

CASE STUDY

Pharmaceutical Marketing

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Introduction- Most opportunities start as problems. In this instance, the problem was how to teach an elective course in pharmaceutical marketing that does not lend itself to didactic teaching. Pharmaceutical Marketing (PMAD 421) is taught to approximately seventy students in their third professional year. Most students do not have a background in marketing or business, and marketing problems do not have right or wrong answers. Being an elective, students may devote limited time to the course. In spite of these challenges, gaining an understanding and skills in the marketing process can benefit students in any career they choose.

In an effort to overcome these challenges and offer the students a richer learning experience, the instructor sought a novel approach. Several options included small group discussions, problem- or case-method teaching, focus groups, games and role-playing, take-home case studies, and mini-presentations in class. It was noted that guest speakers from pharmacy-based businesses were appreciated by the students and were enthusiastic participants in the teaching process. For efficiency and simplicity, the instructor experimented with case-method teaching in conjunction with input from collaborative partners.

Use of Collaborative Partners The development of collaborative opportunities is an emerging concept in pharmacy education and pharmacy practice. The use of case-method teaching in conjunction with a real-life case from a collaborative partner in a pharmaceutical marketing elective seems to be a novel approach not described in the literature. Collaborative teaching has been described in nursing education in which staff nurses were used to enhance students' clinical preparation(13). Staff pharmacists are commonly used for teaching pharmacy practice. An untapped potential exists with pharmacy-based businesses as collaborative partners with colleges of pharmacy. The students are future customers or employees of pharmacy-based businesses. The business people also enjoy the teaching experience and the vitality of the students. Many are alumni who love returning to the College and reliving memories. By developing collaborative bonds, students gain a better

DESCRIPTION OF THE INNOVATION

Learning Objectives

The real-life pharmaceutical marketing case is designed to engage students in a creative critical thinking process and develop team building and interpersonal skills in a collaborative, professional environment. Upon completion of the course, the students are to achieve the following learning objectives:

- demonstrate an understanding of pharmaceutical marketing problems and issues;
- show the ability to think creatively and critically, and to use interpersonal skills in the development of solutions to a marketing problem;
- demonstrate team-building skills by working successfully in a group;
- be able to successfully communicate results, findings , and recommendations in a persuasive, thorough, and interesting manner;
- establish a collaborative bond between students and representatives from a pharmacy based Business.

Selecting a Collaborative Partner

Each year, a collaborative partner from a pharmacy-based business is selected to provide a real-time, real-life case to the students. The instructor begins exploring the opportunities for

the marketing case and for collaborative partners during the months before the class begins. There are many potential collaborative partners such as retail chains, pharmaceutical manufacturers, pharmaceutical advertising agencies, hospital pharmacies, pharmacy benefit managers, or managed care organizations. Locally-based businesses, especially with alumni from the College of Pharmacy, seem to be most willing to commit the time and resources to the case.

Developing the Case-Due to the customized and real-time, real-life nature of the cases, each case is different. The case is developed by the collaborative partner and assisted by the instructor. The collaborative partner is free to provide as much or as little material in order to convey the elements of the case. Two sample cases appear in the Appendix. Below is a list of some of the cases used over the years.

1. Marketing plan for an anticipated Rx-to-OTC switch.
2. Development of a virtual pharmacy strategy.
3. Marketing a sustained release brand name drug with a branded equivalent.
4. OTC drug branding strategies.
5. Managed care launch of a cardiovascular product with labeling restrictions that would limit its use in managed care.
 - Marketing a mature brand name product facing patent expiration and generic competition.
 - New product launch of a lipid-lowering drug.

Since the real-life case is different each year, the presentation materials for the students vary as well. One year, marketers from a pharmaceutical manufacturer brought to the class a package of over 100 slides and spent close to three hours presenting the material and answering questions. Everyone in the class, including the instructor, was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement due to the proprietary nature of the information. This heightened the interest of the class and emphasized that they would be working on a serious, important real-life project. Another year, marketers from a drugstore chain presented their current e-commerce marketing plans and then gave a simple case to the students - to develop a new virtual marketing strategy. The challenge to the students was found to be equally great

regardless of the amount of material presented to the students in that introductory session.

Assigning the Case Students' assignment is to develop a marketing plan and presentation for the case presented by the collaborative partner. The required elements of the marketing plan are described in Table I. During week twelve, the collaborative partner from the pharmacy-based company introduces the case to the students and student teams are formed. Several years ago, when classes were smaller than fifty students, the instructor assigned each student to a team. An attempt was made to balance each team with a diverse group of students with regard to leadership and academic ability. As the class size grew, the instructor allowed students to choose their own teams of six or seven students each. This has worked out better than expected. Students seem to break into diverse groups and natural leaders tend to develop. They find it easier to set up out-of-school work sessions with their teams when they know the other students in their teams. Immediately following the introductory presentation of the case, students break into groups and start working on the case. The remainder of the three-hour classes are devoted to group work sessions. Between class and out-of-class time, there seems to be ample opportunity for in-depth discussions and group problem solving.

The Group Learning Process - Once the students begin working in their groups, they seem to really come to life. They quickly take ownership of the project and the creative juices start flowing. The groups are given assistance and instruction on how to work as a group. They are required to work as a group (not individually) during class and meet with the instructor and teaching assistant at least once during each class period to discuss their progress. The instructor asks questions to stimulate group discussion and help them develop their ideas. There may be a struggle among some students who are more accustomed to individual study or if the group is having difficulty coming up with an idea. If a group is struggling, they either request assistance or it becomes obvious to the instructor. Time is spent helping the group overcome their roadblock and develop more productive group dynamics.

Each year, students seem to progress through several stages in the group learning process:

- Uncertainty - where to begin, how to begin, what to do, etc.
- Leadership and guidance - someone in the group usually assumes a leadership role and tries to help the group figure out what needs to be done.

- Assign tasks - each person is usually assigned a specific task, such as researching a topic, to report to the group at the next meeting.
- Brainstorming and occasional frustration - this takes the longest time. Once the group members gain confidence in their roles and in the topic, the creative ideas start flowing. Group members discuss, argue, fight, laugh, and try to arrive at their 'big idea' that will drive the entire marketing plan.
- Aha - this happens once the group achieves their big strategic or creative idea. Usually this is the positioning or other major strategy that drives the marketing plan. It is usually apparent when the group has arrived at this point because they become very animated, excited, and confident. Some groups arrive at the 'aha' stage quickly, whereas other groups take much longer. Usually the students assume that the project is complete once they determine their big idea or their positioning strategy. The instructor's job at this point is to guide the group to develop the idea fully.
- Detail work - now the students realize that they still have a lot of work to do, even though they feel they have solved the case. Group dynamics come into play once again as the students determine how they will work out all the details of the project. Substantial out-of-class work is usually involved. Students realize that "the devil is in the details," and that significant group interaction and discussion must take place to work out the details of the marketing plan.
- Closure - pressure is on to complete the case and develop a persuasive presentation. As the group brings their case to closure, they become very competitive and secretive. They make the instructor promise not to tell the other groups what they are doing, while at the same time probing unsuccessfully for details of other teams' strategies.

Elements of a marketing plan

1.Executive Summary- A brief summary of the marketing plan. If someone reads only the Executive Summary, they should be able to understand the main elements of the marketing plan.

2. Situation Analysis -An analysis of the problems and issues of the case that are identified by the students. It sets the stage for the marketing strategy. Various references are used, such as literature, classroom materials, or web pages. The

importance of the problem is explained and the main issues are identified. These issues might be technical, competitive, ethical, or financial, for example.

3. Marketing Objectives- Measurable outcomes of the plan. Examples are: improve patient compliance on antihypertensive regimens, increase sales of a new product, or increase awareness of a new treatment for an important disease.

4. Marketing Strategies - An outline of how the team plans to achieve its marketing objectives. The marketing strategic planning approach learned in class is followed. Students develop strategies for the following categories: Market Segmentation and Targeting Positioning Product/Service Strategies Product Positioning Price Strategies Place (Distribution) Strategies Promotion Strategies.

5. Marketing Tactics - A detailed description of one if the marketing strategies defined above. Students describe how the product/service works, what it looks like, how a customer would use the product/service, and how results would be measured to determine if the goals and objectives are met. Visual aids are extremely important in this section, such as an advertisement or other promotional aid.

6. Presentation- On the final day of class, each team gives a ten-minute presentation to their peers, the faculty, and marketers from the pharmacy-based company. The presentation is clear, concise, persuasive, and informative. It covers each element of the marketing plan described above. Visual aids must be used, including overheads, slides, storyboards, posters, videotapes, audiotapes, and role-play situations.

Student Presentations Finally, on the last day of class (week fifteen), each team presents their findings in the form of a marketing plan to their peers, the faculty, and the collaborative partner from the pharmacy-based company. Each presentation is limited to ten minutes. Students are encouraged to use visual aids, including slides, overheads, videotapes, posters, story boards, role plays, animated characters, mock commercials or sales presentations. Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of pharmaceutical marketing problems and issues, to show the ability to think creatively and critically, and to use interpersonal skills in the development of solutions to a marketing problem. They achieve these objectives by working together to develop a written marketing plan that was presented to their peers, the faculty, and the collaborative partner from the pharmacy-based business. The instructor grades the presentations and the written

marketing plan that is provided upon completion of the presentation. During the class period, the collaborative partner from the pharmacy-based company judges the presentations. At the end of the class, the collaborative partner announces the first and second place winners and give awards, usually a sports bag or briefcase, to each member on the winning teams. All other class members receive rewards for participating in the case, such as note pads and pens.

EVALUATION

Student Evaluation Students offered comments regarding the real-life pharmaceutical marketing case as part of the formal course evaluation. Many students claimed that they learned more from the case than in the entire class. Students spent more time than expected or planned on the case because it was challenging and interesting. Words used to describe the case by the students include: fun, interesting, different, useful, realistic, innovative, challenging, rewarding, hard work.

- “The course is interesting and great for those interested in marketing.”
- “I like the bringing of current business tactics to illustrate marketing concepts.”
- “I really enjoyed working on this project and am really thinking about pursuing a job in marketing.”

Students seemed to appreciate that the case is collaborative and involves a real-life situation. It conveys the importance of the situation for them to know that they are working on a real-life problem. As the teams work on the case and start developing their creative ideas, they inevitably ask the instructor if the partner is going to use their ideas. Some of the teams have even tried to copyright their ideas. All teams prominently include their names so the collaborative partners know them. One of the collaborative partners went on to develop a pharmacy clerkship for interested students. The demand for the pharmaceutical marketing elective has increased significantly, even though it is well known that the case is hard work and challenging. The class size has increased from about thirty students several years ago to seventy students in 2001. There are a total of 150 third-year PharmD students, so almost half the class takes this elective. Students are turned away due to class size restrictions.

Collaborative Partner Evaluation

The benefit to the collaborative partner of having seventy advanced students looking at their problem for one month is priceless. Each year, the partners state that they want to participate in the case the following year. Often, the instructor must choose among potential collaborative partners. One of the partners from a pharmaceutical company stated that several of the students’ ideas had already been presented by their advertising agency, and that some of the students’ ideas were

better. The partner was astonished that the students were more creative than their experienced agency. Another partner noted the ability of the students to probe and uncover relevant information.

DISCUSSION

Most students who take an elective in pharmaceutical marketing do not intend to become marketers. It is therefore the instructor's responsibility to identify new methods of providing added value and excitement to the course, beyond simply teaching the students the basics of marketing. After considering many options, the instructor selected the process of real-life case-method teaching with a collaborative partner from a pharmacy-based business.

Advantages of Case-Method Teaching

- It helps to bridge the gap between ivory tower ideology and the real world by allowing the students the opportunity to apply learned concepts to a real world environment.
 - Active involvement on the part of the student creates more permanent knowledge. Learning is customized at the same time building upon certain basic concepts.
 - The student's experience dominates, not the instructor's. Learning tends to be powerful, personal, and intimate. Students take ownership of the case and its results.
 - The group interaction provides opportunities for brainstorming and building upon each other's creative ideas. Students realize at the end of the project that their collective effort is better than their individual effort would have been.
 - Utilizing a real-life case from a pharmacy-based business helps to establish a meaningful bond between the students and representatives from the business. The students gain a better understanding of business challenges, and the business people are always impressed with the students' capabilities.
 - Finally, the competitive nature of the case (judging by the business representatives) helps to motivate the students to put forth their best efforts.
- Possibly the most successful aspect of the real-life pharmaceutical marketing case was the use of a collaborative partner from a pharmacy-based business.

The collaborative partner lent credibility and intensity to the case that was difficult for the instructor to transmit alone. Students were most attentive when the marketing representatives from the pharmacy-based business are presenting their case and they asked many probing questions. The use of the collaborative partner and the resulting team competition truly motivated the teams to do their best

possible job. Another advantage of using the collaborative partner was that it forced the students to place themselves in another role and understand the problem from the perspective of the pharmacy-based business. The most difficult aspect of the real-life pharmaceutical marketing case was the management of the group dynamics. Although the groups were self-selected, the students did not always work well in the group setting. Some students embraced the process easily; others wasted valuable time trying to develop their roles and understand how the group was to function. The instructor was responsible for facilitating the group interactions and teaching the students to work at their potential. In future classes, the instructor will plan a lecture on group dynamics and will be better prepared to work with the teams to help them develop as a group to their full potential. It is important for the students to master group and interpersonal skills and to apply those skills to their future work settings. One major modification for this course is planned for the future. There will be a formal evaluation of the real-life pharmaceutical marketing case to provide more specific input regarding the case. In the past, the instructor relied on course evaluations, demand for the course, and informal input to evaluate the case, but there were obvious gaps in the knowledge gained from such an approach. By not giving all students and collaborative partners an opportunity to answer a series of specific questions about the case, the instructor may be missing some important information. Only with the results of a formal evaluation will the instructor be able to make significant improvements in the real-life pharmaceutical marketing case.

Transferability of This Approach

The application of real-life case based learning using a collaborative partner need not be limited to pharmaceutical marketing classes. Indeed, collaborative working relationships are gaining importance as pharmacists move into expanded clinical and management roles. Instructors in colleges of pharmacy have a responsibility to help prepare students to assume leadership roles that require increased visibility. Potential collaborative partners come from all walks of pharmacy practice, including: community pharmacy, hospitals, associations, startup services or businesses, managed care organizations, pharmacy benefit managers, employers, consultants, or any other organizations interested in pharmacy issues. Other colleges or departments at the university level are also potential partners, including colleges of medicine, nursing, law, or business, to name a few. Many potential collaborative partners are eager to allow students work on a pressing problem or issue. It is a winwin situation for the students and collaborative partner alike

CONCLUSION

Much of pharmacy education is based on individual achievement. Once students embark on their professional careers, they quickly realize that individual achievement is only part of their overall success. Students find they must be able to get along with other pharmacists, physicians, nurses, technicians, managers, and patients. They realize that working in a group may lead to better results than solving the problem alone. Learning to work well in a group can make the difference between a professional's success or lack thereof. The real-life pharmaceutical marketing case with a collaborative partner was designed to engage students in a creative critical thinking process and develop team building and interpersonal skills. In the end, the process of solving a real-life problem became more important than the problem itself. Years later, students may not remember what the problem was, but they remember the skills they learned in working with the group and developing the case. They remember what it was like to look at a problem from the partner's perspective. In the end, the instructor is not necessarily teaching pharmacists how to become marketers; instead, the instructor is teaching pharmacists how to become better practitioners