

# Reviewing, Revising, and Reinventing the Undergraduate Marketing Curriculum at a Public University

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## Abstract

The business community faces tremendous challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and needs an educated workforce that can navigate the realities of empowered customers, new scientific and media technologies, growing environmental and social concerns, and global competition. Unfortunately, undergraduate business education, for the most part, continues to rely on 20<sup>th</sup> century theories and practices. Undergraduate marketing education, in particular, seems to have stagnated and continues to fall short on both relevance and rigor. This article presents the results of a two-year departmental initiative to review, revise, and reinvent the undergraduate marketing curriculum at a large public research university's business school. After analyzing the internal and external forces that were the impetus for change, the article presents the process the marketing department used to reform the undergraduate program. Next, the article discusses the results of six data collection projects among key constituency groups that revealed weaknesses in the undergraduate program and potential areas for improvement. The article concludes with the presentation of a transformed undergraduate marketing curriculum, along with initial assessment feedback. By engaging in continuous evaluation and improvement, the marketing faculty hope to provide undergraduate marketing students with a more rigorous and relevant academic experience that will enable them to succeed in the professional workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** marketing, university, teaching, curriculum revision, student course perceptions, marketing specialization tracks

## 1. Introduction

Higher education has been the subject of analysis and criticism for many years. Nowhere is the call for academic reform more evident than in the marketing discipline (Smart, Craig, and Jeffrey, 1999; Evans, Nancarrow, Tapp, and Stone, 2002; Bateman, 2010). This article presents the results of a departmental initiative to re-conceptualize the undergraduate marketing curriculum at a large public research university's business school. The impetus for this effort was the intersection of a dramatic group of internal and external forces that coalesced to make the existing curriculum increasingly out-of-date. A departmental task force was formed to examine the marketing curriculum and make recommendations for improvements.

Webster's dictionary refers to curriculum as "a set of courses defining an area of specialization" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). From the authors' perspective, this definition is too narrow. A more appropriate definition should define an academic curriculum as "a process that transforms students" (Drinka and Yen, 2008, p. 331). Using this definition of an academic curriculum, the components of this process would then include the courses, instructors, teaching materials and methods employed to facilitate learning (Drinka and Yen 2008). This latter definition is more useful because it recognizes that pedagogy is an important component of curriculum—along with

course content. It is from the perspective of the latter definition that this investigation was conducted.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Criticism of Undergraduate Higher Education

Several large-scale reviews of American higher education have been conducted over the past 15 years. The Boyer Commission (1998, p. 37) criticized the state of undergraduate education at U.S. research universities, concluding that “the record has been one of inadequacy and even failure.” Derek Bok (2006), former president of Harvard, wrote a stinging indictment of undergraduate education in American colleges and universities. The United States Department of Education published the Spellings Report in 2006 (p. 29) which concluded that the U.S. needs to “give urgent attention to improving its system of higher education.”

Most recently, Richard Arum and Joseph Roksa (2011) sounded an alarm in their critically acclaimed book *Academically Adrift*, with their finding that during the first two years of college, a large proportion of American students do not make significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication. According to Babcock and Marks (2011), full-time college students today spend less time on *all* academic pursuits (both in-class time and study time) than their high school counterparts spend in the classroom.

The logical conclusion from these studies is that the U.S. is losing its international edge in higher education. For the first time in history, other countries (particularly China) are graduating a higher percentage of young people from college (OECD, 2011). When comparing higher education academic performance in math and science nationally, the U.S. has shown less-than-stellar results (Lederman, 2010). As Arum and Roksa (2011, p. 124) note:

*While the US higher education system still enjoys the competitive advantage of a sterling international reputation, in recent decades it has been increasingly surpassed in terms of quantity...and its quality is coming under increasing scrutiny.*

As American educational progress seems to have stagnated, calls for reform are getting louder, and they are coming from a diverse set of voices. *Parents* worry that the cost of an undergraduate degree makes it increasingly unattainable. In fact, the cost of higher education has been rising faster than both inflation and health care for more than two decades (Costello, 2010). This has led some parents to do the unthinkable of actually giving up guardianship of their children so that their students can qualify for need-based financial aid (Belkin, 2019). *Government policymakers*, who have watched their annual state budgets shrink, worry about the efficiency, equity and cost effectiveness of public dollars being spent on higher education (Finney, 2014). *Business leaders* are expressing dissatisfaction with the current skill set of college graduates and are beginning to demand that additional types of training be incorporated into degree programs (Sautter et al., 2000; Sidhu and Calderon 2014). *Educators* have expressed concern about the increasing reliance on low-cost, part-time instructors, as well as institutional priorities that place a premium on scholarship versus teaching and service. Astin (1993, p. 342) found that “there is a significant institutional price to be paid, in terms of student development, for a very strong faculty emphasis on research.”

### 2.2 Business Education Under Fire

Arum and Roksa (2011) singled out undergraduate business education as being particularly weak when compared to other fields of undergraduate education. There is considerable evidence suggesting that rigor is lacking in undergraduate business education. Strempek, Husted, and Gray (2010) argue that business curriculum revisions have often been reactive rather than proactive. Business education has also been criticized for being less demanding than other majors (Glenn, 2011a). Research resulting from collaboration between the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Times* spared no major in undergraduate business programs and found that while business undergraduate majors collectively are the most popular majors on college campuses nationally (constituting 20% of total bachelor's degrees awarded), the lack of rigor and critical thinking in business education is pervasive. Similar to Arum and Roksa (2011), Glenn (2011b) uses anecdotal evidence from interviews with students to conclude that undergraduate students majoring in business spend a paltry amount of time reading and studying outside of class. Explanations offered to justify the current situation included shifting faculty priorities, outdated curriculum, disengaged students, and relatively more emphasis in business schools on group work and internships that are learning-related.

### 2.3 Undergraduate Marketing Education—the Weakest Link?

Glenn (2011c) labeled marketing and management as the weakest academic programs in the undergraduate business curriculum. While he acknowledged that the more quantitative disciplines such as finance and accounting were somewhat more rigorous, the author nevertheless criticized all undergraduate business majors collectively. Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan, and Rochford (2007, p. 223) found that, “Marketing majors are among the poorest performing students relative to other business majors both coming into and leaving college.” They offer compelling evidence that what many marketing educators fear is true: marketing majors are among the lowest caliber students in the business schools and they remain at that low level of performance as they near graduation and even after finding employment. Weak inputs result in weak outputs, it is argued. In addition, certain disciplines within business schools have been more receptive to revising their curricula. Management information systems and computer information systems curricula have undergone several revisions in the recent past in response to changing technologies (Maier and Gambill 1996), but also in response to declining enrollments (Lifer, Parsons, and Miller 2009). Accounting curricula have been revised in response to legal and regulatory reform, such as the Sarbanes Oxley Act of 2002 (Arens and Elder 2006).

### 2.4 A New Conceptualization of Marketing

While marketing education has been criticized by several authors based on its lack of rigor, relevance is another aspect that must be considered. In the last thirty years, the global environment in which marketing operates has changed radically. Yet, Porter and McKibbin (1988) complain that business education uses models developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Empowered consumers, new scientific and media technologies, growing environmental concerns, and global competition have forced marketers to shift away from a purely functional focus. Notably, the American Marketing Association changed its definition of marketing in 2007 from a “function” to a broader activity within the organization that creates long-term value (Ringold and Weitz, 2007). Scott Davis (2009) argues in *The Shift* that marketing today must be a “strategic growth driver,” with marketers serving as partners to CEOs. Unfortunately, as Yoram Wind (2008, p. 21) observes, “The discipline of marketing hasn't kept up with the rapid changes facing 21st century businesses.” Seth Godin (2002, p. 6) put it more succinctly: “As marketers, we know the old stuff isn't working.”

Wind (2008, 2009) suggests the need for re-conceptualizing the discipline of marketing. Focusing on a prominent role of analytics and metrics, Wind and others (e.g., Harrigan and Hulbert 2011) call for a new mental model of marketing which has clear implications for marketing education. As collective understanding of marketing changes and marketing's role is re-conceptualized, marketing education needs to reflect this change.

### 2.5 Assessment as a Force for Curriculum Redesign

While numerous forces are converging to cause educators to reexamine their marketing curricula, another force has grown in importance in higher education nationwide: assessment and the assurance of learning. Increasingly, administrators are requiring evidence documenting whether educational objectives are, in fact, being achieved. Accrediting bodies, in particular, have taken up the banner of assessment and are demanding that educators present empirical evidence documenting whether they are accomplishing their goals.

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) began requiring evidence of continuous improvement in 1993, later changing the focus to assurance of learning in 2003 (Vitullo and Jones, 2010). A number of authors have written about the impact of AACSB accreditation standards incorporating assessment and assurance of learning (Aurand and Wakefield, 2006; Pringle and Michel, 2007; Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak, 2007; Sampson and Betters-Reed, 2008; Gardiner, Corbitt, and Adams, 2010; and Vitullo and Jones, 2010).

### 2.6 The Marketing Curriculum in Transition

Fundamental to assessment processes is the evaluation of performance against standards and the creation of action plans based on outcomes. One result of this process is to evaluate the appropriateness of the curriculum and, if necessary, to make changes. This can take several forms: making changes to specific courses, changing pedagogies, adding courses, deleting courses, etc. Several articles have appeared in the marketing education literature discussing the role of assessment in curriculum decision-making (Mayo and Miciak, 1991, 1997; Davis, Misra, and Van Auken, 2002; Baker, Kleine, and Bennion, 2003; Young and Murphy, 2003; Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher, 2005; Aurand and Wakefield, 2006; and Borin, Metcalf, and Tietje, 2008). Curriculum revision in marketing is also discussed in specific contexts of advocating for particular topics such as social media (Dickey and Lewis, 2010; Wymbs, 2011) and pedagogies such as problem-based learning (Wee, Kek, and Kelley, 2003) and experiential learning (Elam and Spotts, 2004). Finally, authors suggest that marketing curricula need to be vetted by practitioners to assess their

relevance. Some research suggests that employers should have a role in evaluating the types of assignments that marketing educators use as well as the skill sets that are needed (Ackerman, Gross, and Perner, 2003; Ellen and Pilling, 2002; Wellman, 2010).

Collectively, this literature suggests that a confluence of forces has increased the need for marketing curriculum revision. As noted earlier, higher education in general has come under fire as society has begun to question the radical increases in costs relative to the overall inflation rates. In addition, business practices are changing and new models are being offered, leading to calls for a re-conceptualization of marketing. Many factors will likely be part of the newly conceptualized marketing framework, but two factors stand out: the importance of marketing metrics/analytics, and the importance of developing a better understanding of customer relationships.

While the practice of business is evolving, business education is in a state of flux. Both graduate and undergraduate business education are receiving intense scrutiny. Criticisms from inside and outside the academy focus on a lack of rigor and relevance. Simultaneously, every level of education (including higher education) is being forced to demonstrate its effectiveness through assessment and the assurance of learning. This, in turn, has meant an increasing focus on results (Belkin, 2014) and on factors leading to those results, including curriculum review and revision.

2.7 A Case Study at a Large Public University

The university that is the focus of this research is located in the heart of a major southeastern city. It was founded in 1913 as an evening school of commerce. Since that time, it has evolved into a large and dynamic, urban research university. It is the largest institution in the state university system, with 52,000 students, 2,600 faculty, and 250 degree programs across 10 colleges and schools. It is the 10<sup>th</sup> most ethnically diverse university in the nation, with a student body that is 11% Hispanic, 14% Asian, and 42% black. Students hail from 170 countries. The university is home to one of the largest business schools in the United States, with over 7,800 students, 6,300 of whom are undergraduates. Fifty-three percent of undergraduate business majors are male; the mean student age is 23.

The College of Business houses 12 academic departments, 5 institutes, and 12 research centers. Undergraduate students in business can choose from among 11 majors and 7 minors. Marketing is the most popular major in the College of Business, followed closely by computer information systems. There are currently over 1,000 undergraduate marketing majors. Because of its historic popularity, the Department of Marketing has never had to actively recruit students.

2.8 The Department of Marketing Curriculum Revision Process

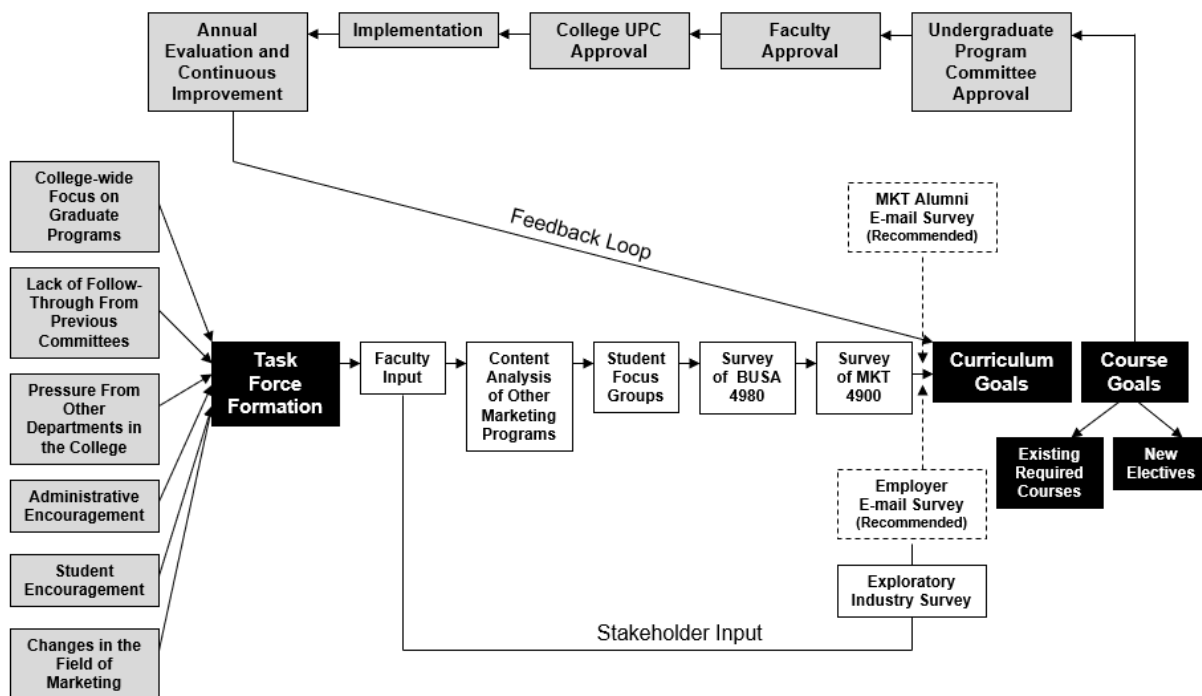


Figure 1. Undergraduate Marketing Curriculum Revision Process

In this case study, the process of reviewing, revising and reinventing the undergraduate marketing curriculum began with the formation of a task force made up of four tenured departmental faculty members who teach both required and elective undergraduate courses. The formal process took two years to complete, although assessment continues on an annual basis. Figure 1 provides a flow chart of the curriculum revision process. The left side of Figure 1 lists those forces pushing the department toward curriculum assessment and revision. Among the contributing factors was a longstanding, college-wide focus on graduate as opposed to undergraduate programs. More importantly, the Marketing Department had failed to follow through on several attempts at undergraduate curriculum revision over the years. As noted earlier, the department has always been large and has offered a wide range of electives (N=21 at the time of the task force formation) reflecting both faculty and student interests. However, it is instructive that the majority (75 percent) of undergraduate marketing courses being offered at the beginning of the review process had been on the books for 25 years--even though the content in many of the courses had been updated over time. As an illustration, from 1990 to 2008, only three new courses were added. A final factor that had to be navigated was the fact that there was little standardization of course content due to the large number of full- and part-time instructors who teach the same courses.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, when the College of Business conducted its EBI exit assessment curriculum analysis prior to the start of the curriculum review, marketing ranked only 6<sup>th</sup> among College of Business departments in terms of satisfaction with the quality of instruction (see Table 1) – far below the peer group of universities, where marketing ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> among all departments. Admittedly, the difference in means among the various core courses is most noticeable at the extremes (that is, between business law at 6.11 and statistics at 4.92). In addition, the EBI test measures student perceptions, not actual student performance.

There is no denying a pattern, however. Further examination of the EBI assessment analysis confirmed this pattern across 37 research universities, as well as all 201 institutions in the study. That is, marketing was uniformly ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> at other schools in terms of satisfaction with the quality of teaching (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Benchmark Comparison of College of Business with Other Business Schools on EBI Exit Assessment Curriculum Analysis\*

Course	College Mean (N=303)	College Rank	Select Six Rank	Carnegie Class Rank	All Institutions Rank
Business Law	6.11	1	1	1	1
Organizational Behavior	5.76	2	3	4	4
Business Policy	5.72	3	4	3	3
International Business	5.67	4	7	7	5
Human Resource Management	5.60	5	8	6	6
<b>Marketing</b>	<b>5.59</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Operations	5.52	7	10	8	7
Accounting	5.50	8	9	5	8
Economics	5.44	9	6	10	9
Finance	5.31	10	5	9	10
CIS	4.99	11	12	11	12
Statistics	4.92	12	11	12	11

\*Student satisfaction with quality of teaching from 1 (low) to 7 (high)

Select Six = Illinois at Chicago, FSU, MSU, U of Florida, U of Pittsburgh, and Colorado at Boulder. Schools change each year.

Carnegie Class = 37 Research Universities

All institutions = 201 Schools

Adding additional pressure was the fact that 5 of the 11 undergraduate programs at the university had undergone major revisions to their curriculum in the six years prior to the EBI assessment. And, as discussed earlier, numerous changes to the field of marketing necessitated a fresh look at exactly what was being taught to prepare undergraduates for a career in marketing.

Given that there were many agents calling for change, the task force decided it was important to gain initial input from a number of stakeholders, including: faculty, students, administrators, alumni, other departments within the college that had already undergone significant curriculum revision, and peer schools, as well as top universities that had undertaken curriculum revision/innovation. In addition, input was obtained from private industry, employers, and alumni. Regarding the latter groups, information was obtained via employers' feedback. The university has strong relationships with many of the employers that hire its students, in part due to its prime location in the heart of a major metropolitan area. Thus, the task force was able to gather insights from these individuals and organizations. The College of Business also has a large placement office, which facilitated the gathering of information from recruiters. Finally, plans are in place to do an extensive and systematic ongoing survey of employers and alumni once changes have been in effect for several years.

With information from the various data collection projects in hand, the task force had a better understanding of student and faculty perceptions of the curriculum. The next step was to make recommendations for redesigning the program to help it better meet the needs and demands of the contemporary business world. Curriculum goals were the direct outcome of the information gathering process and were then overlaid against course goals to determine if the needed changes could be accommodated within the existing array of marketing courses (both required and elective) or if the department needed to develop new courses to meet those critical needs. Once these issues were determined, the task force sought approval from the department curriculum committee. Upon receiving their endorsement, the entire marketing faculty approved the plan, and it was submitted to the college-level undergraduate program committee. Unanimous approval at all levels provided the needed support to implement the task force recommendations. Following two years of implementation, some preliminary assessment was conducted. More formal evaluation and continuous improvement are planned moving forward.

### 3. Method

Data for this project were collected in two stages. In the exploratory phase, feedback was gathered from both departmental faculty members and student focus groups. In addition, the task force examined the curricula of a number of benchmark programs across the country. In the second phase of this investigation, descriptive data were gathered through standardized surveys administered to graduating business administration students from all 11 majors offered in the College of Business, as well as a separate survey among graduating marketing majors.

To begin the investigation, full-time marketing faculty were asked for feedback regarding whether or not they felt that the marketing curriculum should be revised, and if so, what they felt should be changed. Specific questions regarding the curriculum and needed revisions were emailed to all faculty members. Their responses were summarized and distributed among the members of the task force.

Armed with this feedback from faculty, the task force identified 20 benchmark marketing programs across the country, using *Business Week's* ranking of the top undergraduate business programs as a starting point. The task force analyzed the content of their undergraduate curriculum, looking in particular for:

- whether they offered a major, minor, and/or concentration;
- what courses were required;
- the number and nature of electives;
- the number and composition of tracks or areas of emphasis; and,
- what was innovative about their program.

The next step in data collection involved conducting focus groups with senior-level undergraduate marketing majors—i.e., the constituency most familiar with the current marketing program. The first focus group was comprised of 12 students and was evenly divided between students who had already graduated and students who were graduating at the end of the semester. Pizza and soft drinks were served to attract student participants in lieu of any type of financial compensation.

The second focus group was comprised of approximately 30 students who were graduating marketing majors enrolled in their last semester of classes. Both focus groups lasted approximately two hours, and both were audio recorded and translated verbatim.

Based on data collected from these two exploratory focus groups, two separate surveys were developed to examine the opinions and attitudes of both business majors who had taken the Principles of Marketing core course and

marketing majors who were familiar with current marketing course offerings. The first survey solicited feedback from undergraduate business administration students concerning their perceptions of the Principles of Marketing course. Both qualitative and quantitative feedback about the course were obtained. Using a structured survey, students were asked to provide feedback on whether they found the Principles of Marketing course to be interesting, and whether they found that class to be valuable. Students were also asked to respond to those two questions about all the other required courses for undergraduate business administration majors. This information enabled the ranking of students' interest in all of the required business administration core courses as well as their perception of the value of these two courses. Overall, 210 students, representing all 11 majors, participated in this part of the investigation.

Next, a structured survey was administered to all graduating marketing seniors enrolled in the marketing capstone course. Of particular interest was students' perceptions of the required undergraduate marketing courses they had taken. Overall, 65 undergraduate marketing students took part in this phase of the research. Data for both structured surveys were entered into SPSS for tabulation and analysis.

Feedback from industry was obtained through the College of Business Career Placement Center and from business recruiters as well as from personal contacts among recruiting companies. This feedback supported information that was received from other methods.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Results of the Faculty Survey

With a little follow-up, feedback was provided from 100 percent (N=22) of the full-time marketing faculty. In general, curriculum relevance and rigor were the most often mentioned weaknesses of the undergraduate program. Several of the faculty lamented the fact that while the marketing discipline has changed radically, the undergraduate program has not. A number of specific issues raised by the faculty related to the preparation of marketing students, including the fact that many marketing students lacked both quantitative and critical thinking skills, especially when applied to case analysis. Many instructors felt that students lacked effective writing capabilities. They also felt that the marketing tracks needed development and promotion since marketing majors were often unaware of the specific tracks, and many students were unaware that the tracks even existed. Related to this, faculty felt that courses needed better sequencing, and instructors needed to devote more attention to explaining the various career paths. Basic Marketing (the introductory course) generated the most course-related comments and complaints, followed by Buyer Behavior and Marketing Research.

Among the other comments, faculty wanted more interaction among colleagues to share teaching methods and ideas to increase student engagement; more enforcement of uniform standards across instructors regarding grading, assignments, and class policies; and the re-institution of lead teachers in every course with multiple sections (not just the existing required courses). Faculty also suggested more interdepartmental collaboration to determine if marketing courses fit into the tracks of other business disciplines. Finally, faculty wanted to see the honors program strengthened.

### 4.2 Results of the Secondary Research Among Benchmark Schools

A number of interesting findings emerged in the content analysis of 20 benchmark programs. Nine of the 20 programs offered a major; the other 11 offered a concentration or minor. Four was the most common number of required courses. The most common required courses were Principles, Marketing Research, and Buyer Behavior. The number of electives ranged from 1 to 17, with the average being 10. The most common electives were Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), International Marketing, Sales Management, Personal Selling, Retailing, and Branding. Areas of emphasis ranged from none to 12. The most common concentrations were Marketing Management, Sales, Entrepreneurship, Advertising, Retailing, and Brand Management. Five of the 20 schools offered undergraduate certificate programs.

The task force uncovered several innovations or other outside-the-box policies that the benchmark programs are offering. For example, two schools require not one, but two marketing courses in the core business curriculum. One school offers half-semester courses. One school requires an internship as a condition of graduation. Another gives extra credit for participating in a research study. One school requires a course covering thought leaders in marketing (entitled cleverly, "Principals of Marketing"). One school offers both a lockstep program and a traditional program. Innovative courses offered at various schools include: Ideation, Data Mining, Search Engine Marketing, and Web and Mobile Marketing Strategies.

### 4.3 Results of the Focus Groups

One of the key questions for focus group members was how these students had decided to major in marketing, and more broadly, how they had chosen this university. Participants stated that they picked the university because of its location, the strong reputation of the College of Business, and also the availability of scholarship money from a state-run lottery. Four of the participants explained:

“I was in-state, and I had family who went to graduate school and undergraduate here. I'm in the area. I grew up in this city, so I kind of gravitated toward it.”

“I chose this school over other universities within the state because of the fact that it was in the city. I didn't want the full college experience. I was focused on getting a job.”

“I think at this school, students get a different experience because it enables the student to cope with life outside of school, and it's not just school, school, school.”

“The lottery scholarship program was attractive.”

On the question of whether instructors promoted the marketing major sufficiently in the Principles of Marketing course, the consensus among students in the two focus groups was that they were not sold on marketing as a major in the Principles class. Instead, students did not find the class to be interesting. They felt that it was “just memorization,” and “very basic and very broad.” Another student remarked that, “It was cram, test, cram, final. That's all it was, for me at least.” Another student said, “It's so much information. It's crazy.” It should be noted that some of the Principles of Marketing classes at the time had as many as 200 students in a section. Not surprisingly, students did not speak very favorably about these extremely large classes. One student reported that, “everyone sleeps.” Another told us,

“There are a lot of other things going on in those large classes. Sometimes you're not really paying attention. You're just watching other people or listening to other conversations.”

How then did they come to select marketing as their major? For many of the focus group participants, marketing was more of a default major. As one young lady stated:

“Actually, marketing was my fifth major, so I had to make a decision as soon as possible. I started off in culinary arts, then film production. I can't remember what my third major was.”

Some other students selected marketing “to get away from numbers.” Another said that he picked marketing as a major because “...it's way easier than accounting or finance.”

The task force wanted to know if students felt connected to the department. They reported that they didn't, but that they did feel connected to “the faculty, yes--more so than to the department.” Also of interest was how these graduates or graduating seniors perceived the major as it is delivered at the university. The consensus was that these students were satisfied with their coursework overall, although there was certainly room for improvement. One area that needs improvement is to provide students with more information about what they can do with their major. Students stated that they did not have enough information about what to do with a marketing major once they graduated. Two of the focus group participants said that they were going to enlist in the Peace Corps upon graduation.

Participants also commented on some of the courses that they felt were less helpful in the marketing program. It was surprising to hear that the Buyer Behavior course was perceived to be too similar to the Principles of Marketing course. In addition, students noted a number of inconsistencies in the way some classes were taught and wide variations in the requirements and learning outcomes when different professors taught the same course.

### 4.4 Results of the Survey Research

After completing the exploratory research, the task force collected survey data from graduating marketing majors to get additional course-related feedback and to get an idea of how widely the views from the focus groups were held by marketing students at large. The task force wanted to learn whether marketing majors felt the required courses were interesting, and whether or not students felt they learned a lot in these classes. As Table 2 reveals, students found the introductory marketing course (Basic Marketing) relatively interesting (ranked 4<sup>th</sup> among 9 classes), but the students did not feel that they learned a great deal (7<sup>th</sup> of 9). Further analysis indicated that only 16 College of Business Administration (CBA) students rated the required marketing course as the *most valuable* required course (see Table 3). Given that there were 25 marketing majors included in the sample of 181 students who answered that question, one would expect a higher proportion who would value their own major courses over other courses in the business program.



**Table 2.** Student Ratings of Business Core Courses on Degree of Interest and Amount of Learning

Interesting vs. Boring*		Learned a Lot vs. Learned Very Little**	
Course Title	Mean	Course Title	Mean
Legal Environment of Business	2.74	Legal Environment of Business	2.71
Global Business Practices	3.11	Corporation Finance	2.79
Managing People in Organizations	3.36	Principles of Accounting I	2.79
<b>Basic Marketing</b>	<b>3.43</b>	Global Business Practices	3.21
Business Analysis	3.56	Business Analysis	3.28
Corporation Finance	3.65	Managing People in Organizations	3.28
Principles of Accounting I	3.71	<b>Basic Marketing</b>	<b>3.30</b>
Principles of Macroeconomics	3.93	Principles of Macroeconomics	3.46
Introduction to Computer- Based Information Systems	4.23	Introduction to Computer-Based Information Systems	3.95

\*Where 1 = Interesting and 7 = Boring

\*\*Where 1 = Learned a Lot and 7 = Learned Very Little

**Table 3.** Students’ Single Most Valuable Required Course in the Business Core by Academic Discipline

Frequency	Course
42	ANY Accounting
41	ANY Business Administration
31	ANY Finance
29	ANY Managerial Sciences
<b>16</b>	<b>ANY Marketing</b>
13	ANY Business Communication
5	ANY CIS
4	ANY Economics

N = 181 Undergraduate Business Students (including 25 Marketing Majors)

**Table 4.** Students’ Suggestions for Improving the Core Marketing Course (N = 181)

Frequency	Comments/Suggestions
30	Fine as is
19	Have better teachers (less lecturing, less reading slides)
17	Add projects (such as an advertising campaign)
15	Make projects more hands-on
15	Smaller class size
10	Add relevance
8	Make course more interactive
6	Add cases
4	Involve more interesting examples
4	Use a real company for a project
3	Don’t require this course
2	I don’t remember much
2	Focus more on smaller companies
2	Use a better textbook
2	Discuss career opportunities
2	Course is not challenging enough
1	Add field trips
1	Have fewer formulas
1	Make it a two-part course
1	Good introductory course, just not as meaningful as other core courses
1	Add quizzes
1	Amount of information is overwhelming

Data were also collected regarding students' opinions about how to improve the core marketing courses (see Table 4). This information, while interesting, was in many cases not very helpful. The most common remark was that the course was fine as it was currently conducted. More useful comments recommended that we make coursework more hands-on, have smaller class sizes, add projects to the course (not all instructors required them), use cases and make the course more interactive.

In addition to the introductory marketing class that is required for all Business Administration Majors, students majoring in marketing are required to take Buyer Behavior, Marketing Research, and the capstone course (Marketing Problems). Students were asked to rate these three courses on how interesting each course was, and whether or not they felt that they learned a lot in the courses. This was measured on 7-point semantic-type differential scales, with 1 being most interesting (or learned a lot), and 7 being most boring (or learned very little).

**Table 5.** Student Ratings of College of Business Marketing Core Courses on Degree of Interest and Amount of Learning

Interesting vs. Boring*		Learned a Lot vs. Learned Very Little**	
Course	Mean	Course	Mean
Marketing Capstone	2.45	Marketing Capstone	2.36
Buyer Behavior	3.62	Buyer Behavior	2.63
Marketing Research	4.08	Marketing Research	3.60

N = 65 Graduating Marketing Majors

\*Where 1 = Interesting and 7 = Boring

\*\*Where 1 = Learned a Lot and 7 = Learned Very Little

As Table 5 illustrates, the Marketing Problems course was rated as the most interesting of the three courses. Students felt that Buyer Behavior was the least interesting, although it also had the largest standard deviation, suggesting that there was a lot of variability in students' opinions. Students also reported that they learned the most in the Marketing Problems capstone course. Marketing Research was rated in the middle on both its ability to keep students interested, and on their perception that they learned a lot in the class. We also asked students to indicate which course they felt was the least valuable. Based on the results of the previous question, it was not surprising to learn that students felt that the Buyer Behavior course was the least valuable. Further, when asked whether the content in the Buyer Behavior course was unique, complementary or redundant, students overwhelmingly reported that they felt the content was redundant (See Tables 6 and 7).

**Table 6.** Marketing Majors' Least Valuable Required Marketing Course

Course	Frequency
Buyer Behavior	41
Marketing Research	15
Marketing Capstone	4

N = 60 Graduating Marketing Majors

**Table 7.** Marketing Majors' Perceptions of the Nature of Content in their Least Valuable Required Marketing Course

Course	Unique Content	Complementary Content	Redundant Content
Buyer Behavior	3	7	26
Marketing Research	4	4	6
Marketing Capstone	1	2	1

N = 54 Graduating Marketing Majors

The task force wanted to know if the marketing program was able to live up to student expectations. Thus, students were asked how well their initial perceptions matched ultimate reality. Forty-nine students, or 63 percent, said that the coursework met or exceeded their expectations. However, 27 students (approximately 35 percent), were more negative in their appraisal of how well the degree program matched their expectations. In addition, two responses were difficult to dichotomize as either positive or negative (See Table 8).

**Table 8.** Marketing Majors' Perceptions of the Extent to Which the Marketing Degree Program Has Matched Expectations

Nature of Response	Percentage
At or Above Expectations	63
Below Expectations	35
No Opinion	2

N = 65 Graduating Marketing Majors

The marketing department has several different "tracks" that marketing majors can specialize in, including advertising, sales, and retailing. Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that they selected a specific track in which to develop a specialization. However, approximately thirty-two percent did not select a track, often because these students were either unaware that specialization tracks were available, or they were not interested in the tracks that were offered.

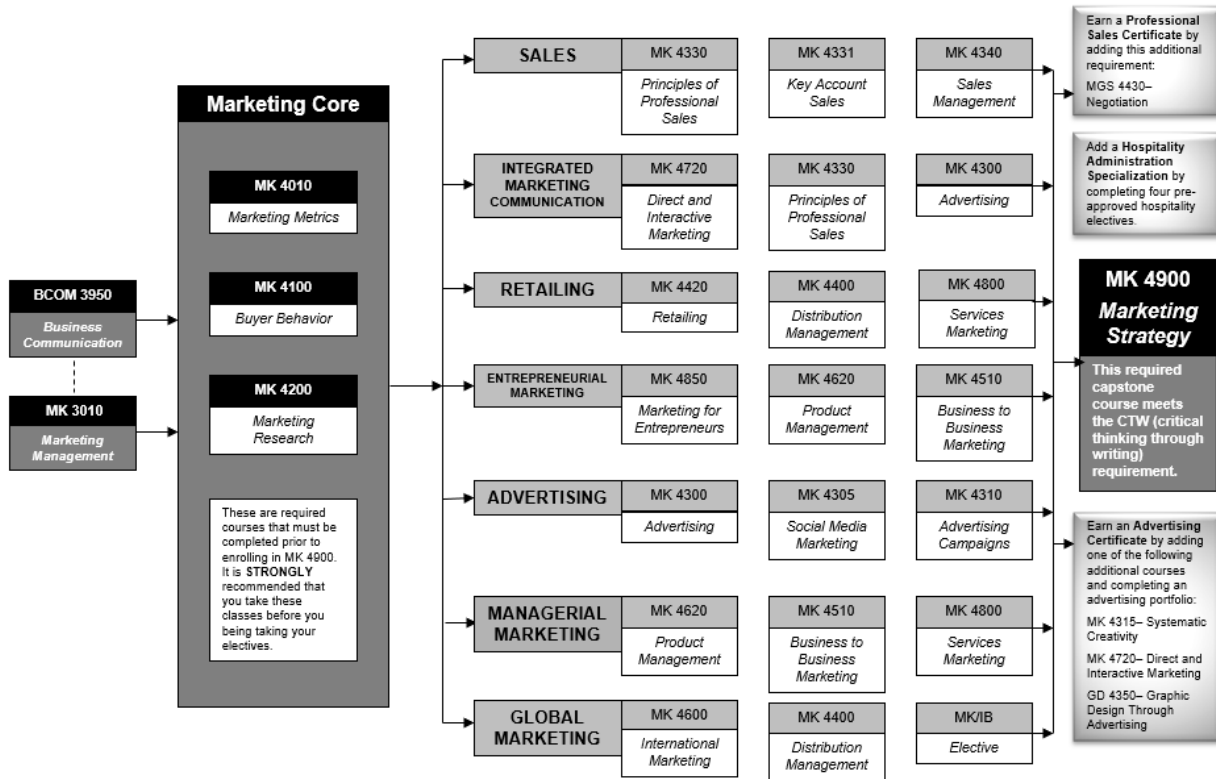
Also of interest was what specific area within marketing, if any, students planned to pursue as a career. Thus, the task force explored preferred career paths, and found that the top areas of pursuit were: Advertising (selected as a first choice of 20 students), followed by Marketing Research/Marketing Intelligence (selected as the preferred career path of 12 students). Sales and Brand Management were tied for the third most desired career path with nine students each suggesting that this was the career direction they hoped to pursue. These findings helped to identify several new avenues for developing marketing tracks that would be attractive to students.

Several other issues were also considered in determining whether to make revisions to the marketing curriculum. The research indicated that many students did not find the introductory course to be very interesting or challenging. In many cases, this was their only exposure to marketing, so the task force thought it was especially important to enhance the value of the introductory marketing course. In addition, many students viewed marketing as a nebulous field with a great deal of ambiguity and uncertain job opportunities. Finally, most students did not understand the role of marketing in the firm. Given these issues and the ones identified earlier in the focus groups and survey of market majors, the task force believed that it was essential to make several changes to the marketing curriculum, and even wholesale changes in two of the required courses (although the content was changed and updated in almost every course). These changes were most noticeable in the core marketing course that was required of all business majors.

#### 4.5 Curriculum Revision

As noted earlier, while the department already offered a large number of courses, the data suggested the need to rethink the composition of existing required courses, the need for new courses, the sequencing of courses and the nature of undergraduate marketing tracks to make the program more relevant and interesting to business students and in particular, marketing majors. The revised undergraduate marketing program and tracks of electives are presented in Figure 2. The major changes to the curriculum are detailed below.

*Course Name Changes.* The names of the introductory course and the capstone course were changed to better reflect the revised content of the respective courses and better position the major. The title Basic Marketing was changed to Marketing Management (in keeping with the increasing managerial focus of the course through the writing of a marketing plan and institution of case analysis, discussed in a later section). The title of the capstone course, Marketing Problems, was changed to Marketing Strategy (again reflecting the focus on decision making outputs, rather than inputs).



**Figure 2.** Undergraduate Marketing Program  
•Tracks of Electives•

*Sequence of Courses.* As Figure 2 reveals, the department now requires five marketing courses, along with a business communication course that is required of all undergraduate business majors. The required courses are Marketing Management, Marketing Metrics, Buyer Behavior, Marketing Research, and Marketing Strategy. This leaves students with three marketing electives to complete their program, unless they choose to obtain a certificate, in which case additional courses are required.

*Tracks of Electives and Certificates.* Students may now choose from among 7 tracks of electives. They include Sales, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Retailing, Entrepreneurial Marketing, Advertising, Managerial Marketing, and Global Marketing. For students who want to obtain additional expertise and are willing to take additional coursework, we offer two undergraduate certificates. Students who want to earn a Certificate in Professional Sales must take Principles of Professional Sales, Key Account Sales, Sales Management, and a course in Negotiation offered by the Department of Managerial Sciences. Students who wish to earn an Advertising Certificate must take Advertising, Social Media Marketing, Advertising Campaigns, and either Systematic Creativity, Direct and Interactive Marketing, or Graphic Design Through Advertising (offered by the Art Department). Some marketing majors also choose to earn a certificate in Hospitality Administration, administered by another department.

*New Required Course.* A new required course, Marketing Metrics, was developed that focuses on quantitative analysis of marketing data. This course adds rigor to the program by increasing students’ ability to think critically and utilize quantitative information in marketing decision making. Over the long term, this skill set should enhance the ability of marketing majors to effectively compete in the job market and advance through the marketing profession.

*New Elective Courses.* Among the new elective courses that were approved and developed are: Social Media Marketing, Services Marketing, Marketing for Entrepreneurs, and Systematic Creativity. One final area under development is an undergraduate course in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The marketing department offers the course at the graduate level, but it is not presently offered to undergraduates. Once the SEO course is approved, the department will have the necessary courses for an 8<sup>th</sup> track—in Digital Marketing (with courses in Social Media Marketing, Direct and Interactive Marketing, and Search Engine Optimization).

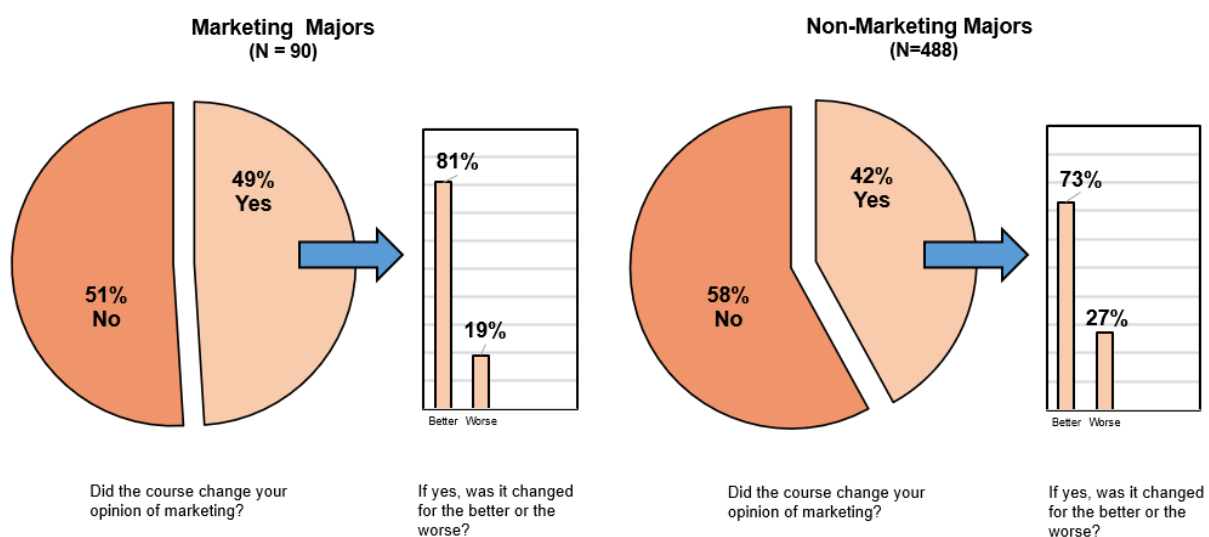
*Changes to the Core Marketing Course.* A third major change involves the introductory marketing course. It will no longer be taught in very large sections. Instead, sections will be limited to 35 students. Students enrolled in this course are now required to complete at least one substantial case on an individual basis, as well as a marketing metrics exercise. In addition, students are now required to work in groups to develop a marketing plan for a product or service. This hands-on project adds rigor to the course and makes the core marketing course more relevant and interesting to both majors and non-majors alike. Most importantly, the introductory marketing course will be administered as a hybrid course, with lecture material presented online in podcasts, and in-class time devoted to interactive discussion and applications.

*Changes to All Marketing Courses.* As a result of the task force recommendations, all required and elective marketing courses must now include at least one major case analysis and write-up as part of performance evaluation. The case is to be completed individually for a grade. This approach will help students develop critical thinking skills and reinforce the materials taught in other marketing classes, especially supporting the content of the new marketing metrics course. By utilizing cases earlier and more often in the marketing curriculum, several benefits are anticipated, not the least of which is that marketing students will be better prepared to perform at a high level in the marketing capstone course.

In addition, the department is in the process of developing a list of key marketing concepts and metrics. Each course is expected to cover those concepts and metrics that are related to its specific subject matter. A matrix is being developed where each concept and metric will be laid out against all courses — both core and elective — so that the department can determine a) in which course(s) a concept/metric is addressed, and b) if there are concepts/metrics that are not sufficiently reinforced by the curriculum. If so, additional effort will be focused toward making sure that these lightly covered concepts and metrics receive more attention across core and elective courses.

**4.6 Initial Assessment Feedback**

Two years after implementation of the task force recommendations, the task force administered initial assessment surveys to all business majors graduating that semester. The sample included 488 non-marketing majors and 90 marketing majors. Of particular interest was whether the core marketing course had changed student perceptions of marketing, and if so, whether student perceptions were changed for the better or the worse. For marketing majors, one might expect that they would have a positive predisposition to the field and thus, the course wouldn't change those opinions. However, as Figure 3 reveals, 49 percent of marketing majors reported that the core course did in fact change their opinion of marketing, with 81 percent of this group reporting that opinions were changed for the better. In the case of non-marketing majors, 42 percent changed their opinion of marketing after taking the core course, with 73 percent of this group reporting more positive perceptions of the field.



**Figure 3.** Initial Assessment of Revised Core Marketing Course—Marketing and Non-Marketing Student Perceptions

In a separate assessment tool, the department measured student perceptions of learning in the new required course, Marketing Metrics. With a sample of 40 marketing majors, the survey measured student confidence in calculating seven popular metrics at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. Table 9 shows a highly significant difference in confidence level over time. In addition, students were asked a global question about their confidence in using numbers to make better marketing decisions. Mean confidence scores improved from 2.05 at the beginning of the semester to 3.70 at the end of the semester (where 1= not at all confident and 5=very confident).

**Table 9.** Initial Assessment of Student Perceptions of Learning in the New Marketing Metrics Course

Marketing Metric	Confidence to Calculate Metric Mean Scores*		
	Beginning of Semester	End of Semester	Paired Sample t-test
Breakeven Sales Volume	2.40	3.80	8.37 (<.01)
Price Elasticity	2.05	3.40	7.90 (<.01)
Share of Wallet	1.40	3.33	10.1 (<.01)
Impact of Cannibalization	1.75	3.93	10.6 (<.01)
Price Premium	1.63	3.18	8.80 (<.01)
Customer Lifetime Value	1.56	3.56	9.10 (<.01)
Gross Rating Points	1.65	3.58	8.60 (<.01)
Using Numbers to Make Better Marketing Decisions	2.05	3.70	8.50 (<.01)

N = 40 Marketing Majors

\*Where 1 = Not at All Confident and 5 = Very Confident

Of course, both of these initial assessment tools measured student perceptions of learning, and not actual performance. As Borin, Metcalf and Tietje (2007) have stressed, program effectiveness must be demonstrated with direct, outcome-based measures of learning for AACSB's Assurance of Learning. With that in mind, the results of the ETS Major Field Test (using the marketing performance indicators) were compared pre- and post-revision. It should be noted that the College has stopped using the EBI Exit Assessment Curriculum Analysis, so it was not possible to do a before-after comparison with the data in Table 1.

As Table 10 reveals, on objective, outcome-based assessment measures, both non-marketing majors and marketing majors have improved their marketing performance significantly since the marketing curriculum revisions have been implemented. The trend is especially noteworthy for marketing majors, whose percentile score increased from the 38<sup>th</sup> percentile prior to the curriculum revisions to the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile. This may be a reflection of the fact that these students were exposed to more of the curriculum revisions than non-marketing majors, who were required to take only the core marketing course. But even non-marketing majors improved their percentile score from 43<sup>rd</sup> to 69<sup>th</sup>. The large sample size (between 405 and 589 students participated in each test administration) lends further confidence to the findings.

**Table 10.** ETS Major Field Test Results for Marketing Performance Indicators, Pre- and Post-Curriculum Revision

Year	Overall Sample Size	Percentile Score	
		Marketing Majors	Non-Marketing Majors
Pre-Revision Year 0	405	38	43
Post-Revision Year 1	486	53	49
Post-Revision Year 2	540	65	59
Post-Revision Year 3	589	84	69

## 5. Limitations

During the curriculum revision process, the department learned several valuable lessons that might be helpful to other departments undergoing a similar program review. First of all, consistent with Sautter, Popp, Pratt, and Mills (2000), the process moved much more slowly than had been anticipated. Sautter et al. (2000, p. 19) were correct in noting that this is indeed a “long and rocky” road, and the process can easily become derailed without consensus from all stakeholders. Second, buy-in and support from the departmental chair is imperative to ensure acceptance as well as follow-through from faculty members to carry out the proposed changes. It is vital for the chair to reinforce the recommendations during the annual faculty review process and develop sanctions for faculty who fail to implement agreed-upon changes. It is also helpful for committee members to remember that resistance to change is a natural human characteristic. In the present case, this resistance was sometimes complicated by the lengthy tenure of several participating faculty members, coupled with the university’s hefty research expectations, which often leaves less time available for a teaching focus.

A final limitation was the nature of the student body. The commuter status and busy work schedules of a sizable percentage of students made it difficult to see quantifiable results over a short period of time. This is because many students take time off for work in order to pay for their education, and they often schedule courses for convenience to their work schedule, forcing them move in and out of the university system. Even when they are enrolled, they sometimes take courses out of the recommended course sequencing or take course overloads to expedite graduation. (It is noteworthy that the average student loan debt held by undergraduates from this university at the end of their four-year program is \$30,000.)

## 6. Conclusion

The process of curriculum innovation and revision began with a charge from the Department Chair to propose any and all changes that were necessary to bring the undergraduate marketing curriculum into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The results included adding a required marketing metrics course to the marketing core in an effort to help students improve their quantitative analysis skills. The department made significant changes to the core marketing course (including transforming it into a hybrid course), as well as improvements to the capstone course. In addition, the department added a requirement of at least one graded, in-depth case to be completed in all undergraduate marketing courses. This requirement was added in an effort to help marketing majors hone their writing and critical thinking skills (Reid and Anderson, 2012). In addition, several marketing tracks and new marketing electives were added to reflect the state-of-the-art in the marketing discipline. These new courses and tracks were based on feedback from both students as well as the College of Business placement office and industry recruiters. In addition, two professional certificate programs were created to give students the opportunity to gain expertise in a particular area of specialization (beyond the three course elective requirement for the major). These tracks and certificates are now explained and better promoted by instructors teaching within the specific topical areas of the new tracks. They are also communicated on the departmental website.

The department is also in the process of developing a list of key marketing concepts and metrics that every marketing graduate should know and be able to put into practice (Harrigan and Hulbert 2011), and a grid system for ensuring that these topics get sufficient coverage in the various marketing courses. Finally, the department is committed to an annual assessment process to calibrate the revisions in order to provide students with the strongest educational foundation possible for a successful marketing career. As time passes, the task force anticipates a further round of curriculum revision, including the hybridization of other required courses. The primary goal is to ensure sure that students are exposed to, and transformed by, a marketing curriculum that is both relevant and rigorous, one that enhances student learning and enables its graduates to compete effectively in the professional workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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