REFLECTIONS ON STUDENTS' A PRIORI EXPECTATIONS OF AN INTRODUCTORY MARKETING COURSE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

An exploratory study has been made on an attempt to meet students' a priori expectations in an introductory marketing course. Student expectations and preferences were incorporated into course emphasis and conduct. Preliminary findings suggest that if expectations are met, both student satisfaction and performance may be improved.

Introduction

Only recently has experimental evidence been gathered to substantiate a position that participatory planning leads to gains in student achievement (Stromquist). For instance, controlled experiments in learning have shown that subjects tended to recall ideas they felt more important and had poorest recall for items rated as least important (Mayer). As a practical matter to business educators, recent developments by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in outcome testing would seemingly place a premium on the amount of material learned in a class as a step toward professional accreditation (AACSB, AACSB Newsletter). Thus, experimentation in course evaluations and outcome testing have been encouraged. Recently, Heroux and Droge investigated students' a priori expectations of an introductory marketing course and preferred teaching methods (1986). As a consequence of their study, these authors were able to rank fifteen items in order of students' perceived importance and identify three underlying factors that accounted for students' expectations. Three modes of learning and corresponding teaching methods favorable to student reception thus were suggested. Sensitivity to these issues may affect not only student satisfaction but their learning efficiencies in individual courses.

The initial work by Heroux-Droge represents a step forward in designing courses to suit students' preferences, thus developing learning-oriented procedures for teaching. The significance of this approach would be improved, however, by post-course tests of perceptions and course evaluations. That is, the initial research determined students' expectations, but results were not made available on student performance or students' feelings upon course completion. Attempts have thus been made to extend the Heroux-Droge approach to determine not only "post" course impressions, but also some evaluation of both faculty and student performance. Such information would appear essential in completion of course evaluations to determine whether meeting expectations tended to produce favorable learning conditions. The purpose of this paper is therefore to review the application of a student preference approach to an introductory marketing course using the Heroux-Droge instrument as input. Professor Heroux was kind enough to lend the original instrument to this purpose (Heroux).

Hypotheses

H1: Students will tend to be more satisfied with courses they helped plan.

Essentially this hypothesis is a tenet of participative management--employees who participate in management tend to be more satisfied with their jobs (Gibson et al). Thus, it follows that students who participate in "management" of a course should be expected to better appreciate the course and their satisfaction with it.

H2: Students will tend to perform better in courses that they helped plan.

Participation does not always lead to better performance. For many tasks, participation is just not appropriate. The use of participative management depends on 1) the time available--participation takes more time; 2) the individual's desire to participate--not everyone wants to participate; 3) the reward system--participation will not be so important if rewards are inequitable or unfair; 4) the nature of the task--if participants cannot control the task, participation management is inappropriate (Gibson et al). The nature of a beginning course, with an appropriate instructor, would seem to fit these limitations.

Procedure

The course selected for experimentation was a beginning fundamentals course. This class was offered as a first course in a graduate program for students without an undergraduate business degree. In terms of material it contained the items generally covered in a principles course. Two types of students typically populated this class--either students who continued on in an MBA program, or students from other university departments who desired a business minor. A premium was thus placed on providing student satisfaction in this class in order to encourage continuation in the MBA program and/or implant positive impressions within students who carried a business minor from the university. The course was usually taught from undergraduate texts, suitable for students with no background in marketing, but who were expected to have a high self-motivational level. Previous student evaluations indicated that a suitable approach for material presentation was a problem.

After preliminary introductions, a course syllabus used in teaching previous courses was introduced to students at the first meeting. The syllabus contained general remarks made on course description, objectives, prerequisites, tests, term projects, class participation,

attendance and grading, the course approach was described as,

> "A mixture of discussions, assignments, readings and two term projects...used to realize the course objectives and provide a learning experience that is both challenging and satisfying."

The tentative approach included brief topic descriptions, e.g. "Market Segmentation," and specified coverage of fourteen text chapters and twenty-one readings. Students were then informed why the Heroux-Droge instrument was being used and that their priorities and reasonable expectations would be incorporated into the course. Students naturally were guaranteed anonymity. Additionally, pre- and post-tests of student comprehension were made by an approach described by Wilson (1987). The pre-tests were also given during the first meeting. This information, along with university student evaluations, was used to complete the course evaluation and students' receptivity to its conduct. Course evaluations from a previous class were used as a baseline for student evaluations, and simultaneous information from a concurrent outcome measurement study was used to compare students' relative comprehension of subject matter.

As a consequence of the initial survey, certain changes were made in the original course syllabus. These changes were announced to the class and results of the initial survey were reviewed. The class was not informed that it was otherwise a "special" class and, in fact, grading processes and procedures were nearly identical to previous classes. Exit interviews with class members indicated they expected that a portion of their final exam would be identical to the initial segment of the outcome measurement exam, which of course did not occur. This expectation could have led to lower overall scores on the final portion of the outcome measurement study.

Results

1. Student Preferences and Course Conduct

The Heroux-Droge instrument contained two sections. The first section is a format for determining student preferences on course content and the second section is concerned with student demographics and a preference selection for style of course conduct. Results of the survey were shared with students second section first to "warm" to the task of emphasizing course content, and this organization is followed here.

The majority of students (64%) in the class had over two years work experience, but only a minority (9%) had a major concentration in marketing. Consequently, over seventy percent (73%) of students thought a beginning course should be operationally oriented, i.e., "provide problem solving management skills." Further, almost half the students (45%) thought a case method approach to teaching was appropriate. Table 1 shows the relative diversity in experience and interest reported by the class.

The relative importance placed on the fifteen line items of Heroux-Droge is shown in Table 2. Students, consistent with their background, associated high interest values with learning marketing concepts, obtaining real world knowledge, learning rules of thumb and developing management skills. Little importance was associated with learning to model marketing relationships and learning about academic research in marketing (Column 1 in Table 2). Somewhat more difficult to understand, because of the "practical" inclination of the students, was the apparent lack of interest in learning about famous marketing cases or in contacting people in the field. It was supposed, however, that these results related to a disinclination to hear "war stories" from practitioners.

During the second class meeting, the students were shown an overlay that reflected their apparent preferences as a consequence of these results. This information is shown in Table 3. Three priority levels were established for course conduct. High emphasis was to be placed on six items that ranged from learning concepts to learning vocabulary. Moderate emphasis was to be placed on four items that ranged from obtaining action oriented skills to theoretically analyzing phenomena. Low emphasis was to be placed on the remaining five items--mastering theoretical knowledge to learning about academic research. Further, a significant change in course conduct was promised. Because of the relatively high interest in a case approach, four cases were selected for addition to the course and nine of the readings were deleted. These changes were made in the syllabus and, to the degree possible, these changes and preference were incorporated into the course.

2. Post-Course Perceptions

Final interests of students might be expected to change throughout a course because of experience gained during the course. Interest rank, or priorities in this case, did not appear to change much. The Spearman rank coefficient of initial interest (Column 1 of Table 2) in comparison with final interest (Column 2) was significant at the 0.001 level. The most obvious shifts were in learning about famous cases (increase), learning rules of thumb (decrease), and contacting people in the field (increase). Individual T-tests of these items revealed that shifts in interest level were not significant at 0.100. It was therefore concluded that although some changes did occur, they were not unlike any random change that might be expected.

It might be noted that it was possible to evaluate the results of this study against the original Heroux-Droge research. Column 4 of Table 2, the original Heroux-Droge rankings, might be compared with Column 1, our findings, in this regard. The Spearman rank coefficient of this comparison was significant at the 0.005 level. Thus, in structuring a course, the

TABLE 1
STUDENT RESPONSES TO GENERAL QUESTIONS

A. Work Experience:
   - Less than 6 months full time.....18%
   - 1 to 2 years full time.....18%
   - Over 2 years full time.....64%

B. Major Concentration:
   - Marketing.....9%
   - Accounting.....9%
   - Finance.....36%
   - Management.....18%
   - International Business.....9%
   - Engineering.....18%

C. Perceived Purpose of a University Education:
   - Provide Analytical Skills and Theoretical Base.....27%
   - Provide Problem Solving and Management Skills.....73%

D. Appropriate Teaching Method:
   - Lecture.....54%
   - Case Method.....45%

TABLE 2
IMPORTANCE RANKING OF STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

	Initial Interest Mean	Rank	Final Interest Mean	Rank	Final Performance Mean	Rank	Heroux-Droge Interest Mean	Rank
1. Learn Marketing Concepts	1.55	1	1.33	1	1.50	1	1.57	1
(standard deviation)	(0.66)		(0.47)		(0.50)		(0.72)	
2. Develop Marketing Problem-Solving Skills	1.91	5	1.67	2	1.90	4	1.72	3
	(0.79)		(0.47)		(0.70)		(0.77)	
3. Obtain Real World Marketing Knowledge	1.82	2	1.67	2	2.20	11	1.71	2
	(1.19)		(0.67)		(0.75)		(0.88)	
4. Learn Marketing Vocabulary	1.91	5	2.00	6	1.80	2	2.38	10
	(0.67)		(0.67)		(0.60)		(0.94)	
5. Learn to Develop Marketing Strategies	2.09	8	2.11	7	1.80	2	1.76	5
	(0.79)		(0.57)		(0.40)		(0.84)	
6. Master Theoretical Marketing Knowledge	2.55	11	2.56	12	2.10	9	2.74	13
	(0.78)		(0.83)		(0.83)		(0.97)	
7. Learn About Famous Marketing Cases	2.73	13	2.22	9	2.00	7	2.78	14
	(0.86)		(1.03)		(0.77)		(1.02)	
8. Obtain Action Oriented Marketing Skills	2.00	7	1.78	4	1.90	4	2.12	7
	(0.60)		(0.63)		(0.30)		(0.90)	
9. Learn About Academic Research in Marketing	3.09	15	2.89	15	2.50	14	3.01	15
	(1.08)		(0.87)		(0.81)		(1.04)	
10. Learn Marketing Rules-of-Thumb	1.82	2	2.22	9	2.20	11	2.14	8
	(0.94)		(0.79)		(0.75)		(0.89)	
11. Develop Analytical Marketing Skills	2.18	9	2.11	7	2.00	7	2.03	6
	(0.57)		(0.74)		(0.77)		(0.92)	
12. Learn to Model Marketing Relationships	2.64	12	2.78	14	2.30	13	2.39	11
	(0.88)		(0.63)		(0.78)		(0.87)	
13. Theoretically Analyze Marketing Phenomena	2.18	10	2.67	13	2.10	10	2.64	12
	(0.83)		(0.67)		(0.70)		(0.93)	
14. Develop Marketing Management Skills	1.82	2	1.78	5	1.90	4	1.73	4
	(0.72)		(0.79)		(0.70)		(0.79)	
15. Contact With Persons in the Field	2.91	14	2.22	9	3.80	15	2.20	9
	(1.38)		(1.03)		(1.17)		(1.19)	

Heroux-Droge emphasis apparently would have been an excellent first approach in prioritizing course coverage. Because the Heroux-Droge study was on undergraduate students and this study was on graduate students, preliminary results exist for generalizing emphasis.

3. Perceived Faculty Performance

Two measures were used to evaluate perceived performance of the instructor. The first of these measures was a modification of the

TABLE 3
PRIORITIES SET BY SURVEY RESPONSES

A. High Emphasis
   1. Learn Marketing Concepts
   2. Obtain Real World Marketing Knowledge
   3. Learn Marketing Rules of Thumb
   4. Develop Marketing Management Skills
   5. Develop Marketing Problem Solving Skills
   6. Learn Marketing Vocabulary

B. Medium or Moderate Emphasis
   1. Obtain Action Oriented Marketing Skills
   2. Learn to Develop Marketing Strategies
   3. Develop Analytical Marketing Skills
   4. Theoretically Analyze Marketing Phenomena

C. Low Emphasis
   1. Master Theoretical Marketing Knowledge
   2. Learn to Model Marketing Relationships
   3. Learn about Famous Marketing Cases
   4. Contact with Persons in the Field
   5. Learn about Academic Research in Marketing

Heroux-Droge instrument. The modification gaged performance by changing the endpoints in the Likert scales from "very important/not at all important" in the questionnaire to "very well done/not at all well done" in the performance questionnaire. Further, the instructions were changed from (emphasis added):

> This study will investigate the expectations you have of the introductory course in marketing. Please give your opinion as to the importance of the following items:

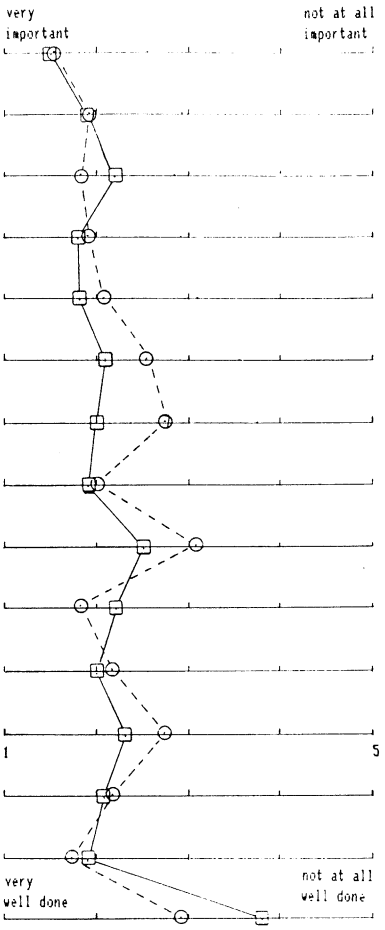
to:

> This study will investigate the perceptions you have of the introductory course in marketing. Please give your opinion as to the coverage of the following items:

Performance versus expectations on this basis can thus be evaluated by comparing Columns 3 and 1 in Table 2. Alternatively, an image analysis diagram can be constructed with this data, as shown in Figure 1. This diagram makes immediate comparisons easy, which accounts for their popularity in positioning services (Kotler). If it is assumed that the Likert scales for preference and performance are identical, statistically significant deviations were noted for only three items--learning about famous marketing cases (α=0.050), learning about academic research in marketing (α=0.100), and contact with people in the field (α=0.100). In the first two items the students got "more" than they thought necessary, whereas in the third item the students got less and so indicated. Overall, however, the course appeared reasonably positioned to preference. It may have been slightly more academic than interest would dictate and slightly less worldly, but performance was surprisingly coincident for a first time effort.

Apparent satisfaction carried over into the second measure of performance, the internal university student evaluation of instructor and course. At the time of this study, the university was conducting a comprehensive survey of

FIGURE 1
PERCEPTION OF CONTENT VERSUS INITIAL INTEREST
(Keyed to Table 2)



student perceptions with an internal instrument. Twenty-six line items were surveyed, along with an overall evaluation of course and instructor popularity, using a five point Likert scale. The average of twenty-three of the twenty-six line items and the two popularity items were reported in the department's annual evaluation instrument. In each case, statistically significant improvements were noted over previous evaluations in this particular course. The mean of means increased from 4.0 to 4.5, which reflected significant improvements in 17 of 23 items (5.0 equals perfection). Large improvements (1.0 or greater) were noted in style of presentation, good uses of examples and presentations, course organization, precision in answering questions and appropriateness of demands to course level. Apparent student euphoria carried over into improved perceptions of instructor availability, being on time and meeting classes. These latter items, of course, remained unchanged during the course of study. Students' perceptions of the overall course and instructor increased from 2.9 to 4.0. All improvements were significant at the 0.010 level. This information is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF UNIVERSITY EVALUATION
OF INSTRUCTOR AND COURSE

Summary of Evaluation Item	Previous Course	Experimental Course
Aggregate Mean of 23 Line Items	4.0	4.5
Overall, Instructor Is Among the Best Teachers I Have Taken	2.9	4.0
Overall, Course Is Among the Best I Have Taken	2.9	4.0

It may be concluded from these two perceptual measures that students indeed appreciated the course they helped plan. Thus, there is preliminary support for Hypothesis 1, e.g., the students would appreciate the course, and it cannot be rejected. Further, there is preliminary support for a corollary hypothesis that students not only appreciated the course, but the instructor as well, in the course they helped plan.

4. Student Performance

Student performance in the experimental class was monitored as part of a broad based study of outcome measurement testing of the beginning marketing course at the university (Wilson, Dodge and Mathews). Four other classes were included in the study, featuring other student backgrounds, teaching methods, class period lengths, and texts and schedules. Preliminary results from this study are shown in **Table 5**.

TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF VALUE-ADDED STUDY
("n" represents the number of students that took both exams)

Class	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test Std Dev	Post-test Mean	Post-test Std Dev	"n"	% Improve
A	49.6	3.2	61.3	5.3	46	23.6
B	54.0	7.2	60.9	8.0	27	12.8
C	52.0	5.6	61.7	6.0	6	18.6
D	55.8	6.1	69.6	5.2	32	24.7
Exp. Std.	50.9	6.5	64.6	6.2	10	26.9
Average or Total	52.4	5.3	63.7	6.0	121	21.6

The experimental class showed the largest improvement in outcome measurement, due in part to its fairly low pre-test score. It did not receive the highest post-test score. AACSB has noted the bias against high pre-test scores in its pilot study of value-added testing (AACSB). Nonetheless, when the experimental group's value-added scores were compared against the scores of the other four classes, improvement

was significant at the 0.100 level. Thus, there is also some preliminary support for Hypothesis 2 in that students tended to do better in the course they helped plan. At the very least, it may be concluded that permitting students to participate in planning did not harm their learning effort.

Discussion

An apparently successful attempt has been made to position an introductory marketing course with regard to student expectations of content and preference in conduct. It followed that the course met with relative approval, and statistically significant improvements were noted in measures of student satisfaction and performance. These results deserve some reflection.

The first observation that may be made is that a Heroux-Droge approach gets further support as a worthwhile place to start in attempts to fashion a student-oriented course, either at the undergraduate or graduate level. The independent application here tended to replicate the previous rankings of priorities and also produced a satisfaction oriented clientele. This study clearly produced the result intended in the original Heroux-Droge research. It would be hoped that future work in this area would continue to include evaluation methodology introduced here--especially some measure of student learning.

It is recognized that this study has its methodological shortcomings. It represents a case study, of course, and thus is not generalizable. Further, it was an "O-X" study without return to the previous state or control (Kerlinger). Finally, instructor evaluation results suggest a "halo" effect, and there is always the suspicion that student performance may also have been positively affected as was performance in the original Hawthorne studies (Berger, Benson).

Without being irresponsible, these problems are recognized and are dealt with in the following philosophical manner. Establishment of Heroux-Droge as an instrument, or any instrument, will not be accomplished in a single study but rather by widespread application by a cross section of marketing educators. This paper, therefore, contributes to the potential of this approach to course conduct and suggests further investigation. The results reported here seem appropriate for this purpose and an Academy of Marketing Science conference may be especially appropriate to discuss this approach, which may lead to further study. In writing of the development of procedures in clinical psychology and psychiatry as well as educational fields, Hersen and Barlow have positioned case studies in a positive light in this regard. With regard to O-X designs, they suggest with appropriate reservations that results may be meaningful (1984).

The nature of course improvement for individuals is undoubtedly to follow-up on approaches that produce favorable student learning situations. Perhaps a lead has been identified, and if a halo effect in instruction was developed, it may not be all bad if it encouraged learning. In a practical sense, halo and Hawthorne effects may be worth developing in marketing education, not avoiding.

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