

MARKETING EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Marketers are increasingly adopting sustainable business practices as the evidence mounts linking sustainability with market share, brand equity and long run profitability. While business coursework is following practice in some disciplines (e.g., environmental accounting/economics), attention to sustainability issues in marketing curricula is limited, for the most part, to discussions of “green” customers, environmental considerations in product development and packaging, and social/ethical issues in non-profit marketing (Beyond Grey Pinstripes 2009). Marketing courses wholly devoted to sustainable business strategy are rare, particularly at the undergraduate level. Thus, there appears to be an increasing discrepancy between the importance placed on a triple bottom line approach to setting marketing objectives by practitioners and its importance to marketing educators. Status quo marketing curricula fail to give students the knowledge and skills they need to be sustainability advocates and experts in their places of employment. This places them at a competitive disadvantage as they seek fulfilling careers in the field.

The special session brings together six marketing faculty from three different institutions to discuss marketing pedagogy related to sustainability. These are some of the first faculty to develop sustainability-related course content, particularly at the undergraduate level. All are passionate evangelists who welcome the opportunity to share experiences and exchange ideas with others. The session begins with a reiteration of the business case for sustainability and the need for marketing EFS (Professors Erica Okada and Eric Mais). The purpose of this leadoff presentation is to ground the discussion in a managerially useful context and to highlight the managerial importance of sustainability-oriented business education. This is followed by a presentation of new research that demonstrates the effectiveness of sustainability coursework for increasing long-term information-seeking among students (Professors Ed Love and Craig Dunn). Information-seeking has been linked to issue involvement.

The remaining three presentations focus on course development efforts by faculty who are currently integrating a sustainability world view into their marketing courses. One professor has developed a stand-alone course at the undergraduate level (Professor Wilhelm). Two have developed teaching modules and required projects relating to sustainability as part of their consumer behavior and non-profit courses (Professors Jill Mosteller and Mottner, respectively). Each of these presenters discusses: (1) motivations for incorporating sustainability into their courses, (2) key learning objectives, (3) overview and evolution of course/module organization and materials, (4) examples of assignments/projects that support learning objectives, particularly those that involve collaboration with marketing practitioners, (5) key challenges faced from administration and student perspectives, and (6) advice to fellow faculty members at other institutions who might wish to initiate similar endeavors.

There is still much work to be done before sustainability will be successfully integrated into the core marketing (and business) curriculum. Our hope is that this session will assist and motivate faculty to develop their own sustainability-related initiatives at their respective institutions. With AACSB calling for business schools to seek ways of incorporating sustainability into their programs, it is time for marketing educators to recognize the importance and relevance of this topic for marketing pedagogy and teaching scholarship.