

## University of Strathclyde: Department of Marketing

### A REAP project case study

#### **About the class:**

The first year class *Principles of Marketing* is a core, one-year long class delivered to approximately 520 students. Students are drawn from a variety of courses within Strathclyde Business School (approximately 350 students) and the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences (approximately 170 students). Some students will study marketing in subsequent years, others take the class only in first year as part of another degree course.

The class is designed to introduce students, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the subject, to the main principles of marketing and to develop students' study skills. The syllabus makes no assumption of prior knowledge. On completion of the class, students should be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of marketing as a business and societal philosophy and as a managerial function. The class aims to familiarise students with the various contexts within which marketing professionals operate, the issues and variables that confront them in their many and varied roles, and the strategic and tactical tools that can be employed in addressing relevant challenges.

The main text book used in the class is by Jobber (2005, McGraw Hill). The book is primarily used for reading specific chapters related to class assignments and for case study analysis.

#### **Drivers for change:**

Assessment practices in the *Principles of Marketing* class were re-designed in 2003 to reflect departmental concerns about staff workload and a perception that students were being 'over-assessed'. This re-design resulted in a reduction in the number of written assignments from five to two and the abolition of a multiple choice and short essay test in the first semester. Students achieving an average of 60% or over in the remaining two assignments are granted an exemption from the final class exam.

These changes resulted in a drop in the number of students (50%) receiving the required standard for exemption from the final class exam because fewer assignments mean fewer opportunities for students to receive feedback on their performance and consequently improve their overall coursework marks. There is a perception that students who receive high marks in the two remaining assignments (and are therefore exempted from the class exam) do not engage with the other topics covered and many enter second year marketing classes with limited knowledge of the subject.

Although the number of written assignments has been reduced to two, the administrative burden of marking approximately 1040 student submissions and providing individualised feedback to students remains a difficulty for staff members. Although a paper-based feedback pro-forma has been introduced to support this process there is evidence that many students fail to collect written feedback from the department. This problem has been exacerbated because students receive their assignment marks electronically via the institutional VLE.

Staff members were also concerned about poor student attendance at lectures and about retention and progression rates (only 40% of students enrolled in the *Principles of Marketing* class elected to study marketing in second year during the session 2005/06). A new member of staff, Dr Michael Harker, assumed the role of course leader in 2005 and undertook a comprehensive review of the course prior to the start of the 2005/06 academic session. This has resulted in changes to the course content and in teaching arrangements: teaching in lectures is now delivered solely by Dr Harker and the remaining members of the teaching

team are responsible for facilitating tutorial groups. Initial data suggests that these changes have resulted in a substantial increase in both retention and progression rates.

### **Phase one pilot: January 2006 – June 2006**

Three technologies were introduced to the *Principles of Marketing* class during the academic session 2005/06:

- **WebCT**

As part of a broader roll-out of the institutional VLE across the university, WebCT is being used as a repository for class information and as an administrative tool. Supporting a re-design of the course materials to encourage greater student engagement, all notes and slides are now available prior to lectures, encouraging greater opportunities for dialogue and debate during face-to-face sessions. Interactive elements of WebCT including message boards and private messaging are also used by students and teaching staff involved in the class.

- **Online multiple choice question tests**

In order to encourage greater student engagement with each class topic, provide opportunities for practice and self-testing and provide enhanced feedback opportunities for students, online multiple choice question tests were delivered via the institutional VLE (WebCT) during semester two, using approximately 1500 questions provided by publishers McGraw Hill to support the class textbook.

Online tests were used in two ways:

**Formative testing:** All students received a voluntary opportunity to self-test during two-week 'windows' associated with key topics. Individualised tests included 50 randomly-selected questions from the Kotler textbook question bank. Feedback comments incorporated in the publisher's materials were provided to students immediately on submission of the test. Additional feedback opportunities were offered subsequently at a tutorial meeting during which tutors and students discuss areas of weakness across the whole class based on tutor's analysis of test scores. Students were able to take the test as many times as they like to 'close the loop' in their learning and self-correct their responses.

**Summative testing:** In addition to the two written summative assignments all students were required to take a summative online MCQ test undertaken as an 'open book' activity during one of the eight class tutorial sessions. Marks gained on this test counted towards exemption from the final written exam.

- **Online tutor feedback template**

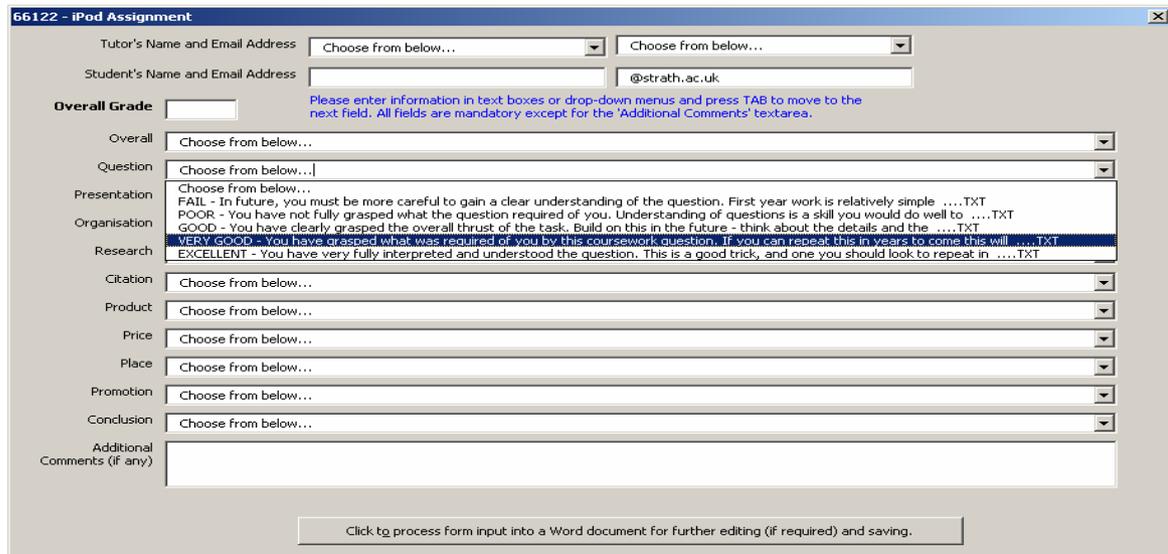
Students already receive summative marks for each written assignment via the institutional VLE, WebCT and written feedback on a pro-forma developed in 1998 by the department in collaboration with the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement.

During the pilot phase, teaching team members collaborated to devise an electronic version of this form. Initial plans were based on the work undertaken at the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development at Oxford Brookes University (see <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/>). However, the course leader was keen to ensure that the nature and tone of feedback comments was consistent with newly re-designed lectures and course materials, so a bespoke databank of comments was developed (see illustrations). Delays in this process meant that that the feedback form was used only to mark the second written assignment during semester two and was not fully implemented by all members of the teaching team. Implementation was subject to further delay due to university-wide disruption in assessment activities as a result of industrial action.

## About the technology:

**Online tests:** Class course materials and online tests were delivered to students via the institutional VLE, WebCT (see: <http://www.strath.ac.uk/see/index.htm>).

**Feedback template:** The online tutor feedback template was created using visual basic scripts to create a drop-down menu of feedback comments for selection by tutors. After selection of comments, tutors are asked to click a button which converts the form into a word document which is then sent to students via email.



66122 - iPod Assignment

Tutor's Name and Email Address: Choose from below... Choose from below...

Student's Name and Email Address: @strath.ac.uk

Overall Grade: [ ]

Please enter information in text boxes or drop-down menus and press TAB to move to the next field. All fields are mandatory except for the 'Additional Comments' text area.

Overall: Choose from below...

Question: Choose from below...

Presentation: Choose from below...

Organisation: FAIL - In future, you must be more careful to gain a clear understanding of the question. First year work is relatively simple ....TXT  
POOR - You have not fully grasped what the question required of you. Understanding of questions is a skill you would do well to ....TXT  
GOOD - You have clearly grasped the overall thrust of the task. Build on this in the future - think about the details and the ....TXT

Research: VERY GOOD - You have grasped what was required of you by this coursework question. If you can repeat this in years to come this will ...TXT  
EXCELLENT - You have very fully interpreted and understood the question. This is a good trick, and one you should look to repeat in ....TXT

Citation: Choose from below...

Product: Choose from below...

Price: Choose from below...

Place: Choose from below...

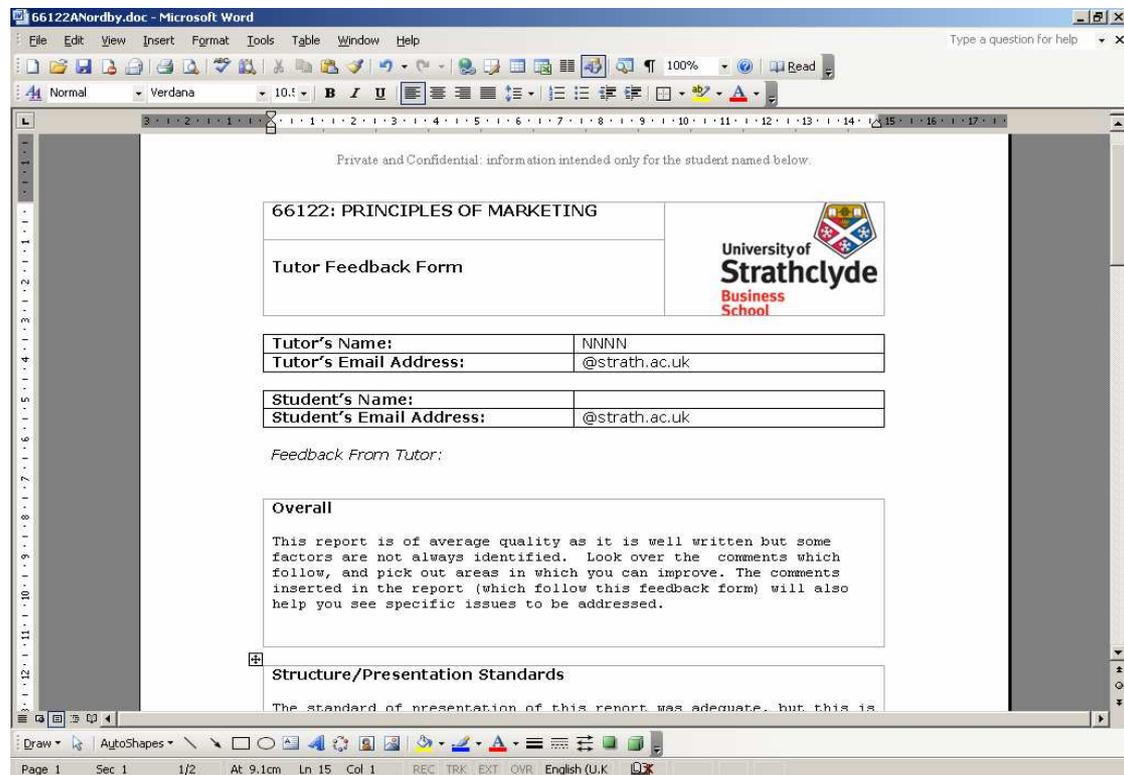
Promotion: Choose from below...

Conclusion: Choose from below...

Additional Comments (if any): [ ]

Click to process form input into a Word document for further editing (if required) and saving.

Fig.1: Drop-down menu of feedback comments



66122ANordby.doc - Microsoft Word

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help

Private and Confidential: information intended only for the student named below.

66122: PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING

Tutor Feedback Form

University of Strathclyde Business School

Tutor's Name: NNNN

Tutor's Email Address: @strath.ac.uk

Student's Name:

Student's Email Address: @strath.ac.uk

Feedback From Tutor:

Overall

This report is of average quality as it is well written but some factors are not always identified. Look over the comments which follow, and pick out areas in which you can improve. The comments inserted in the report (which follow this feedback form) will also help you see specific issues to be addressed.

Structure/Presentation Standards

The standard of presentation of this report was adequate, but this is

Page 1 Sec 1 1/2 At 9.1cm Ln 15 Col 1 REC TRK EXT OVR English (UK)

Fig 2: Word document received by students incorporating feedback comments.

## Evaluation methodology:

**Online MCQ tests:** Student accesses to tests delivered via WebCT were monitored by the department's learning technologist. A questionnaire developed using 'SurveyMonkey' software was made available online to students during June 2006. However, technical difficulties meant that not all of the intended questions were distributed to students and response numbers were limited to 100. Disruption to assessment as a result of the AUT industrial action and subsequent timing problems precluded any qualitative data collection involving students. Staff members were not canvassed about their perception of the impact of the tests.

**Online tutor feedback template:** Four of the ten members of the first year teaching team were interviewed by a member of the department, Dr Sean Ennis, about their experience in developing and using the template and about a number of other issues relating to the content of the course. AUT action prevented any canvassing of student perceptions of the template and feedback process.

## Results:

**(a) Online MCQ tests:** Student uptake of formative test opportunities was low (55%), however 64.9% of participating students canvassed agreed that the tests helped them to understand class topics all or some of the time. Uptake of the practice (or mock) MCQ test prior to the summative MQC class test was much higher (90%) and 44% of students repeated this practice test more than three times. 97.7% of students agreed that the opportunity to repeat the mock test helped them to gain confidence in their knowledge all or some of the time and 74.4% agreed that taking the mock test had improved their overall chances of success in the summative MCQ test.

**(b) Online tutor feedback template:** Staff members canvassed recognised that the level of detail and opportunity to customise comments were valuable aspects of the feedback template. The quantity of feedback supported by the comment bank could not have been provided manually without a significant increase in workload. Using WebCT this task took only a few minutes and readability of the comments was significantly enhanced for students. In terms of the comments/criteria for marking and feedback, it was felt that the template was designed purely from the course leader's perspective (which was mainly due to lack of time to collaborate) and neither tutors nor students had been adequately involved in the process. This meant that tutors had to spend time customising the template to suit their own style and what they thought it was the right level for first year students.

Staff members also identified some technical difficulties: accessing assignments was cumbersome for tutors because they had to identify their own students from the WebCT assignment box one by one in order to download documents for marking. Uploading the edited version was no problem. Technical changes meant that access to the template itself improved in the second semester after early difficulties. Selecting the relevant criteria boxes in the template was straightforward but if a mistake was made a new template had to be opened and the process had to be repeated once again. While using the template, all other functions were frozen so it was not possible to revert back to the original student's document for checking comments. One of the tutors indicated that she did not like marking online.

In spite of the time taken to download the assignments and customise the feedback form, the overall process of marking and returning feedback to students took as long as when it was done manually. The quality of the feedback is better and more accessible for students and if improvements are made on design and technology, quality and time could be reduced considerably.

**Critical success factors:**

The technologies and activities sponsored by REAP were introduced into the first year *Principles of Marketing* class during a period of significant change in the department and in the first year teaching team. A new member of staff, Dr Michael Harker, took responsibility for the class during the session 2005/06 and was mandated to address concerns about retention, progression and student engagement with course materials by re-designing both class content and class delivery. Primary responsibility for REAP project activities remained with a member of the first year teaching team. REAP activities have necessarily been affected by other changes to the course. AUT strike action across the university sector has contributed to delays in evaluation and in the delivery of some activities, particularly the implementation of the online feedback tool.

**Future plans:**

The department recognises that the activities introduced in this first pilot phase remain a work in progress but that REAP has been a positive enabler of holistic course re-design that will be continue into the next academic session. Positive student responses to online MCQ tests mean that this technology will be implemented again during the academic session 2006/07, provided that materials produced by publishers McGraw Hill to support a new edition of the core class textbook are appropriate.

In order to address disappointing student uptake of formative tests it is likely that these will be replaced by four or five 'low stakes' summative tests that begin earlier in the class to provide more opportunities for students to improve learning and the overall weighting of MCQ tests will rise to approximately 20% of the final mark. Although the feedback comments currently available to students within the publisher's materials are described by staff members as merely 'adequate' it is recognised that to augment feedback attached to 1500 questions would represent an unacceptable workload burden and the department has instead written to McGraw Hill to request that comments are revised.

The team plan to work together to address some of the content-related and technical difficulties encountered in implementing the online marking procedure and feedback form. During the period August-October 2006, the team will evaluate locally-developed software against alternative electronic feedback software developed by Phil Denton at Liverpool John Moores University ([www.ljmu.ac.uk/cis/software/feedback.asp](http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/cis/software/feedback.asp)). Returning students who received feedback via the current template during summer 2006 will be asked to participate in focus groups to re-define appropriate comments.

Other plans to implement the use of EVS technology are on hold, pending a decision about the project's support of EVS in teaching room at the university. Timetabling and scheduling concerns means that changing current one-hour lectures to a longer timeslot is not possible during the next academic session, but use of EVS with smaller tutorial groups remains a possibility. The implementation of peer review software to support anonymous distribution of student work for peer comment is also of interest and it is hoped that the new version of WebCT will be able to support anonymised distribution.