

TEACHING COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING: AN ACTIVE LEARNING APPROACH FOR INFLUENCING THE SOCIAL GOOD

H. Rika Houston, Shikha Upadhyaya, and Nicholas Pendarvis,
California State University, Los Angeles

Introduction

Initially introduced into the marketing literature in the 1970s, both the definition of social marketing and the discipline of social marketing have evolved considerably since that time (Andreasen 1995, Fox and Kotler 1980, French et al. 2011, Kotler et al. 2002, Kotler and Zaltman 1971, Lee and Kotler 2015). Kotler et al. (2002) define social marketing as the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole. French et al. (2011) note that while definitions may vary by disciplinary perspectives, the majority of the definitions include three common elements: (1) the primary purpose is to achieve a social good—not commercial gain, (2) it consists of a finite and coherent set of concepts and principles that can be used to inform policy and assist in the development and implementation of social change strategy, and (3) it is a systematic process that is defined by learning and evaluation. As the multidisciplinary offspring of marketing techniques developed in the commercial sector and behavioral change techniques refined in the public and non-profit sectors, social marketing provides a rigorous platform to influence and change behavior for the social good (French et al. 2011, Kotler et al. 2002).

When applied to the context of a community such as a state, city, or neighborhood; social marketing can be strategically employed to change target audience behavior on social issues as diverse as but not limited to health, recycling, public transportation, homelessness, and water conservation. McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) note that community-based social marketing or CBSM is composed of four steps: (1) uncovering barriers to behaviors, (2) selecting which specific behavior to change, (3) designing a program to overcome the selected barrier, and (4) evaluating the effectiveness of the program once implemented. The key emphasis of CBSM is that effective program design must begin with a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to change as they are perceived by the target audience. In addition, CBSM emphasizes the importance of a rigorous strategic planning and implementation process to ensure effective and substantive change (McKenzie-Mohr 2000, McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999). In this paper, we discuss the evolution of a CBSM course and the importance of an active learning approach to increase the effectiveness of the course objectives at both the course and societal level.

The Evolution of the Community-Based Social Marketing Course

Fueled initially in 2011 by a University strategic initiative to increase community engagement for the social good, institutional priorities and resources have subsequently focused upon making this initiative a reality (*citation omitted for blind review—to be provided upon final submission*). In 2014, the Center for Engagement, Service and the Public Good was established as the umbrella organization for campus-wide community engagement efforts (*citation omitted for blind review—to be provided upon final submission*). Through the efforts of the Center, over 200 community organizations have since signed agreements to participate as community partners. This list continues to grow exponentially. And with renewed emphasis, “engagement, service, and the public good” was established as a strategic priority area in the University’s 2015 Strategic Plan (*citation omitted for blind review—to be provided on final submission*). Furthermore, as part of this strategic priority, all incoming freshmen as of Fall Semester 2016 are now required to complete two civic learning courses that feature engagement with public or non-profit organizations in the surrounding community. Both required courses are designated as general education courses taken by all students, regardless of their major academic discipline. In the context of this University-wide focus upon community engagement, several faculty in the Department of Marketing recognized an opportunity to develop a course in community-based social marketing. Initially, in 2013, the course was designed as an elective course for marketing majors who were interested in learning about social marketing and applying this knowledge to community

organizations. With the renewed strategic emphasis on community engagement in the 2015 strategic plan and a concurrent call for civic learning, general education (GE) course proposals; faculty in the Department of Marketing revised and resubmitted the CBSM course as a civic learning GE course. Subsequently, the revised CBSM course was approved. In addition, since it is to date the only civic learning GE course in the College of Business and Economics, all business majors and marketing majors can enroll in the course and receive double credit for it as both a business or marketing elective *and* a GE civic learning course. And finally, in anticipation of the increased overall student enrollment and marketing student demand, the Department of Marketing has hired new faculty who specialize in social marketing and has received approval for additional faculty hires in this growing area. This evolution has, in short, provided a high energy albeit challenging synergy among faculty, students, the University, and community partner organizations.

Teaching Community-Based Social Marketing: An Active Learning Approach

Derived primarily from Kolb's (1981, 1984) Experiential Learning Model, active learning proposes the notion that "learning by doing" increases student involvement and activates a deeper learning process when compared to traditional, lecture-based learning (Frontczak 1998). Effective active learning involves four successive stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Frontczak 1998, Petkus Jr. 2000). Each stage is carefully designed to immerse students into a new experience that initiates a deeper and more reflective experience through the active application of marketing theories and practices.

By its very nature, community-based social marketing is an ideal course for the application of an active learning approach. Since the course is specifically designed to apply the marketing process to building and developing programs in the surrounding community, it provides the perfect platform for getting students out of the classroom and immersing them into public or non-profit organizations where they can experience a new reality, reflect upon that experience, and make a genuine difference for the social good. While the majority of universities do not provide a structured environment to facilitate such opportunities, our campus has initiated a concerted, strategic effort to provide infrastructure and direction for community-based (civic) engagement. In the following section, we provide two examples of how an active learning approach is used within the course to engage students on the timely topic of water conservation in the State of California and the City of Los Angeles.

CBSM Active Learning Examples:

Water Conservation and Medical Equipment Donations

To date, the community-based social marketing (CBSM) course has been taught twice and only one of those sections involved off-campus community partners. While the results were extremely successful, these pilot courses highlighted the heavy faculty time commitment required for successful implementation. As a result, the revised CBSM civic learning GE course reflects a reduced class size of twenty-five (25) students so that the active learning approach could be more effectively applied in the classroom and in the community. Some of the complex social issues confronted in these initial offerings of the CBSM course included water conservation, food (in)security, medical equipment donations, healthy eating and lifestyles, prostate cancer prevention, energy conservation, and public transportation. Regardless of the issue; in-class attendance was consistently high, students were highly engaged, and the two initial community partners were extremely pleased with the results. Indeed, one of the community partners continues to work with marketing faculty in the CBSM course and other courses to grow and improve services at his nonprofit, community-based organization. (See Table 2 for one of the related active learning exercises.)

The following active learning examples about water conservation and medical equipment donations, borrowed from the pilot study of the CBSM course, follow the four success stages of the active learning approach: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Frontczak 1998, Petkus Jr. 2000). In the first example (see Table 1), it is important to point out that water conservation is a timely social issue because the State of California and many neighboring states have been experiencing severe drought conditions for more than five years now (<http://drought.ca.gov>, <http://www.azwater.gov>, www.drought.nv.gov). In the second example (see Table 2), durable medical equipment donations are important to communities because they ensure the availability of free or low-cost equipment loans and purchases for residents of a community. In the case of the community partner with whom we worked, the donation of durable medical equipment is also a highly sustainable model for the community because the equipment is repaired by volunteers, professionally sanitized on site, and loaned out to community members at no cost (*citation omitted for blind review—to be provided upon final submission*).

Table 1
Active Learning Exercise: Community-Based Social Marketing Course
Lesson Plan: Crafting a Desired Positioning Statement
Case Example: Water Conservation

Active Learning Stage	Active Learning Application
Concrete Experience	Students read assigned chapter on how to craft a desired positioning statement (Chapter 9 of textbook, Lee and Kotler 2015). Online activities include viewing two public sector (state and city) water conservation campaigns: Arizona’s “Water Use It Wisely” campaign and the City of Los Angeles’s “Save the Drop” campaign. Both campaigns can be found online at: http://wateruseitwisely.com and http://savethedropla.com , respectively. As a short blog assignment, each student is required to post their initial perceptions about each of the campaigns with regard to intended scope, audience, and potential impact.
Reflective Observation	During the in-class session, an instructor-led large group activity involves walking through National Geographic’s online “water footprint” activity (http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/change-the-course/water-footprint-calculator/). This activity takes each person through the many ways that water is consumed by individuals and how much water is consumed during each consumption activity (e.g., washing dishes, taking a shower, or washing the laundry). This activity typically results in high engagement and lively discussions about what each person can and cannot do about water conservation. (Time estimate for activity: 15-20 minutes.)
Abstract Conceptualization	Using the reflective observation as context, students are divided into small groups of 4-5 students each. Each small group works on a case scenario in which they must apply the social marketing concepts (in this case, the four types of positioning statements*) to each of the two water conservation campaigns viewed previously online (Arizona’s “Water Use It Wisely” campaign and the City of Los Angeles’s “Save the Drop” campaign). After conceptualizing how each type of positioning statement would look for the two campaigns, the small groups document their answers in writing and report back to the entire classroom on their decisions. The instructor moves from group to group during the small group discussions and then facilitates the large group discussion during the last 15 minutes of class. (Time estimate for activities: 30-45 minutes.) * (Four types of social marketing positioning statements: behavior-focused, barriers-focused, benefits-focused, and competition-focused.) *

Active Experimentation	Currently under development with existing public sector community partners working on water conservation. See “Discussion and Conclusions” section for a discussion of the challenges and constraints.
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Table 2
Active Learning Exercise: Community-Based Social Marketing Course
Lesson Plan: Place Strategy
Case Example: Durable Medical Equipment Donations

Active Learning Stage	Active Learning Application
Concrete Experience	Students read assigned chapter on how to develop place strategy that will make the product or service more convenient and easier to access or adopt (Chapter 12 of textbook, Lee and Kotler 2015). Online activities include making a “digital” visit of the organization website to gain a better understanding of the services offered. This digital visit is supplemented with an in-class presentation by the Executive Director of the organization (<i>citation omitted for blind review—to be provided on final submission</i>). As a short blog assignment, each student is required to post their initial perceptions about the current place strategy of the organization with regard to the target market and location(s).
Reflective Observation	During the in-class session, an instructor-led large group activity involves walking through the website together and brainstorming possible ways to improve the place strategy of the organization. This activity resulted in high engagement and lively discussions about the nature of and complexities regarding medical equipment donations. (Time estimate for activity: 15-20 minutes.)
Abstract Conceptualization	Using the reflective observation as context, students are divided into small groups of 4-5 students each. Each small group works on a case scenario in which they must apply the social marketing concepts (in this case, the ten place-related tactics that can be used to make it more convenient and pleasant to donate durable medical equipment.)* After conceptualizing how each tactic could be applied, the small groups document their answers in writing and report back to the entire classroom on their decisions. The instructor moves from group to group during the small group discussions and then facilitates the large group discussion during the last 15 minutes. (Time estimate for activities: 30-45 minutes.) * (Ten types of social marketing place-related tactics: make the location closer, extend the hours, be there at the point of decision making, make the location more appealing, overcome psychological barriers associated with the place, be more accessible than the competition, make access to the competition more difficult or unpleasant, be where your target audience shops, be where your target audience hangs out, and work with the existing distribution channel.) *
Active Experimentation	Student groups (usually 2 or 3) conduct a site visit and tour of the organization headquarters (and donation sites too in this case). This effort requires a considerable amount of advance planning, time, and coordination. Assigned student groups, in collaboration with the instructor and the contact person at the organization, identify appropriate place-related tactics, complete a report of their findings, and conduct a formal presentation to the class and representatives of the organization.

Discussion and Conclusions

The ongoing journey to fully embrace, integrate, and support an authentic, University-wide culture of community or civic engagement is fraught with challenges. In the specific context of our community-based social marketing course, we are encouraged by small successes and become more resilient to the newfound obstacles at every stage of the implementation process. While working directly with a community partner is rewarding due to the immediate source of gratification in the form of observing real world scenarios, developing real world social marketing solutions, working on important social causes, and developing long term relationships with community partners; it can also be very challenging. Due to a myriad of issues the least of which includes time constraints, off-campus travel constraints, coordination issues with the designated organizational contact person, and the typical constraints associated with classroom management for a relatively new course; senior and junior faculty alike can easily become discouraged. Now that the CBSM course is officially designated as a civic learning, general education course; even more new challenges will undoubtedly emerge as more non-business and non-marketing majors select it to fulfill one of their general education civic learning course requirements.

These challenges aside, our community-based marketing course continues to evolve into one with more structure and more consist course content and pedagogy across a growing cadre of instructors. Under ideal circumstances, an active learning approach for any course would include all four of the stages in the active learning process (Frontczak 1998, Petkus Jr. 2000). In reality, due to the challenges of initiating the relationships with community partners within such a short timeframe, we were unable to implement the fourth stage, active experimentation, to the fullest extent possible. With the topic of water conservation, for example, students could more holistically benefit from the high impact practices of an active learning approach if they could work directly with the two aforementioned public sector organizations on improving the water conservation campaigns. In the case of durable medical equipment donations, both the students and the community organization clearly benefited from the “active experimentation” stage of the active learning approach. It is hoped that, as the working relationship with the community partner continues to grow, less time will be spent on getting to know them and more time will be spent on the application of social marketing principles and strategies for the social good.

While it is clear that institutional resources and support, as well as a tenure review process that does not necessarily reward labor-intensive community engagement activities, must evolve to genuinely foster taxing efforts such as these; the end result could nonetheless be rewarding. With an active learning approach as applied to a community-based social marketing course; students could be transformed, universities could achieve their strategic priorities, and community organizations could gain valuable social marketing support for their respective social causes. And, with a little luck, marketing faculty could also begin to feel more connected to the communities where they live and the universities where they work.

References Available Upon Request