FOR THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR COURSE:  
A DIFFERENT ASSIGNMENT

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Abstract

The course in Consumer Behavior, like many other courses in business studies, proceeds in the development of a number of important concepts over its duration. Customarily, there are mid-semester examinations and final examinations, with perhaps some outside assignments, such as term papers, field research projects, and/or supplementary library research efforts called for.

In this report, a "different" kind of assignment is described. It has been used in place of the conventional "Final Examination," and has been assigned as a form of a "term paper," where a final examination is scheduled.

The author devised this form of "examination" because other forms of testing were less than satisfactory. The "objective" form (multiple-choice, etc.) did not seem to probe depth of knowledge; the conventional "short-essay" form too often evoked inadequate, generalized statements, abuse of the English language, or worse, indifference as to exact meaning. And, both forms did not seem to foster residual retention of important issues and concepts.

As for the term paper, too often, given the nature of the assignment, frequent good work was focused too narrowly on a subset of some Consumer-Behavior topic.

The Consumer Behavior course seemed, however, to lend itself to a different approach. First of all, the very center of this kind of course is the buying process itself, a virtually universal process of almost infinite variety, which unfolds from the moment of first stimulus through purchase and subsequent re-evaluation. Hence, there are "steps" or phases of a special nature, with which the student readily identifies during the Consumer Behavior course. In addition, the weight and impact of cultural, social, peer, and marketplace influences are brought to bear as the course proceeds. A good part of the popularity of the course is traceable to the ease with which the student identifies with the concepts and behaviors explicated in such a course.

The Assignment

In this assignment, therefore, the student is called upon to write from personal experience, to apply the concepts and terms developed during the course; the approach here asks the student to tell the instructor a story, the story of a purchase. This "Tell-me-a-story" approach was developed both to overcome the aforementioned limitations and to involve the student in a deeper, more creative, more committed way—and more comprehensively.

A separate, supplementary syllabus is provided for this assignment. It requires the student to write the story of a purchase, whether it be for a package of chewing gum, a VCR, a house, a special dinner at a restaurant. It can be factual or fictional; it can be written in prose style or even in the "script" form used in plays or screenplays.

The story must begin with the initial influences and stimuli, taking the reader through the stages of the Adoption-Process, to a conclusion at some point after post-purchase re-evaluation. The student is further required to incorporate and apply all appropriate major concepts and terms derived from the course textbook, the classroom lectures and discussions, and from any useful concepts obtained from outside assignments.

The student’s final draft should have parts which depict the influences of such factors as demographics, culture, sub-culture, peer-groups, family, and personality. As mentioned, the Adoption Process must be depicted and should
provide the basic structure and flow of the narration.

A Special Form

The further demand in the student work is the requirement of properly identifying what is taking place as his story unfolds. The student must use the terms and concepts learned in the Consumer Behavior course and state them they pertain to each part of the purchase-process being described.

To facilitate such a presentation, each page of the student's "story" is divided vertically, such that the narrative is set forth on the right-hand two-thirds of each page. In the remaining left-hand space, the student must place those words, terms, or phrases which properly describe or pertain to what is being narrated to their immediate right.

Conclusion

This form of major assignment seems to have value in several respects:

1) The student is involved in a creative, relevant effort which seems more likely to enable a fuller residual retention of course concepts;

2) Not only is the student writing a story of a purchase in some depth and detail, but he or she is also compelled to label correctly that which is happening in the story, often with two or three terms alongside each written paragraph; and

3) Requiring a detailed narrative as a form of major assignment necessitates, with all foregoing stipulations, that:

   a) a student review of all important concepts and terms used in the course; and

   b) a correct use and application of those concepts, as matched with appropriate parts of the student's own developing story.