Delivering Graduate Marketing Education: An Analysis of Face-to-Face versus Distance Education

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Marketing education may be delivered through a number of different methods from face-to-face to distance education. This study analyzes MBA student perceptions and preferences with regard to face-to-face versus distance education methods for delivering a course in marketing management. The results indicate that consistent course structure can be developed across delivery formats but that some pedagogical adjustments may be required for the distance education format, particularly in the areas of class participation and course-related activities. The findings also show that students appear to select the distance education delivery method because of convenience, not quality, since distance education was found to be the least effective and least satisfying method of delivery for the students studied. The study concludes by discussing the implication of these results.

The delivery of education in general and marketing in particular has undergone a series of methodological revisions in recent years. Traditional classroom-instructor dyads have been replaced or supplemented with a variety of different and sometimes innovative forms of instructional dissemination. These innovative forms of instruction have helped to move the classroom from the traditional campus classroom to a variety of decentralized locations. Many of these instructional formats tend to involve the theme of distance education using technological advancements to assist in delivering the distance-based instruction.

Although the concept of distance education is not new, the advances in technology offer a more robust method of delivery (Kerka 1996). These technological advances in distance education involve such areas as Internet Web-based instruction as well as various methods of audio and video, real-time, and delayed distance education. With all of these technological advances, one would assume that distance education is the future for delivering education to various student populations. But what do the student populations think of the advances incorporated in educational delivery? What do they prefer in regard to the delivery of their graduate marketing education, and how should MBA programs adjust their marketing course offerings to these student populations? This study attempts to explore these questions as they pertain to a marketing management course delivered to graduate students enrolled in an MBA program at a land grant state university.

BACKGROUND

Graduate student education can be delivered in several different pedagogical formats. The most personal and labor-intensive is a one-to-one student-to-instructor format. In this case, the student is directed through the instructional material personally by the instructor. On the other hand, the least labor-intensive and most impersonal is a student self-paced correspondence format such as one may find from manuals or Web-based course structures (Imel 1997). Somewhere in between these two methods is the instructor delivering education to multiple students in a classroom setting. It is this instructor/multiple-student format that is examined here. Specifically, the researchers examine graduate student preferences and satisfaction with three distinct forms of graduate instructional delivery. These delivery methods are (1) on-campus (face-to-face) instruction *to full-time students* with a professor in the classroom, (2) off-campus (face-to-face) instruction *to part-time students* with a professor in the classroom, and (3) off-campus instruction *to part-time students* with the professor using real-time audio and video to interact with the students. It is this last form of delivery that has captured the attention of many educators recently as well as the issues surrounding technology-driven distance education.

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Distance Education Issues

Distance learning is neither a recent nor a new phenomenon. In reality, distance learning has existed for more than a century with European correspondence courses being the earliest form of distance learning (Sherry 1995). What is new is the development and adoption of increasingly sophisticated communication technologies (Schlosser and Anderson 1994). With the advent of these technologies, distance education programs are expanding at an ever-increasing rate (Weinstein 1997). However, too often, instructional program designers and those who are delivering the course instruction become enamored with the technologies without considering the underlying issues, especially student needs and learning (Sherry 1995).

Although technology is no longer the main issue, it is still an issue (Filipczak 1995). Moreover, Bates (1995) suggests that new technologies are not necessarily better than old ones but that all technologies should be judged on how they may be used to promote and enhance learning. The issue in distance learning is not the technology but rather student learning, including how and where that learning should take place (Bates 1995).

Student access due to the high cost of both personal student equipment and access charges is another distance learning issue (Davison 1996). Lack of standards has also been found to be an issue (Imel 1996). Another frequently discussed issue is staff development (Davison 1996; Filipczak 1995; Thach and Murphy 1995; Warren 1995). Educators and users of distance learning must be trained on how to effectively use and integrate this format into their instructional delivery. Finally, the prohibitive cost borne by the educational institutions for state-of-the-art technology required to deliver the instruction is also an issue affecting distance learning.

Distance Education versus Face-to-Face Instruction

Although distance learning has surfaced as a major educational alternative, the question of how (if at all) it should differ from the traditional face-to face instruction needs to be considered. In reviewing the literature on distance education, Schlosser and Anderson (1994) conclude that at least in the United States, the goal is to offer the distance student an educational experience as much like the traditional face-to-face classroom as possible. It was further concluded that distance learning pedagogy should not differ from traditional classroom methods (Schlosser and Anderson 1994). However, since distance education is now considered to be more than classroom connections, there is a growing realization that traditional teaching techniques will not work in a distance education format (Thach and Murphy 1995).

To overcome this problem, participants in distance education must recognize the interactivity involved in this format. According to Sherry (1995), successful distance education systems must involve interactivity between instructors, students, and the learning environment as well as active learning in the classroom. McNabb (1994) found that although students felt that the accessibility of distance learning far outweighed the lack of dialogue, there is still a considerable lack of dialogue in telecourses when compared to face-to-face instruction. This is problematic since Garrison (1990) argues that the quality and integrity of the educational process depends on sustained, two-way communication. Without connectivity and interactivity, distance learning degenerates into the old correspondence course model of independent study with the student becoming autonomous and isolated (Sherry 1995). In sum, distance learning and traditional learning may differ, but the goal should be to achieve the same learning results with either method (Imel 1998).

With these issues in mind, another area of concern should be considered; that is, how face-to-face education versus distance learning is related to student preferences (Imel 1998). Do students want to engage in distance learning? According to Imel (1998), no clear-cut answer to this question emerges from the literature. Schlosser and Anderson (1994) concluded that even though students appreciated the flexibility and convenience offered them by distance learning, they still preferred the traditional classroom. On the other hand, Klesius, Homan, and Thompson (1997) found that the convenience of distance learning overcame the lack of teacher accessibility at least in the case of elementary teachers as students. This leads to a dilemma for educational providers. This dilemma is succinctly outlined by Simonson (1997) to be the conflicting pressures of students who do not really want to learn at a distance but are increasingly accepting distance learning because of the convenience. It is this dilemma that is examined here. Specifically, what are the preferences for the delivery of a graduate marketing management course by graduate students enrolled in an MBA program?

RESEARCH METHOD

To analyze graduate business student preferences toward the method of delivering a marketing management course, a field survey was developed and administered. The methodology involved three different sections of the same marketing management course being delivered to three separate and distinct groups (cohorts) of graduate students enrolled in an American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)–accredited MBA program at a state land grant institution. All graduate students included in the study had received their undergraduate degrees using the traditional face-to-face method.

The study was conducted during a 2-year period in which different cohort groups participating in this lockstep MBA program were analyzed. There were six different cohort groups during the 2-year data collection period (two from

Group 1, two from Group 2, and two from Group 3). *Group 1* was composed of traditional, on-campus, full-time MBA students with the course being delivered in a face-to-face on-campus format. *Group 2* consisted of weekend, off-campus, part-time MBA students with the course delivered in a face-to-face format. *Group 3* included part-time distance learning MBA students with the course being delivered via real-time audio and/or video during the weekend and weekday evening hours. The distance learning course was delivered simultaneously to a "studio" class with live students on campus and one distance site with live students. Students in all three groups had multiple means to communicate with the instructor—Internet access, phone, fax, e-mail. Although each cohort had the same basic educational preparation, as one would expect, the part-time students (Groups 2 and 3) tended to have more extensive lifetime and workplace experience.

Three individual members of the marketing faculty delivered the marketing management course to each group. All three faculty had terminal degrees in the field of marketing and each had experience teaching this course at the graduate level. These three members of the marketing faculty jointly designed the marketing management course. That is, the same syllabi, course structure, course requirements, textbook, and visual aids (overhead transparencies) were jointly designed and used in delivering the marketing management course material to all three groups during the 2 years analyzed. The only differences were method of delivery and the instructor. However, to control for possible instructor bias, the marketing faculty rotated to a different mode of delivery in the 2nd year of this study.

Student preferences were analyzed using a questionnaire administered at the conclusion of each respective marketing management class. The questionnaires were distributed and collected by a third party, not associated with the course. The questionnaire included a variety of Likert-type questions regarding students' perception of the effectiveness of, and their satisfaction with, various course activities. Students also were asked to indicate whether they felt the time allotted to various course activities was sufficient. In addition, several summary measures of overall course quality and satisfaction were posed. Finally, students indicated what they liked and/or disliked about the course and what they would change with the course. The results of this methodology are discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

During the 2-year study, six classes were analyzed—two from each delivery format (group). A total of 143 MBA students participated in the study. Of that number, 39 were traditional on-campus students (Group 1); 45 were weekend, off-campus, part-time students (Group 2); and 59 were part-time, distance education students (Group 3).

Before assessing perceptions of course effectiveness and satisfaction levels, it was necessary to ensure that students did not differ in their perceptions of the course workload and the time allotted to various course activities. To assess perceptions of the course workload, students were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale whether the quantity of work that they were expected to cover in the course was *too little* (1) to *too much* (7). A one-way ANOVA with delivery format (group) as the independent variable revealed no significant differences ($X_{Group\ 1} = 4.59$, $X_{Group\ 2} = 4.53$, $X_{Group\ 3} = 4.62$, $F = 0.16$, $p = .86$). To assess whether students felt the time allotted to several activities (e.g., lectures, individual exercises, group exercises, project presentations, semester project, and overall time to cover course material) was effective, 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*very ineffective*) to 7 (*very effective*) were used. Separate one-way ANOVAs revealed no significant differences between the groups (all p values > .05).

Three summary measures of course satisfaction were presented. First, students indicated overall satisfaction with the course format on a 7-point scale ranging from *very dissatisfied* to *very satisfied*. Second, students indicated how satisfied they were with the course format as a percentage point, where 0% was *very dissatisfied* and 100% was *very satisfied*. Finally, students described the course format on a 7-point scale with descriptors ranging from *terrible* to *excellent*. Results of separate one-way ANOVAs suggest that the students were most satisfied with the part-time, weekend format and least satisfied with the distance education delivery format (see Table 1).

The remainder of the analysis attempts to discern why satisfaction levels differ between the two groups. It was felt that students might perceive different aspects of the course to be more or less effective depending on the delivery format. Therefore, students were asked to evaluate on 7-point scales (where 1 was *very ineffective* and 7 was *very effective*) how effective they felt various aspects of the course format were—(1) organizational content of course lectures, (2) visual materials used during lectures, (3) handouts for note taking, (4) class participation by the students, (5) individual exercises used in class, (6) group exercises used in the class, (7) student class presentations, (8) semester project, and (9) working with team members. A composite measure of presentation effectiveness was created by averaging scales 1 through 3 ($\alpha = .76$). A second composite measure of course activities was created by averaging scales 5 through 9 ($\alpha = .82$). The results consistently suggest that students perceived the distance education delivery mode to be the most ineffective (see Table 1). Satisfaction with the above activities was also measured using the same scales. Composite measures of presentation satisfaction ($\alpha = .86$) and satisfaction with course activities ($\alpha = .85$) were created using the same variables as above. Again, results suggest that students were least satisfied with the distance education delivery format (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
ANOVA RESULTS: EFFECTIVENESS/SATISFACTION BY COURSE DELIVERY FORMAT

Measure	*Full-Time, On-Campus (Group 1)*	*Part-Time Weekend (Group 2)*	*Part-Time Distance (Group 3)*	F	p
Overall course satisfaction (*very dissatisfied-very satisfied*)	5.26	5.62	4.86	7.14	.001
Overall course satisfaction (0%-100%)	78.2	83.11	72.41	3.74	.03
Overall course format (*terrible-excellent*)	5.39	5.71	5.25	3.42	.04
Composite presentation effectiveness	5.49	5.99	5.63	3.12	.05
Composite course activities effectiveness	5.52	5.90	5.36	3.84	.03
Class participation effectiveness	6.10	5.62	5.34	6.02	.003
Composite presentation satisfaction	5.65	5.98	5.55	2.61	.07
Composite course activities satisfaction	5.49	5.84	5.23	4.23	.02
Class participation satisfaction	5.92	5.62	5.31	3.80	.03

When asked to rank various program formats in terms of the most to the least preferred, some interesting patterns are revealed. As seen in Table 2, students in the different groups indicated that their most preferred format is one in which the classes meet 2 days per week for a 7-week period with the instructor present ($\chi^2 = 22.26, p < .01$). This format is the current on-campus format. Interestingly, neither the off-campus nor the distance education group selected their current format as the most preferred. Moreover, only 10 of the 138 respondents to this question indicated that they preferred a distance education format. When asked to justify their choice of most preferred program format, 43 respondents said that they liked the student-teacher interaction. The off-campus and distance education group also listed the following reasons:

1. Works well with schedule and travel
2. Least impact on work and family
3. Preferred weekday-night classes over weekend classes

Another reason driving the satisfaction and preference results could be that the respondents in the different program formats are demographically different. A demographic profile of the respondents is provided in Table 3. As seen by the results of this analysis, significant differences were found in terms of marital status, children at home, and employment, including the number of years. No significant differences were found in terms of the gender of the students in each group or in the formal educational preparation of the students as measured by previous degrees.

DISCUSSION

The literature has indicated that distance education activities are expanding at an increasing rate, but a number of issues associated with these activities can be problematic. It appears that many proponents of this method of educational delivery sometimes rely too heavily on the technology associated with these programs (Sherry 1995). The literature also shows that pedagogical differences should not exist between traditional classroom methods and those delivered via distance education (Schlosser and Anderson 1994). However, to deliver adequately the material in a non-face-to-face setting, some pedagogical adjustments may need to be made to offset the limitations of the distance education format (Thach and Murphy 1995). The problem with making these adjustments is the concern for the student. Are students willing to sacrifice face-to-face classroom interaction and positive features associated with this format for the convenience of a distance education experience? The literature provides no definitive answer to this question especially as it relates to the delivery of graduate marketing courses.

The results of this study do offer some guidance and insight into this dilemma. Findings indicate that the various MBA marketing student cohorts studied did not differ significantly in their perceptions of course workload and the time allotted to perform that workload through course activities. That is, according to student perceptions, the same amount of work can and should be expected from graduate marketing students no matter what method of course delivery is being used. This is also true of time allotted to perform the activities related to successful completion of this graduate marketing course. This seems to indicate that the same or similar course format could be used in both distance education and face-to-face instruction.

However, when it comes to student satisfaction with their MBA marketing management course, method of delivery showed significant differences in perceived satisfaction. Students experiencing face-to-face instruction (both on-campus and off-campus) were more satisfied than their cohort counterparts who received the course via distance education. That is, in terms of overall satisfaction with the course content and the course format, distance education students were generally less satisfied than those receiving face-to-face instruction.

This trend continued when the analysis shifted toward course effectiveness. The distance education marketing students found their method of course delivery to be less effec-

TABLE 2
MOST PREFERRED PROGRAM FORMAT BY CURRENT PROGRAM FORMAT

	Ranked Format					
Current Format	*1 Evening per Week and 1 Saturday during a 15-Week Period with Instructor Present*	*2 Days per Week for a 7-Week Period with Instructor Present*	*Fridays and Saturdays for 3 Weekends with Instructor Present*	*1 Evening per Week and Saturdays for 7 Weeks during a 15-Week Semester via an Interactive Distance Format*	*2 Days per Week for a 7-Week Period via an Interactive Distance Format*	*Fridays and Saturdays for 3 Weekends via an Interactive Distance Format*
On-campus	2	30	6	0	0	0
Off-campus weekend	5	26	12	0	1	0
Off-campus distance	10	21	16	0	6	3

TABLE 3
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS

	Full-Time, On-Campus	*Part-Time, Off-Campus, Weekend*	*Part-Time, Off-Campus, Distance*	*Significance*
Degree				
Bachelor's	31	39	51	$p = .91$
Master's	6	4	7	
Doctorate	1	1	1	
Age				
18-24	19	18	3	$p < .01$
25-29	14	15	26	
30-24	4	5	7	
35-39	0	3	12	
40-44	0	2	5	
45-49	1	1	2	
50-54	0	0	2	
55-59	0	0	0	
60+	0	0	0	
Gender				
Male	26	27	34	$p = .63$
Female	11	16	22	
Marital status				
Single	27	24	19	$p < .01$
Married	9	18	32	
Divorced/separated	1	1	7	
Widowed	0	0	0	
Children at home				
Yes	1	10	20	$p < .01$
No	37	32	39	
Employed				
Yes	4	19	34	$p < .01$
No	26	17	2	
Years employed	2.4	5.45	8.98	$p < .01$

tive than both methods of face-to-face instruction with regard to both class participation and course activities. The exception to this trend was that these distance education students found the presentation of course material to be slightly more effective than the full-time on-campus group but lower than the part-time face-to-face weekend group. However, when considering satisfaction with presentation, participation, and activities, the distance education group again had the highest level of dissatisfaction. These findings would lend themselves to support the supposition that although the course

structure can remain the same between various formats (e.g., work required and time allotted), pedagogical adjustments in how class activities and class participation are being delivered need to be given strong consideration.

The findings also lend themselves to support prior results, which found that distance education students tolerated rather than preferred the electronic delivery of their course material. As noted earlier, the preferred method of program format was face-to-face delivery, although if they had their choice, most students surveyed would opt for the current full-time on-campus method. However, since outside forces (location, career, family, etc.) were noted as reasons affecting their format selection, it appears that convenience in terms of location and schedule forces students to opt for the less preferred delivery format—electronic distance education.

Specific evidence of this need for convenience can be found in the demographic differences of the cohorts studied. Although no discernible differences were found in the gender or formal educational preparation of the student studied, significant differences were found in areas outside the classroom. These experiential differences indicate that the part-time MBAs were generally older, married with children living at home, and advancing in their professional careers. These types of outside-the-classroom forces tend to make the selection of an MBA course format one of convenience rather than preference.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONAL ISSUES

The findings from the study show that MBA students in a distance education environment tend to have a lower level of satisfaction with the distance education course than do their counterparts in the traditional face-to-face instructional environment. Students also perceive the level of effectiveness of a course taught via distance education to be less than for the same course taught using the traditional face-to-face method. Although the level of satisfaction and effectiveness of the distance education course were perceived as lower than the traditional face-to-face approach, students elected to take the distance education course because of convenience. It has been suggested that some pedagogical adjustments may be required of the distance education method, particularly in the areas of class participation and course-related activities.

Although the effectiveness of pedagogical adjustments was not measured by this study, the authors in later distance education courses had positive student feedback when the instructor visited the various distance learning sites. That is, the instructor actually went to the distance site to deliver the lecture material, making the students who would normally have been receiving the material via electronic methods the live studio audience. Of course, this necessitated the instructor to travel off-campus to deliver the material, adding transportation-related expenses to the cost of delivering the course. Also, the students who are accustomed to being the live studio audience tended to be less receptive of this rotating method of delivery. Again, it should be noted that this adjustment was not proven by this study to increase satisfaction; rather, it may serve as a heuristic measure of pedagogical adjustment that could be used to increase student satisfaction with distance education classes.

With this and other adjustments, it might be possible to increase the level of satisfaction and effectiveness experienced by the students in the distance education class. This leads to the question that if these adjustments are made, what are the implications of such adjustments on the course quality and the learning experiences that the students in the distance education class will receive?

With this in mind, several issues from this research present themselves, the first being quality. This study did not address the issue of course quality and/or learning in its analysis. It does, however, raise the potential for several questions that should be addressed in future studies. For example, is it possible in a distance education delivery method to maintain convenience for the student while increasing the levels of satisfaction and effectiveness? More important, can this be accomplished without compromising course quality? After all, one of the missions of AACSB standards is the delivery of a quality educational experience (Standards for Accreditation Business Administration and Accounting 1994-95). To accommodate the students in the distance education format, the architects of the programs need to consider how such programs can be developed where quality can be measured. It is equally important to design such programs so as not to compromise the current AACSB-accepted level of quality education and learning environment that exists in the traditional face-to-face format.

A second issue involves cost. That is, do the costs that are associated with a distance education format compromise the goal of achieving a high-quality education and creating an environment where learning is enhanced? Colleges and universities are faced with reduced and/or inadequate funding and potentially lower enrollments. As such, they are seeking alternative avenues to generate additional funding opportunities and to be more competitive than ever in terms of attracting students to their programs. With the availability of technology, distance education programs have surfaced in many educational environments. Although additional students do represent added revenues, there are significant costs associated with the creation and implementation of distance education programs. In particular, where technology is a prerequisite, costs to operate and maintain current equipment can be expensive. It is therefore suggested that when creating distance education programs, one needs to examine the cost associated with, and the benefits received from, those programs. It is at this point where caution must be exercised. That is, there is a tendency when considering costs to make every effort to reduce costs where possible. A cost reduction philos-

ophy can lead to decisions that focus on convenience and expediency at the expense of course quality.

A third issue involves student learning under different course delivery formats. Student learning is particularly difficult to assess. Exam scores may be a viable yet weak proxy for learning. However, in this research effort, such scores were not available because student grades were based on group projects rather than traditional exams. Moreover, each group project was unique in terms of both topic and outcome, making assessment of learning across groups in this situation impractical. However, we recognize that whether student learning differs in different delivery formats is an important issue and should be considered in future research efforts. In addition, it is hoped that students learn not only from interactions with the instructor but also from interactions with other students in their class preparation and discussion. Future research could also examine how the limited interaction of students in a distance learning format may affect student learning.

A fourth issue is the application of distance education to other types of courses and disciplines. That is, can the distance education method be just as convenient, maintain quality, enhance learning, be effective, and be satisfying to students in programs other than at the graduate level and/or in other disciplines? There are several questions to be addressed regarding the applicability of a distance education format to all levels and disciplines of higher education. For example, could distance education meet the needs of undergraduate marketing students? Would the format be as effective and satisfying to undergraduate students when compared with the traditional face-to-face instructional method? Will the distance education method be functional where the use of recitation sections and/or laboratory exercises are necessary? A one-size-fits-all application of distance education may be a concept that offers convenience and expediency. But it could also very well be a concept that compromises the quality one receives from an educational experience in exchange for expediency and convenience.

These are important questions. The implications may be far-reaching and influence the basic structure of the educational process. Or they may be rendered moot by further advances and research in this area. Nevertheless, it is these questions and their implications that future research should consider when studying the relationship between the distance education phenomena and the traditional face-to-face classroom experience.

SUMMARY

This research effort analyzed the delivery of graduate marketing education at an AACSB-accredited land grant institution. At issue were the student preferences toward, and satisfaction with, varying methods of delivering the marketing management MBA course. Although the MBA cohorts surveyed were rather diverse in their experiential preparation for this graduate program, their preferences were rather similar. These similarities indicated that a majority of the part-time cohorts would prefer a course format different from the one in which they were currently participating. They seemed to have gravitated to their present course delivery method based on outside forces and/or convenience rather than preference.

Results also show that a consistent course structure can be developed among varying cohorts and delivery formats. However, some pedagogical adjustments may be required of the distance education format, particularly in the areas of class participation and course-related activities. In the end, it can be summarized that based on the results of this study, distance education is seen by these students as a convenient but less effective and less satisfying alternative for delivering graduate marketing education. These results should give one pause to consider the implications. If we are to adjust courses to improve both effectiveness and student satisfaction with distance education, we must be cognizant of how these adjustments affect course quality and the learning experience. Therefore, it would behoove future researchers as well as architects of distance education programs to consider these issues when planning, developing, and adjusting the delivery of their graduate educational programs.

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