

TEACHING: How we incorporated Jesuit Values into the online Marketing courses in the Regis University School for Professional Studies (SPS) Business program

In December 2003, a group of 6 marketing faculty were brought together to develop and re-vamp four online Marketing courses for the Regis SPS Business program. Two marketing classes all ready existed online and needed updating and two new courses were going to be offered online. With the course development and updating, we faced the challenge of bringing the classroom environment to a non-traditional student in an online environment. In addition to being sure we were capturing the elements of Marketing, Promotion, Consumer Behavior and Critical Thinking we wanted to be sure that we brought the values of Regis University and the Jesuit Mission to the student.

Background on the Regis SPS program:

Regis University is composed of three schools, Regis College, The Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions and the School for Professional Studies. **Regis College** serves 1,400 traditional undergraduates with a range of programs in liberal arts, sciences, business, and education. **The Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions** (RSHP) offers undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs to 1,200 students in the health care career fields. In 1977 Regis College developed The Regis Career Education Program (RECEP), the school's first accelerated undergraduate program for adults. Today this program has evolved to the **School for Professional Studies**, a program designed for working professionals. The SPS program serves more than 13,000 students a year with ground based and online graduate and undergraduate courses in fields that include Business Administration, Computer Science, Liberal Arts, Finance, Accounting, Communications, Public Administration, Religious Studies and Teaching. Classes in the SPS program are small, averaging 15 students per course.

SPS Online

The SPS Business program offers both online and ground based classes. For this discussion I am going to focus on the online learning environment for specifically Marketing classes.

As seen in the chart below, the enrollment in online Marketing classes continues to grow at Regis.

On-line vs Classroom based enrollment (BA 429- Advertising and Promotion)

	1999*	2001	2002	2003	2004**
% on-line	37%	52%	56%	48%	69%

* 1999 includes summer and fall terms only

** 2004 year includes all spring term sand summer8w1/5w1 only

The profile of a student, who takes courses online, may differ from the profile of a traditional undergraduate. At Regis, the SPS online student has the following attributes:

Female	63.6%
Married	59.2%
Children at home	47.7%
Single Parent	11.2%
Working 31+ hours a week	90.3%
25-34 years old	57.3%
31-99 hours of transfer credit	49.8%

Regis University SPS Fall 1999 entering cohort – page 35 – The Center for the Study of Accelerate Learning

Through the SPS program, Regis University currently offers seven majors online including Finance, Business Administration, and Public Administration. As of January 2005, the Marketing Degree will also be offered online.

When Regis University made the decision to add the marketing degree to the online environment, the following quote from the December 2001 edition of *Connections* was considered. David L. Shrock, Dean of the College of Business Administration, Marquette University and President-elect, AJCU Conference of Business Deans made the following comments:

...One of the identifying elements of business education at Jesuit institutions builds on the underlying principles of a Jesuit, Catholic education. At the undergraduate level, especially, the university core curriculum stressing leadership, excellence, faith and service prepares our students for life in addition to their careers. Building on issues of social justice and educating women and men for others creates an environment that leads to ethical business practice and more.

At our winter meeting in 2001, Rev. Paul Locatelli, S.J. President of host Santa Clara University, suggested that business can have a greater impact on the quality of life of citizens in many lesser developed regions of the world than their governments. This concept reflects the power of commerce on enhancing economic conditions and the impact that management practice directed toward social justice rather than exploitation can have on improving life. This concept is central to our overall educational mission.

Business has a significant impact on citizen's lives in all parts of the world, developed and developing. Today's general business and political environment too often encourages profits at all costs, with little regard for the common good or service to others, including employees, stockholders, and customers. One need look no further than the recent Enron debacle and the records destruction incident at Arthur Andersen to demonstrate the lack of ethical standards on the part of many business leaders. Leadership through service to others, and critical thinking skills are needed more than

ever. There are few ways Regis University could better serve its mission than to produce graduates in fields where the values of a Jesuit education can influence the course of events. Offering Marketing courses on-line allows more students to have access to this value centered education.

Incorporating Jesuit Values in an On-line environment

A team of six faculty members developed and revised the following four online courses: Marketing, Advertising and Promotion, Marketing and Management Policies, and Consumer Behavior. In developing online courses, we tried to “re-create” the classroom environment. The online marketing courses run for 8 weeks; each week the student has access to a “teaching” element that reviews the week’s materials, contains an interactive knowledge checks, and details the week’s assignments. In addition to the teaching element, discussions are conducted on the forum. Each week, the faculty member assigned to the class leads a forum discussion that challenges the student with questions and situations that review the week’s material.

While each course could not incorporate every element of the Jesuit Mission, we strived to make sure the courses worked together to give the students the ideals of the mission. When developing the online marketing courses, we broke the mission into four key elements and developed activities, assignments, case studies and discussion questions to support the student’s understanding and application of the mission.

The first element of the mission is to help students make a positive impact in a changing society. In Marketing and Management Policies, the student is presented with several current and real world business case studies. These case studies deal with challenging business situations that range from recommending new products, honoring distribution agreements, evaluating promotional plans, and assessing pricing strategies. The student must recommend a course of action that will add to corporate profits while meeting the needs of consumers and honoring ethical and moral standards of the community. In one case study, Coke-Cola has technology that will allow vending machines to increase the price of soda when the temperature climbs. Students submit a written paper recommending a pricing strategy for Coke Vending that allows the company to maximize profits while taking into consideration the consumer perception of the technology. In most cases students start with the argument that it is “unethical” for Coke to raise prices based on the weather. When they start to compare pricing practices in other industries, they realize that the term “unethical” may not apply to this example. The discussion that results on what is the right business practice for Coke and the impact of consumer perception of ethics is a great learning tool.

The second element of the mission deals with strengthening a student’s commitment to community service. During the first week of the Introductory Marketing class, students are challenged to evaluate the marketing concept, or the ability of the organization to meet the needs of a target consumer, of a not for profit organization they are familiar with. The forum discussion that follows is fascinating. For many students, finding and

defining a not for profit agency is a challenge. Then there are always those students who are passionate about an organization they volunteer for and through the discussion, they realize ways they can help their organization better meet the needs of the community it serves. In most cases, the students realize that the not for profit businesses, need to “compete” and operate in a traditional business environment.

In a forum discussion for Consumer Behavior, students must develop a communication plan that targets the homeless consumer in Boulder. For many students seeing the homeless as a consumer group is a real challenge. Once a profile and personality is associated with the homeless, the class understands that all elements of society are a target consumer for different businesses and agencies. The class then works to develop a promotion plan to attract the homeless consumer to the local shelter during the tough Boulder winter months.

The third element of the mission centers on providing students a value-centered education. In our introductory marketing class, students are asked to review and discuss the code of ethics for the American Marketing Association. Just reviewing the code of ethics is not enough, the students then need to develop a code of ethics for their own company. The development of a personal code of ethics challenges the students to look at the competitive business environment and apply their own values to business.

In our case study Marketing and Management policies course, students are asked to look at Wal-Mart’s new store introduction policy. Many consumers feel that Wal-Mart poses a threat to small businesses when entering a market. Students need to decide if the world’s largest retailer is using smart business practices, that provide a boost to the local economy, or if values play no role in Wal-Mart’s expansion decisions.

One challenge on-line is to help the students see that Consumer Behavior is not the study of stereotyping, but that defining the specifics of a target market will ultimately help the marketer develop a better plan. To illustrate this point, during the first days of the class, students are not allowed to introduce themselves. Rather, each student posts a verbal description of the car they drive. The class is then asked to describe the person’s demographics, psychographics, and ethnicity based on the car information. Not being able to see the student for clues on the student’s gender, ethnicity or age makes the class really begin to discuss the target market for cars separate from the stereotypes of who drives the vehicles.

One of the fundamental missions of the ground based Regis Marketing classes is providing a forum for communication, cooperation and exchange. Many feel that communication and exchange cannot happen online. Through our forum and chat rooms, the marketing classes are challenged with creating an online community. Making sure the discussion questions are current and relevant to the students helps the forum successfully establish an online community. To help establish the sense of community online facilitators try to treat the students as unique, respond immediately to student questions or complaints, and use the student’s first name on the forum.

Often the students raise challenging ethical issues as a result of a forum discussion. In our summer online marketing class when we were discussing pricing, a student brought in the Regis Bookstore as an example. The bookstore buys back student books, if you are the first to sell back you get more money than if you are the last to sell back. While the students agreed that supply and demand play a role, they felt that the inequitable pricing policy tarnished the image of the Regis Bookstore. The discussion of what was good business, versus what practices helped build the bookstore’s “ethical” image brought the students together for a lively discussion.

The consumer behavior class has a forum discussion on shaping opinions versus manipulating the target market. We expect a lively discussion on what is just business and earning a profit, versus what is good for society, the company image and profits.

In his paper, *Approaching value-centered education through the eyes of an electronic generation; Strategies for distance learning*, Mike Spangle, Director, SPS Undergraduate Faculty and Curriculum noted that participation would appear to be more equal (online) than in classroom settings. He also notes that Lanham (1993) argues that online communication promotes greater equality in discussion. “In a classroom based on networked personal computers, the teacher no longer provides the authoritarian focus. Teacher is but one voice online, and other voices too timid to speak in class are often emboldened by the different and more protected role as online conversations provides” (p. 79).

In both our online and ground based classes we survey the students at the end of every term. Before the development of the new online courses we asked students in our current Marketing and Advertising and Promotion online classes about the forum discussion portion of the course.

Mean scores of Student Evaluations from Online courses

	Marketing	Advertising and Promotion
Forum system used for this course was effective	3.22	3.47

Based on a 4 point scale where 4 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree – surveys taken summer 2003, fall 2003 and spring 2004

The responses show that the students view the current online forum as an effective communication tool.

Next Steps

Based on student evaluations for the current online Basic Marketing course, we see the opportunity for improvement in incorporating the Jesuit Mission online. As you can see from the chart below, according to students, the Marketing course online did not deliver on a commitment to ethics, a knowledge of diverse cultures or a commitment to leadership and service to others as well as the ground based course. The current online

Advertising and Promotion class appears to deliver these elements of the Mission to the students (the ground based evaluations for the Advertising and Promotion course were unavailable).

Mean scores for Student Evaluations from Ground based and online courses

	<u>Marketing Online</u>	<u>Marketing Ground</u>	<u>A&P Online</u>
Increased commitment to ethical and social responsibility	2.78	3.09	3.04
Increased knowledge of diverse cultures	2.75	3.06	3.08
Increased commitment to life long learning	3.16	3.27	3.55
Forum system used for this course was effective	3.22		3.47
Increased ability to communicate effectively	2.91	3.18	3.37
Increased commitment to leadership and service to others	2.93	3.06	2.96
Course design (facility for ground) was conducive to effective learning	3.18	3.36	3.58

Based on a 4 point scale where 4 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree – surveys taken summer 2003, fall 2003 and spring 2004

In May of 2004 the newly developed marketing courses which include Basic Marketing, Advertising and Promotion, Marketing and Management Policies and Consumer Behavior went online. We will not have our first student evaluations until after the term ends July 4th. I hope to bring qualitative student comments to our conference in July.

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