Development and Implementation of an AACSB Assessment Plan: Assessing Two Mission-based Principle Learning Objectives in an Introductory Marketing Course

Abstract

Over the intervening years since The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) formally incorporated the notion of outcomes assessment in 1991 (AACSB, 2008; Lui and Shum, 2010), the directives from AACSB regarding assurance of learning have become more focused, and the urgency to assess has been heightened with each iteration of the Standards. The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of the assessment plan that was developed and implemented in a small, private, West-coast university, by describing how faculty buy-in to the assessment activities was attained. Two key learning principles listed in the School's Mission Statement, ethical behavior and globalism, were assessed in our Principles of Marketing course. The implementation and control of the assessment activities is described. We share our experiences and lessons-learned in order to provide assistance for other institutions who might be going through an initial AACSB accreditation process.

Introduction

Over the intervening years since The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) formally incorporated the notion of outcomes assessment in 1991 (AACSB, 2008; Lui and Shum, 2010), the directives from AACSB regarding assurance of learning have become more focused, and the urgency to assess has been heightened with each iteration of the Standards. Informally, it is understood that only those standards regarding faculty qualifications (Standards 2, 9, and 10) eclipse the importance of those regarding Assessment of Learning (AoL) (Standards 16 through 21). With each new revision, the gap of relative importance between the two areas narrows (AACSB, 2010).

AACSB does not dictate how AoL is to be conducted by individual institutions (La Fleur et al., 2009). However, the requirement that a business school's primary activities must relate to both the school's mission as well as to the institution's mission (Standards 1 – 5) drives the school to develop a well thought-through, mission-based, organic, and protean AoL plan. To be effective, both in terms of meeting the AACSB Standards and the intent of assessment (i.e. a process of continual improvement based on the mission of the school and the institution), such a plan must be collaborative, originate at the program level, and be carried out through the various departments/major subject areas. Furthermore, the assessment must be course-embedded and direct (Pringle et al., 2007; AACSB, 2008; 2010; LaFleur et al., 2009). This task is easier said than done.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of how the assessment plan at xxxxxx University, a small, private institution in the Los Angeles area, was developed and implemented, with special emphasis on the following:

1. The process of how faculty buy-in to the assessment activities was attained.

2. The selection of MRKT 301 Principles of Marketing as the course in which two key learning principles listed in the School's Mission Statement, ethical behavior and globalism, would be assessed.

Background

The School is seeking initial AACSB accreditation, and is looking to conduct its Self-Evaluation Report (SER) year very soon. Although an assessment program for the various departments in the School of Business had been in place for several years prior to the acceptance of the Accreditation Plan (AP) by AACSB in 2008, the effort was based on the model required by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), our regional accrediting body, and it was specific to the majors within the School. Thus, to meet AACSB standards, it was necessary to develop an assessment plan at the program level (as opposed to the individual major level) for the overarching BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) degree program (Pringle et al., 2007; Gardiner et al., 2010).

Development of The Assessment Plan

Faculty involvement. For over a decade, it has been reported in the literature that a primary obstacle to developing and implementing a successful assessment program is the lack of faculty buy-in and their resistance to the process (Banta, 1997; Kerby & Weber, 2000; Pringle et

al., 2007; Meuter et al., 2009). Among faculty issues are (1) a perceived lack of time for assessment activities; (2) the fear of treading unknown territory; (3) the belief that their academic freedom in the classroom is being threatened; and, perhaps of most concern, (4) the possibility that the assessment results will be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness and, therefore, poor performance on the part of their students could affect pay increases, promotions, etc.

From the onset we knew that our faculty likely would have similar qualms regarding the need to create and implement a cross-school, collaborative, and systematic assessment program that would require them to include standardized, mission-driven assessment activities in their courses. Thus, the process was initiated by forming an ad hoc committee of faculty from across the School of Business and allowing the faulty members to drive our AoL initiative (see LaPoint, 2002; and Callahan et al., 2010 for similar, faculty-led AoL activities). Therefore, although the committee was co-convened by the School's accreditation officer and the director of our BBA program, due to their knowledge of both the overall AoL process and the BBA curriculum, the faculty members were afforded the opportunity to be a part of the AoL program from its inception, as opposed to being brought into the process post hoc as mere facilitators.

In return for their work on the committee, the faculty were paid a generous stipend during the summer of 2010, fall semester 2010, and spring semester 2011 to develop, implement, and control the program. In fall 2011, the ad hoc committee was changed to a standing committee in the School of Business, and the faulty committee members receive university service credit.

The Plan. The School of Business' Mission Statement indicates that we "prepare future leaders of business who communicate effectively, act ethically, and think globally". From the statement, the committee identified four key program learning outcomes (PLOs): effective communication, ethical behavior, global perspective, and leadership, and developed a database

of learning activities and accompanying rubrics with which to assess each principle via direct, course-embedded methods (Kerby & Weber, 2000; Pringle et al., 2007). The activities and rubrics were uploaded into a common file on Moodle, our electronic course management system, that can be accessed easily by all faculty involved in the assessment process (see Hershey, 2008, for a discussion of using Blackboard for the same purpose). Thus, the committee not only compiled easily accessed instruments, but they also facilitated common learning experiences across the BBA curriculum by supplying the faculty teaching the targeted courses with a set of shared, imbedded, direct learning activities across sections—a systemization process similar to that reported by Lapoint (2002), Meuter et al. (2009), and Gardiner, et al. (2010).

As assessment materials were developed, the committee went beyond mere measurement of learning experiences via single pre- and post-class tests and created a series of Introductory (I)/Developed (DDD)/Mastery (M) measurements in the effort to ensure longitudinal and cross-sectional measurement of the PLOs (Figure 1).
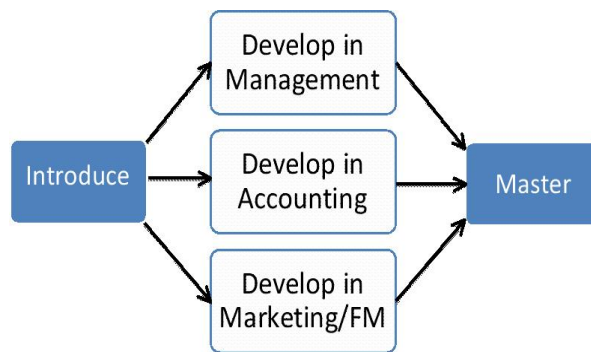

Figure 1. I/DDD/M Model

Assessing Ethical Behavior and Global Perspective in MRKT 301 Principles of Marketing

Selected courses within the core BBA program were identified wherein the AoL for each PLO at each level of mastery would take place. Similar to the situation reported by LaFleur et al.

(2009), MRKT 301 Principles of Marketing, is the sole marketing course in our BBA core curriculum. Thus, it was targeted by the committee for the assessment of two of the PLOs: ethical behavior and global perspective. As MRKT 301 is a junior level course, both PLOs would be assessed at the developed (DDD) level.

Ethical behavior. AACSB mandates that schools of business instruct students in ethical business behavior (2008). Given the recent and seemingly growing number of unethical marketing activities in today's headlines (Schlegelmilch and Öberseder, 2009), choosing MRKT 301 for assessment in this area was a logical choice. For this component, the committee, led by members from the Department of Marketing, developed a short assignment regarding questionable behavior in the fashion industry (i.e. altering photographs of models/famous spokespersons, knocking-off high-end goods, etc.). The exercise is presented in Appendix I. and the rubric in Appendix II.

Global perspective. In an interview published in 2009 in The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship, John Fernandes, the president and CEO of AACSB, emphasized the need to develop a global mindset among students of business as the paramount element of business education today (Carraher, 2010). Subsequently, in a comprehensive report published on February 10, 2011, the AACSB Globalization of Management Education Task Force asserted that globalization stands atop of the changes that have impacted management education in the past fifty years (AACSB, 2011). Based on the global nature of marketing and the role of marketers in the global economy, assessing this PLO in MRKT 301 seemed a good fit. The assignment developed by the committee offers students the opportunity to compare and contrast marketing tactics across three cultures. The exercise is presented in Appendix III and the rubric in Appendix IV.

Implementation and Control of the Assessment Activities

The assessment assignments were completed by the students in MRKT 301 in two consecutive semesters (fall 2010 and spring 2011). Four sections of MRKT 301 were taught during both semesters for a total of eight sections. In fall 2010, three of the four instructors utilized the Moodle online service to post the assignments, rubrics and grades. One instructor gave the global assignment as a group project, but all other instructors gave it as an individual assignment. For purposes of consistency, the group project was excluded from analysis by assessment committee and excluded from the written report. In spring 2011, all instructors complied by giving the assignments as individual work.

For the purpose of analysis, papers with A, B, and C grades were randomly pulled from the dataset of each MRKT 301 section and reviewed in aggregate by the assessment committee. In the fall semester, the committee agreed that the ethics assignment had produced superficial results, and the globalism needed further polishing and a more specific rubric. The committee members also felt that the rubrics and assignments should allow for more student creativity. In terms of delivery, the committee found that students taking the course in the 7-week format needed to receive the assignment earlier in the session. Other changes made by the committee included tweaking the rubric for the globalism assignment and adjusting the ethics assignment to make it more general and less 'formula'.

In spring 2011, the above-mentioned changes were implemented and incorporated into the assignments. All student work from all four sections were posted on Moodle, which yielded a larger dataset of student work than in fall 2010. One instructor reported that the "ethics papers were much more focused than in the previous terms as a result of the improved questions and assignment requirements". The instructor's claim was confirmed by the assessment committee,

after they had analyzed several, randomly selected papers from the instructor's section. According to the spring 2011 report from the committee "[t]he global assignment had some good results, primarily because of better sequencing of assignments and clarification of assignment requirements. Both assignments demonstrated higher levels of student work than in the previous term".

One problem that was detected by the committee stemmed from the fact that junior, senior and even a few sophomore students were enrolled in the MRKT 301, which made the course less useful as a building block for later courses and, therefore, suspect in its usefulness as the course in which to teach ethical behavior and global awareness at the Developed (DDD) level. Therefore, one of the suggested changes for the fall 2011 semester was to encourage student advisors to have students take the course as a second-term sophomore or junior. Other suggestions from the committee were to improve the rubric for the globalism assignment and to compare results among individual professors rather than to analyze aggregate the data from across sections.

By summer 2011 we had closed the assessment of ethics and globalism loop twice in the MRKT 301 course, and we now are in our third iteration of the assessment program. As we continue to assess our students on these two key principles and continue to refine our cases and rubrics and their delivery, we are able to learn the extent to which our students are developing their understanding of the ethical marketing behavior and the nuances of global marketing.

Conclusion

We have come a long way in the assessment arena following the acceptance of our Accreditation Plan by AACSB. Although we had become reasonably adept at assessing at the department level, as required by WASC, the notion of creating and utilizing a systematic

approach to assessing mission-related, BBA program-wide, PLOs (Lapoint, 2002; Meuter et al., 2009; Gardiner, et al., 2010) was new to us. Having worked through two iterations of the assessment plan and being in our third, we believe we have developed a solid program.

By including the faculty from the inception of our assessment efforts, we greatly alleviated the potential problem of faculty being so disengaged from the process that they were resentful.   By developing short, to-the-point assignments that are easily downloaded from Moodle and easily graded and entered into the dataset, we kept the amount of time required of the instructors to a minimum. By allowing faculty of the courses in which assessment would take place to develop the assignments, we helped to ameliorate accusations of taking away individual faculty members' freedom in the classroom. Although it is potentially possible for individual faculty to be assessed in regard to how their students perform on the assignments, it is widely understood by the faculty that if this is done by the committee in future semesters, it will be for developmental and not judgmental purposes. Furthermore, there will be no systematic inclusion of such information in annual reviews, promotion packages, etc. Rather, the information will be included only if and when the individual faculty member chooses to include it him/herself.

Assigning the PLOs of global perspective and ethical behavior at the developed (DDD) level to the MRKT 301 Principles of Marketing course made sense because both are issues that marketers in the 21st century must confront. That the assignments were developed by the MRKT 301 faculty and that they fit seamlessly into MRKT 301 course content meant that their inclusion over the past three semesters has been unobtrusive. Having now included them for three semesters, the assignments regarding ethics and globalism are viewed by the faculty and students as being integral components of the course.

Appendix I Assignment for Assessing the Ethics in Marketing

ETHICS IN MARKETING

Homework Assignment

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Milton Friedman said, "There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits as long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception and fraud."

Discuss this statement, looking at the various ethical concerns we face as marketers. (Please watch the uploaded video, "Lessons from Fashion's Free Culture," before writing your thoughts.)

a. What about marketing messages? Where does deception begin? For example, is airbrushing a photo deceptive? Is using a 'model' for a 'real' woman deceptive? Use these questions as guidelines, but you may discuss ANY aspect of marketing messages.

b. What about 'knocking off' another product? Is it ethical to copy the creative design of another as long as you don't fraudulently use the other designer's name? How does this differ from plagiarism?

c. What about marketing that 'pushes the envelope' with regard to normative behavior in society? Should marketers accept responsibility for some messages that might help society to view itself differently? (Some examples might be commercials that do some 'male bashing' or ads where body image is overly thin. These are JUST EXAMPLES. Feel free to explore your own ideas of what 'pushes the envelope.'

Write a 2 to 3 page reflective paper regarding this topic. Include concrete examples to support your points. Outside research, through observation of actual media messages and products is a plus. (Cite appropriately where needed.)

Be prepared to interactively share your thoughts in class discussion. Bring visuals to support your positions. Remember, when we are sharing that there will be different viewpoints. As a class, we will be respectful to opinions of all our classmates.

5% of class grade

Appendix II Rubric for Grading the Ethics Assignment

REFLECTIVE ETHICS PAPER - RUBRIC

NAME_____

CONTENT/DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL 50% EARNED ____

Subject Matter

- Discussed all key issues posed through the quote and questions
- Content is comprehensive and accurate
- Displays understanding of the issues posed
- Major points supported by details and examples
- Uses ethical theories within the discussion
- Writer has gone beyond textbook for resources when appropriate

ORGANIZATION 20% ____

- Introduction provides a sufficient background on the topic and previews major points
- Central themes are immediately clear
- Structure is clear, logical, and easy to follow
- Conclusions follow logically from discussions in the body of the paper

STYLE/MECHANICS 30% _____

Format--10% _____

- Citations/reference page follow APA guidelines
- Properly cites ideas or info from other sources
- Paper is laid out effectively - uses headings and other reader friendly tools
- Paper is neat/shows attention to detail

Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling--10% _____

- Rules of grammar, usage, punctuation are followed
- Spelling is correct

Readability/Style--10% _____

- Sentences are complete, clear, and concise
- Sentences are well constructed with consistently strong, varied structure
- Transitions between sentences/paragraphs/sections help maintain the flow of thought
- Words used are precise and unambiguous
- The tone is appropriate to the audience, content, and assignment

TOTAL POINTS EARNED_____

Appendix III Assignment for Assessing the Global Dimension

ANALYSIS OF A GLOBAL BRAND

Select a company that markets a global brand – a brand marketed under the same name in multiple countries with similar, centrally coordinated marketing programs. This will be the same company you will research for the beginning of your Marketing Plan (Corporate History, SWOT and Competitive analyses, etc.)

Analyze the Marketing Mix for this brand in 3 different countries. Discuss variations** in:

1. Product

2. Price

3. Place

4. Promotion

Your written paper (2 to 3 pages) should include:

· A brief description of the brand

· A comparison of the delivery of the brand image in each country, using the 4 P's above

· An analysis of the cultural reasons for the differences in marketing mix in the 3 countries (For example, MacDonald's doesn't sell beef hamburgers in India because the cow is considered sacred in that country.)

· When possible, present visual images of marketing promotions to support your arguments.

Appendix IV: Rubric for Assessing the Globalism Assignment

Criteria	Beginner: Does Not Meet Standard Points	Novice: Nearly Meets Standard Points	Proficient: Meets Standard Points	Advanced: Exceeds Standard points	Score
Identification of Global/Cultural Factors	No or incomplete identification of some or all of the following relevant cultural factors	Some identification of most of the relevant factors	Clear identification of relevant factors	Detailed identification of all relevant factors	
Analysis of Marketing Mix and Cultural Factors	No analysis of impact of relevant cultural issues; Erroneous analysis of impact	Some analysis of impact of cultural factors: Some inaccuracies in analysis	Clear analysis of impact of cultural factors; Accurate analysis of impact	Detailed and accurate analysis of impact of relevant cultural factors	
Application of Key Marketing Concepts to the Situation	No application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Incorrect conclusions or recommendations made	Some application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; weak conclusions or recommendations made	Clear application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Valid conclusions and good recommendations given	Comprehensive application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Strong conclusions made" creative recommendations given	

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