Teaching Philosophy

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Overview

At the University of Florida, I have taught MAR 3231 – Introduction to Retail Systems and MAR 4803 – Marketing Management. In both classes, I employ an active learning approach in an effort to increase student interest and to enhance the educational value of these courses. I continue to revise each course in order to enrich the student experience and to improve how the evolving content is delivered. My courses are demanding, requiring extensive student effort outside of the classroom. In turn, I dedicate myself to being available to advise students in these assigned tasks and put extensive effort in designing the assignments in a way that encourages students to learn as much as possible. Over my time at the UF, my teaching skills have been significantly strengthened. One piece of evidence of this progress has been that my student evaluations have increased from 3.32 during my first year (averaged over three sections) to 3.98 during my most recent semester of teaching (also averaged over three sections). For the past seven years, I have also been advising students concerning the honor’s thesis in my role as the Marketing Department’s Honors Coordinator.

My Teaching Philosophy and Course Design

The Importance of Active Learning

Research consistently shows that students learn more effectively through “doing” rather than through “listening.” Many of my students are graduating seniors. All have had multiple courses in the business school. My goal is to give students the opportunity to exercise this knowledge. For example, the primary component of MAR 4803 is BRANDMAPS, a complicated simulation exercise. Students operate competing firms over a simulated 3-year period. They design, modify, and execute a marketing plan. Extensive market research studies are available to each firm. Teams benefit from good decisions, suffer from poor ones, and (hopefully) learn from their mistakes. Essential to this simulation experience is the team aspect. Beyond the weekly decision variable changes, several written and oral group assignments are required. Students must learn how to successfully manage their teams in order to meet these requirements. Conflicting schedules and personalities are inevitable. But, I believe that students benefit greatly by learning how to work as a team since most will go on to jobs that require them to work in coordination with colleagues.

To guide the students through this challenging experience, the course material is closely integrated into this simulation. For example, real world marketing problems are couched in the language of this game. Furthermore, to help students analyze the decisions made in this game (which presumably will help them in the future when they face complex real-world situations), I have designed 8 team exercises, which are used in-class. For each of these exercises, teams compete to complete a particular task, each focused on a different marketing decision, e.g., pricing or new product development. This gives teams experience working together. It also helps them understand the simulation itself as well as the marketing research that is available in BRANDMAPS. These exercises are very successful in building team camaraderie and in breaking a complex environment down to more manageable bits.
Developing Critical Thinking and Communication Skills

Overall, I think the most important skill for students to learn is the ability to think critically and to express their analysis in a coherent manner. In-class discussion is a crucial component of my courses. I expect students to be able to make assertions, defend these contentions against outside attacks, and to be able to think critically about claims made by others. I strive to create a relaxed class atmosphere in which students are comfortable contributing to the discussion. Finally, writing skills play an important role in my courses (and are feasible due to the relatively small number of students). Grading is based on the strength of their independent analysis. These assignments present a formidable challenge to most students. Their tendency is to provide summaries or only shallow analysis. I have been pleased with the improvement many students have shown over each semester. In the beginning, it seems that students are unsure about the expected level of analysis (regardless of how much I explain the requirements for the first assignment). But, once they are aware of the high standards I have set, most students are able to make significant strides towards reaching these standards.

Specific Efforts to Increase the Educational Value of My Courses

As noted earlier, I am continuously searching for ways to improve my courses. At the end of each semester I carefully evaluate the course structure and each of the assignments looking for areas of improvement. At the end of some semesters, I have also asked students for written, anonymous feedback. Some of these suggestions have lead to significant revisions to the course. Below, I include a sample of ways I have significantly improved each of my courses.

MAR 4803 – Marketing Management

1. The first semester I taught this course was Fall 2000.
2. In the Fall 2003 semester, I introduced “Time Outs for Research and Results.” During these segments, I take a brief time (about 10 minutes) to discuss a recent article from the marketing literature (or sometimes from the business press). I choose articles with substantive findings on a topic that is at least tangentially related to the day’s lecture. These segments are very educational and often present quite complex concepts, especially for undergraduate students. These discussions also offer me a simple way to integrate my research interests into the classroom. Students seem to find these “Time-Outs” to be very interesting and relevant.
3. Initially, I relied heavily on Harvard Business School Cases. However, students found many of these cases to be rather boring. I also had a very difficult time identifying cases that were up-to-date, interesting to students, and contain enough detail to allow for in-depth analysis. After experimenting with a number of new cases, I eliminated cases altogether in the Fall 2004, substituting in the “Contemporary Marketing Question.” In this assignment, individual students (or teams of 2) generate marketing questions for a high profile firm, e.g., The Gap, Southwest Airlines, or Amazon.com. Then, other students are assigned to answer these questions and present their results to the class. Students like the contemporary nature of these assignments and consider them to be highly “relevant.” In the Fall 2005, I have taken an active role in helping students

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1 Student feedback confirms that I have been successful in meeting this objective. Some excerpts from this feedback are given in the “Class Atmosphere” section of “Excerpts from Student Feedback Forms.”
generate questions that require more in-depth analysis through required individual meetings. These meetings have greatly enhanced the educational value of these assignments.

4. For the Fall 2004 semester, I also developed 8 in-class team exercises. For each of these exercises, we focus on a different marketing decision, e.g., pricing or new product development, specifically as it relates to the BRANDMAPS simulation. This helped integrate the BRANDMAPS experience more fully into my contact time with students.

5. In the Fall 2004, I eliminated the use of my previous textbook (Guiltinan, Paul, and Madden text), replacing it with a coursepack that includes a mixture of articles from the academic and popular press. This allows me to devote greater attention to topics that are more contemporary and also exposes students to a greater depth of scholarly analysis than is typically available in a standard text.

MAR 3231 – Introduction to Retail Systems

1. The first semester I taught this course was Spring 2004.

2. In the Spring 2006 semester, I began to make a more concerted effort to incorporate non-lecture formats into the course. In particular, during this semester, the class made a field trip to Macy’s, had an outside speaker from Procter & Gamble (Ray Arckey, Publix Account Manager), and introduced several new in-class exercises (e.g., a competition involving negotiation skills and a debate concerning several prominent human resource issues). These non-traditional formats offer a nice change of pace for the students and induce students become more involved in the educational process.

3. Based on the success the previous semester, in the Fall 2006, I increased to the number of speakers to five. In addition to having Ray Arckey of P&G return, I invited speakers from The Mattress Firm, Chico’s FAS, JCPenney, and Kohl’s. Such retail experts bring a wealth of real-world experience into the classroom and offer a poignant demonstration that the topics we analyze in this course is of high practical importance.

4. In the Fall 2007 semester, I offered students the opportunity to participate in The Third Annual ACRA Undergraduate Student Retail Analysis Competition: Location Analysis in lieu of the normal group assignments. This case involved a real firm (Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory) and asked the teams to select a site location for a new franchise. The location decisions were defended with detailed analysis of the market place, a marketing plan, and a financial plan. Entries were judged in a nation-wide competition with the winners receiving cash prizes. One of my students, Joshua Early, finished second (out of 30 total entries). I believe this competition is an excellent opportunity for students to build upon their analytical and communication skills and to stretch themselves educational by seeing how they match up to their peers around the country.
Excerpts of Comments from Past Students
Excerpts from the (anonymous) Student Feedback Forms

BRANDMAPS:

“I liked Brandmaps a lot. Unlike other classes where all work is done in class, this actually had us perform and make decisions like a real firm does. It was fun and a good learning experience. I like the idea of competing against other firms and trying to figure out ways to beat/get ahead of the competition.”

“I have learned a tremendous amount from the Brandmaps game. I think the game and the cases are the best real world experience.”

“I like the simulation very much. I think people learn the most from experiences and this is very close to experiencing working in a marketing firm.”

“The game is interesting. I am always looking forward to getting our results back each week to see the results of our decision-making. I feel this exercise requires a lot of work. However, it is a great learning experience and simulation of the real world.”

“The simulation was a good experience for learning a lot about marketing research and the many components involved to make a firm stay profitable.”

“I thought the game taught me a lot.”

“The simulation is a cool concept and challenging game.”

“At first I really didn’t like it because we were doing badly. But, now I realize that I have learned a lot from it and our company has turned around.”

“Brandmaps helps us get more involved with what we’re suppose to be learning. It takes us out of a lecture setting and lets us be more hands-on, which I think is good. I’ve learned more about marketing/business through actually doing something with it, such as Brandmaps, than I think I’ll ever through a lecture setting.”

Class Atmosphere:

“There is definitely a comfortable atmosphere in class and I enjoyed participating in group discussions.”

“Atmosphere is good. I feel you are open to everyone and make it an encouraging place to participate.”

“I was very comfortable participating, which is not normal.”

“I feel comfortable. The setting is great and relaxed.”

“I enjoy participating in class”

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2 At the end of several semesters, I have asked students to fill out a student feedback form about various aspects of the course. These anonymous responses have been helpful in understanding students’ concerns and in identifying ways to implement improvements. I find this constructive criticism very useful, but here I focus on some of the positive experiences students have reported during the Fall 2002.
Excerpts from the qualitative section of my course evaluations

“I loved this class because of BRANDMAPS. It has been the best business class that I have had at UF. In challenged me and I have learned a lot.”

“I recommend this [course] to anyone. I have learned the most out of all my classes at UF.”

“This is one of the most organized and educational classes I have taken so far in marketing.”

“Dr. Fay is an excellent communicator and uses visuals and other resources very well. He explains things clearly and answers questions in a helpful and encouraging manner.”

“Continue doing what you are doing. I like the fact you are so interested in student feedback.”

“very enthusiastic about [the] subject and willing to have extensive office hours.”

“He was genuinely interested in the success of his students. He was always personable and available to help.”

“Dr. Fay is personable and friendly and you can tell he’s genuinely interested in the subject matter.”

“Helpful to students. Always willing to meet with groups/students”

“Very easy to talk to when I had questions or comments. I always felt like Dr. Fay would engage in discussion even if it was after class. I never felt he didn’t have the time to talk like some professors.”

“very easy to talk to, approachable, and understanding. I appreciated how he made time to meet with us.”

( Unsolicited) emails from recent students

Thank you for a great semester and a class that I thought delivered much more useful information and was much more interesting than I anticipated. I really enjoyed the guest speakers who gave insightful looks into their companies. I was impressed rather than just satisfied I guess you could say.

Thank you,
Eric F.
Hey Dr. Fay

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I really enjoyed your class this semester. I know that people were pissy about how much work we did, I begged to differ. I think all your assignments were meaningful and educational. I really learned a lot this semester, and I really enjoyed the brandmaps assignment. I wouldn’t change a thing about the class if i was you. I am not kissing up I am telling you the truth. I thought people in the class were trying to say that this brandmaps is luck and is not real. I disagree, this is the most real life thing I have done in college and it definately isn’t luck, those who say that obviously didn’t learn anything. Well ok gotta go. thanks for making this class fun,

Bryan P.

Dr. Fay,
I am sad this class is coming to a close. I really have appreciated your organized manner and timely grades. I cannot tell you how much it helps a students and how efficient you are compared to other teachers!! … Thanks a lot Dr. Fay!
Sincerely,
Kate J.

Hello Dr. Fay,

First of all, I regret not having the time to say thank you today for everything and what a great semester it was. Your class was my favorite out of most of the classes I've taken here at UF. Your teaching style and grading style is beyond excellent. This class, with all the assignments, have boosted my learning curve to the next level. I really appreciate everything and especially the extra attention you paid to all the questions I've asked. Thank You. I will keep in touch throughout my post-graduate years. I hope you found me as a good student.

... Thanks for being an amazing teacher! I had a great semester!

Antim S.

Hello professor Fay, Just wanted to thank you for an delightful and interesting final semester. The class was challenging and would prepare anyone for better facing the real world. Enclosed is my attached copy of the peer evaluation. Thanks again and have a great summer.

-- Anthony D.