marketing and management faculty. Both fields of study offer many classes in which active methods are readily included. Other fields of business, such as accounting and finance, may experience more difficulty in adopting many of these active methods into their classrooms. However, as evidence mounts to suggest that these methods are superior to passive methods, it would enhance the learning experience in all business classrooms, regardless of the business discipline. Further research should be conducted with faculty of other business disciplines to examine the frequency and amplitude of active learning methods.

It was also predicted that there would be a difference in the utilization of active methods based

on whether professors were teaching in a private or a public university. The findings of this study support this prediction. Faculty members at private universities are more likely to use active learning methods in the classroom. Several factors may contribute to this. Many private universities have smaller enrollments making it possible to have smaller average class sizes. However, class size was also examined in this study and was not found to be a significant predictor of the use of active learning methods.

In addition, at many private universities, professors teach more classes per semester, resulting in a larger number of annual course preparations. The larger number of preparations would seem to decrease the likelihood of active methods being used because active learning methods require more preparation time and more effort. In fact, this variable was also examined in this study and it was found that a smaller number of course preparations led to a greater likelihood of a faculty member using active learning methods. Therefore, this reason for the increased use of active learning methods at private universities is also not valid, though the predicted hypothesis was supported.

Evidence suggests that faculty at private universities tend to be older and have more teaching experience (Eser and Birkan 2004). In fact, as predicted, an increase in teaching experience actually led to a smaller likelihood of active learning methods being used in the classroom. Also, no evidence was found to support a significant influence of faculty age on the utilization of these active methods. Therefore, additional research is necessary to discover the differences between private and public universities that lead to the significant differences in utilizing active learning methods.

This study also revealed that both marketing and management faculty tend to think they are utilizing more active learning methods than they actually are. This finding should be a reminder to examine our teaching methods and try to include more elements that have been empirically shown to improve student learning and preparation for the "real world."

**Tables, Figures, and References Available on Request**