

## **Behind The 8 Ball: The Education of an Educator**

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*The new “normal” is doing more with less. What follows is one business professor’s efforts to do more with less.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

When I returned from the Marketing Management Association conference last fall, I was angry, disappointed, and embarrassed—by what other Universities were doing, and what mine was not. Fact of the matter, as I gathered my AMA chapter together, was that we were “behind the 8 ball.”

“What do you mean,” my president questioned.

“Simple. Illinois Wesleyan University students take 32 courses; the rest of the world takes at least 40 for a degree. Only 12 of those classes can be in the major—except we do not have a marketing major. And while lots of programs offer at least two courses in social media and/or marketing analytics, we offer none. And here’s what we can do to close the gap, because right now, you’re ‘behind the 8 ball.’”

### **THE VALUE ADDED PROPOSITION**

In addition to crafting our existing program to deliver a marketing major (still born so far), I also sought to give birth to an independent study that responded to market needs and student needs. I proposed the following for the next semester::

Marketing 339: Seminar in Marketing—Current Trends in Marketing

“This seminar in Marketing will use technology to focus on four current topics, themselves creatures of the new technology: Marketing Analytics, Excel, Social Media, and the changing nature of the sales force. The instructor will facilitate and vet the programs used, which could include Coursera, the AMA e-learning modules, and the nationally-recognized certifications offered by Excel and HubSpot. The course will meet Thursday night, but the instruction will be self-paced. This course is being offered in connection with the introduction of the Marketing major, and should further our discussion of what new truths might be included and how to deliver them. It will be limited to 15 students. Ideally, a Curriculum Development Grant will be used to cover any costs incurred.”

The road toward that seminar got detoured when my chair noted that if I taught this seminar, I would either have to get paid or give up one of the courses I taught. I wanted to do neither. And I wanted to learn the material myself.

## DOING MORE WITH LESS

Hence, what emerged was a word-of-mouth campaign to enroll seniors in an independent-study course themed “Lifetime Learning Starts Now,” that would educate them—and their instructor. As I explained, my last online course was 1954, in a Chicago Junior College course on the use of a slide rule (which I had to explain was a “computer” that failed only when I left the bamboo instrument in the rain).

The target of seniors was deliberate: having had internships, they understood why they needed the skills (which would hopefully provide motivation for the self-paced dimension) and convenient as well—I teach mostly seniors.

The AMA chapter served as a beta test group. We used our meetings the fall semester to vet programs such as Excel, HubSpot, and Coursera, which provided recommendations for the independent study.

When the semester started, I had over 20 seniors enrolled. The initial charge was overly ambitious:

“I expect to be able to have sessions on Thursday night beginning next week. I will also be sending more information soon, as I have time to put a syllabus together, but I suspect that the course will evolve using logical incrementalism.

“Here's what I think right now:

“We will start with Excel. You can choose where you need the instruction, since almost everyone has programs. I'll make some suggestions later today or tomorrow to get you going.

“A second topic will be social media marketing. The AMA has a series of programs that are half price for members. The cost of membership and member price is about the cost of the nonmember program, so I'd suggest becoming an AMA member. We can discuss how much of it you'd like to do.

“In connection with that program, the Career Center and AMA are hosting Jessica Shull in early February on using social media professionally (i.e., to find a job). That will be on our calendar, too.

“The third topic will be HubSpot and inbound marketing. That's also a certification course (free). In connect with that topic, I'm going to ask LeeAnn Hughes, the new VP Marketing and Enrollment, to come to our meeting.

“Finally, we'll be doing one of the marketing analytic programs on Coursera. Some are free, unless you want the certification, in which case it will cost \$80. We previewed several last semester, and we'll decide which one (or ones) will suffice to meet your needs.

“As you can tell, this class will depend a lot on your self-motivation, and your ability and willingness to work on your own. I look at the Thursday meetings as an opportunity to motivate and share and keep you on task.

“Complete the programs and the grade will follow nicely. Complete the program and you will have learned how to learn after IWU.

“I'm looking forward to the experiment. Lifelong Learning Starts Now.”

## RESULTS AND EVALUATION

What were the results and the feedback?

It was overly ambitious. We settled on 3 programs: Excel (there had been a great demand for an on-campus credit course on Excel, but as I pointed out to the students, “You're not baby birds; get out of the nest and fly”); HubSpot Inbound; and a choice for the third, since I had not only marketing but a number of finance students in the class as well. My choice was Marketing Analytics. The combination of free, or low price, was useful in attracting students.

All took 3 courses, and everyone finished at least two certifications. The Excel programs took longer than I'd allocated, and were I to do the program again, I'd require Excel certification as a prerequisite.

The meetings were sometimes useful in exhorting dedication, sometimes not. Several students thought they would have done better had we met more regularly. The self-pace cut two ways; students were relatively free to do the work, or not.

For the Analytics, what I found (as did most of the students who opted for that program) was that it would have been useful to have a “person” to talk to.

It was one way to do “more with less,” and reduced the 8 fewer classes (the “8 ball”) to 5. Perhaps more important, it let students realize that they not only will have to learn outside of classes, but that they can do so. And, perhaps the best lesson, so can I.