Written, Spoken and Visual Communication Requirement:
Curriculum Overview and Assessment Plan

Department of Marketing
Pamplin College of Business
2016 Pamplin (0236)

Revised, March 3, 2005

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MISSION

The Department of Marketing has established an undergraduate curriculum with the goal of providing marketing majors with:

- broad-based conceptual knowledge of principles and theories in the key areas of marketing,
- analytical problem solving skills that can be applied to marketing decision making,
- strong written and verbal communication skills, and
- strong interaction skills essential to working successfully in teams.

Graduates who have attained these skills and knowledge base are prepared for careers in a variety of marketing areas, including marketing research, professional sales, brand management, retailing, advertising, channel management, and marketing strategy.

LEARNING GOALS IN WRITTEN, VISUAL, AND SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

Based on the mission stated above, we have several more specific goals related to the current communications initiative. We expect our students to attain the following proficiencies.

1. Write effective communications in professional marketing positions (e.g., plans, proposals, or reports)
2. Speak effectively in formal and informal professional settings
3. Design effective visual materials to accompany spoken and written communications

We note, however, that our ability to fulfill these goals depends on resources being adequate to manage class sizes, which have steadily increased in recent years.

CURRICULUM PLAN

The instructional plan for achieving these learning outcomes in communications extends across the entire marketing curriculum in addition to courses taken in other areas. Marketing courses are taken during the junior and senior years of the student’s curriculum. Prior to this, the student has completed several core courses that provide a foundation for the additional communications skills learned in marketing. These preliminary courses include:

- ENGL 1105-1106 or COMM 1015 -1016 sequence for AREA I
- COMM 2004 Public Speaking (if ENGL 1105-1106 taken for AREA

A marketing major takes ten marketing courses, seven of which are required and two of which are elective. Table 1 presents the courses offered in the marketing curriculum for Spring 2004 (all required courses and the three most popular electives) and the elements of those courses that address written, spoken, and visual areas of communication. In order to make specific assessments of these components, we display the sections of those courses taught during the Fall 2004 semester. It should be noted that a primary goal of our curriculum is to teach students how to work effectively in groups, a context for much of the written, spoken, and design work done in marketing. Our marketing courses therefore often focus on team-based assignments as essential preparation for our students.
The matrix in Table 1 supplies details about relevant assignments in the marketing curriculum. To set the context, we first discuss the introductory course, which is excluded from our summary calculations, and then two other required courses at the beginning and end of our program that play key roles in the learning outcomes for communication in our curriculum.

The introductory course is MKTG 3104, Marketing Management. While resource constraints result in our offering this course to most of our students in a large (500+) section, we also offer several smaller sections (including one Honors section). The smaller sections vary in requirements, but all have students write a paper or marketing plan and require spoken communication in the form of a presentation, graded class discussion, or case analysis discussion. The Honors section, of course, goes far beyond these requirements, with 10-25 pages of individual writing, formal presentations of marketing projects, and class discussions of case analyses. Students also have the opportunity to revise a midterm assignment. Finally, it is also worth noting that even in the mass section of MKTG 3104 the teacher generates some participation by giving extra credit for the comments and questions that students volunteer in this intimidating setting. However, because of the variability of students’ communication experiences in this course, we do not count any of these activities in our summary of communications activities.

One course taken early in the curriculum is MKTG 3154, Marketing Skills. The purpose of this course is to build a base of student skills that will be called upon in later marketing course assignments. To this end, students learn how to communicate a case analysis through writing and through a formal presentation; for the latter they learn how to design Powerpoint slides. They write their resumes and business letters and an individual marketing plan for some product or service. Class participation is formally graded, and they participate in a “Fine Dining Program” that focuses on communication in a formal dining setting, which is a common context for meetings and interviews in business. While some part of this course focuses on building analytic skills, better communication in varied formats and settings is a driving force for most of the assignments.

MKTG 4754, Marketing Strategy, is the capstone course for our curriculum, and is the course currently designated as Writing Intensive. The entire class is build around case analysis of business situations. The object of the case exercises is to train students to analyze the marketing situation along with possible marketing strategies and then argue and defend a recommended course of action. Thus, the format for most classes is a student discussion of some case situation, with persuasive arguments presented for various courses of action. This course currently includes 15 pages of written case analysis done in four-member groups, 2 pages of case summaries, and informal, in-class writing exercises. This course serves to integrate not only the marketing content presented earlier in the curriculum, but also draws on all of the written, spoken, and design aspects of communication honed in earlier courses. As part of our five-year departmental review an evaluator other than the teacher of this course assesses samples of writing assignments from this course. This is one of the measures of how well we have met our goals related to student competence in communication.

Across the marketing curriculum, written communication skills are practiced in a variety of assignments, including papers, case analysis, research reports, informal in-class writing, written homework, marketing plans, and essay exams. In order to estimate the joint impact of these communication assignments, we calculated the expected number of pages written on an individual basis across marketing courses. However, as mentioned above, we exclude MKTG 3104, which has such variability in terms of the communication components because of section differences (zero pages in the mass section, multiple assignments in small sections, and 17.5 pages in the honors section) that make it difficult to represent accurately. We used the following procedure in our summary:
Multiple sections with different instructors were averaged to get a course figure.
Expected individual writing on group assignments was calculated by dividing the total number of pages by the average group size, results rounded for simplicity.
Written examinations were not included.
In-class writing was included only when the instructor estimated number of pages.
When assignments had no specified length, the instructor estimated total pages.
The midpoint was used when ranges of pages were given.
Optional work is shown in the matrix but not included in the total.
Elective pages were calculated by multiplying the average pages across electives by 2 (number of required electives).

The total expected number of written pages across the set of required courses (excluding 3104) based on this procedure is 37. Taking any two of the three elective courses offered this semester would add an additional 10 pages of writing, for a total of 47 pages of written output. The opportunity to revise written assignments is presented in Marketing Research (4154), in which a research report is written in three parts with revision possible for the first two segments. (The honors section of MKTG 3104 also includes revision of a paper.) In addition, the fact that much of the writing takes place in groups means that group members provide informal peer reviews for each other’s written work.

Similarly, we calculate that our majors will give 4-5 formal presentations in their required marketing classes, with electives creating additional opportunities. These presentations vary from formal reports of analysis to sales presentations made during simulated sales calls. In all cases these presentations call for the design of visual support materials, most frequently executed by designing Powerpoint presentations. Other opportunities for visual design experience occur in assignments asking students to design advertisements, create tables and figures for papers, and design research surveys. These presentations are followed in some course, such as MKTG 4154, by a question and answer session in which the class asks the presenting team to expand and/or clarify aspects of their formal presentation. This format provides valuable “thinking on your feet” experiences for the students in both speaking and listening roles.

Finally, it should be noted that this section reflects the current content of the marketing curriculum rather than a plan to be implemented. Communication goals have always been central to the department’s educational objectives and so have historically been incorporated into our classes. The assessment report for our writing intensive class noted that across the measures of communications skills discussed above from our senior survey the marketing department has higher averages than both the college and university.

**ASSESSMENT**

The assessment plan for the Department of Marketing includes feedback from the same sources that it uses for its five-year self-assessment. These are attached in the Appendix, and include the sources below. Items to measure design elements have not yet been created.

- Marketing Department Senior Survey. This survey, which is attached in Appendix A, has items surveying the following aspects of communication.
- Marketing Alumni Survey. This survey asks alumni to what degree they agree that they experienced various things as a marketing major at Virginia Tech. Among these things are: opportunities to express yourself in writing (Q14), opportunities to express yourself orally (Q15), computer presentation skills (Q38), spreadsheet skills (Q37).

- Employer Survey. This survey is sent to a sample of organizations that most frequently hire our marketing graduates. This survey asks among other things about the employer’s perceptions of our students’ verbal communication skills and written communication skills (all in Q3).

- Evaluation of a sample of written assignments in MKTG 4754, the capstone course.

Results reported in the 2001 Outcomes Assessment show that marketing students report writing more in that assessment than in the one five years previous to it. Perceptions of their ability to write had increased from an average of 3.6 to an average of 3.8 (on a five-point scale). That assessment also concluded that the number of oral presentations had grown and that perceptions of their presentation abilities had improved from a man of 4.0 to 4.2 on a five-point scale.