

MKTG 6106 (FALL 2018)
ADVANCED TOPICS IN MARKETING
(SEMINAR IN MARKETING STRATEGY)

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

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Office Hours: M: 3.00 p.m. – 7.00 p.m. or by appointment
Class Meetings: F: (2.30 p.m. – 5.30 p.m.)
Pre-requisites: Instructor consent
Teaching Assistant: Yegyu Han (yegyuhan@vt.edu)
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B. COURSE MATERIAL

There is no formal text for this course. Readings for each day' are assigned in the syllabus and will be posted on the CANVAS website for the course along with background and supplemental material.

C. COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed as a research seminar for Ph.D. students in marketing. The course focuses on substantive topics in marketing strategy and management research that draws on interdisciplinary perspectives grounded mainly in the economic and administrative sciences. Although the research discussed is generally informed by psychological principles, it does not focus on psychological perspectives as would seminars in consumer behavior and/or judgment and decision making. More specifically, the course is designed to:

- provide a selective but intensive exposure to the historical evolution and contemporary growth points in marketing strategy and management research;
- enable students to critically evaluate existing research on marketing strategy and management and identify opportunities for substantive and methodological advances; and
- encourage students to conceptualize, design and implement original research on marketing strategy and management

D. COURSE MECHANICS AND GRADING

The course will meet as indicated. Specific class meetings may be adjusted to adapt to weather related contingencies and unanticipated schedule conflicts.

Class meetings will be devoted to a mix of lectures, discussion, critical analysis and synthesis of assigned readings. Each student should be prepared to participate in and contribute to these discussions and the quality of these daily contributions will be graded. Attachment 1 provides daily preparation guidelines. Also, each day a pair of students will be assigned in teams to lead the class discussion. Attachment 2 provides guidelines for this assignment. Finally, each student will complete a research proposal. This proposal will identify an original research proposal addressing a substantive marketing strategy/management question. The proposal will develop a relevant literature review, evolve a set of research questions/propositions/hypotheses, and design appropriate empirical work. Students will present their research proposals in class and submit a written report. Attachment 3 provides relevant guidelines. Course grades will be based on a weighted assessment of the quality of contributions as follows:

Daily class discussion:	20%	Discussion Leadership:	20%
Proposal Presentation:	20%	Written Proposal:	40%

E. CLASS SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

MODULE 1: MACRO PERSPECTIVES

August 24	COURSE OVERVIEW
August 31	MARKETING: ROLE IN CREATING FIRM & SOCIETAL VALUE
September 7	MARKETING: ROLE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

MODULE 2: THE FIRM AND ITS MARKETS

September 14:	CUSTOMERS (VALUE & RELATIONSHIPS)
September 21:	COMPETITION (COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE)
September 28:	INNOVATION, ADOPTION & DIFFUSION PROCESSES
October 5:	MARKET STRUCTURE AND SEGMENTATION

MODULE 3: MANAGING THE MARKETING MIX

October 12	Flex Date (Schedule TBD)
October 19	BRANDING & BRAND EQUITY
October 26	PRODUCT & SERVICE
November 2	MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS
November 9	PRICING & SALES PROMOTIONS
November 16	SALESFORCE & PERSONAL SELLING
November 30	DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

MODULE 4: SUMMING UP & PROGNOSIS

December 7	COURSE SUMMARY & PRESENTATIONS (Class Starts at 1.30)
December 15	No class. Written Term projects due.

F. READING LIST

Given the extensive literature on marketing strategy and management, it is possible to create a semester long doctoral seminar on each of the above topics. The researcher must choose a substantive problem as well as the (inter)disciplinary perspective in which to frame the problem. Topics are often difficult to study in isolation (e.g., brand equity and marketing communications) and one must choose the focal unit of analysis, whether it is the market (individuals, dyads, groups, etc.), the firm (competitor or collaborator) or the firm-market interface. The choice of research methodology is no less complex and pluralistic methods are increasingly in vogue. Each of these choice influences the audience for and the impact of the research product.

Clearly, researchers should play to their own substantive preferences and skills in making these choices. However, they also must keep an open mind about alternative paradigms within which to situate their own work in the field, be counted in its community of scholars, and stay abreast of advances in knowledge. To this end, I have usually selected six-seven papers for each day's readings. Two of these represent foundational work that influenced definition of the topic area. The next two or three are prominent contemporary papers reflecting the "state of the art." We will discuss these papers in class via student-led presentations and instructor-supported discussion. The final two (or three) papers provide contemporary reviews, syntheses or meta-analyses of findings. The complete reading list is posted separately. The attachments outline the approach we will use to cover the topics each day.

Please note that the reading list **excludes** papers that focus on marketing strategy issues based on purely laboratory based experimental psychology perspectives. This is done deliberately so that we avoid overlap with other departmental seminars on Consumer Behavior and Judgment & Decision Making that will cover these perspectives in depth. The reading list is also biased toward papers in which balance conceptual/analytical components with significant empirical work. A separate reading list containing analytical toolkit material will be provided as needed.

ATTACHMENT 1

READING ACADEMIC RESEARCH PAPERS

The following are some useful hints for reading research papers. The primary goal here is to think about the meaning and implications of the readings and ultimately to relate them to formulate your own research interests. As you will see in implementing the suggestions below, many of your answers will depend on your own (evolving) personal tastes. However, the traction and impact of your opinions will depend on how well you can support them. Developing thoughtful and insightful answers is time and effort intensive and requires self-confidence and practice.

A. FORMING AN OVERALL APPRAISAL OF THE AREA.

1. Is this paper interesting to you? Why or why not?
2. What is (are) the key substantive question(s) being addressed?
3. How has the author positioned the issue?
4. What is it about the positioning that makes you want to read/not read the paper?
5. How important is the issue in context?

B. READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE PAPER

1. Assess the conceptual aspects of the paper.

- What are the source disciplines tapped?
- Has the author reviewed the literature appropriately?
- Are the ideas and the propositions sensible?
- Do the examples relate to the concepts? Can you think of counterexamples?
- What are the paper's conceptual strengths/contributions?
- What are the paper's conceptual weaknesses/limitations?

2. Assess the methodological aspects of the paper.

- What methodology is used?
- Is it appropriate to use this methodology to address the problem?
- What other approach would complement or improve the research?
- What inductive/deductive logic is implicit in the methodology?
- Are the math proofs/the study design/the statistical tests understandable?
- What do you need to know in order to understand them?
- Did the method aid or hinder your understanding of the substantive contribution?

3. Assess the interpretive aspects of the paper.

- What does the paper show/find?
- Do the claims follow from what was shown or found in the study?
- Are the implications clear and interesting?
- Do they suggest new research? If yes' what issues?
- Does the author suggest future research questions? If yes, what are they?
- What are the study limitations (acknowledged and unacknowledged)?
- Do the study limitations suggest new research? If yes, what are they?
- Do you know of other ways to address this issue?

C. ASSESSING YOUR FUTURE INTEREST.

1. Are the substantive issues in this area interesting to you?

- If yes, explicitly identify some of these issues.
- If no, why not?

2. What do you need to know to do original work in this area?

- Do the future research issues suggested provide a starting point?
- What source discipline(s) do you need to read in?
- What methodological skills do you need to develop?
- Who are likely to be useful resources/co-researchers on such a project?
 - *your peers
 - *the marketing faculty
 - *other department faculty
 - *faculty at other schools

3. How might you get this research supported/funded?

- What materials/data/funding would you need?
- Which firm/agency might be worth tapping?
- Do you have contacts who might be helpful?
- Write a 2/3 page idea outline.
- Who might be a good critic/sponsor (see 2)?

D. TALK TO THE PERSON AND GET REACTIONS

In developing your assessment of each paper, make an even-handed assessment of the strengths and limitations of the contribution. Avoid being dismissive on the basis of "generalizability to the real world." Rather, constructively assess how such limitations affect the findings and how these could be addressed in future research. In class discussions, avoid being a "free-rider" where you merely react to the ideas of others – offer your own ideas and develop them (in context and sometimes with the original proponent of the idea). Finally, do not shy away from things you do not know (technical details, methodology, assess what you would need to know given your own interests and how you might go about acquiring the capability via additional coursework, independent reading or finding a trained research partner.

ATTACHMENT 2

LEADING CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Attachment 1 describes the preparation process for a regular class. However, on days when you or your team is designated to lead the class discussion, you will have two specific assignments to complete prior to class.

Assignment 1:

Develop a written summary of your thoughts as you read the two “foundational” papers. For each paper identify at least two observations or points of discussion for the paper that address its (i) conceptual, (ii) methodological, and (iii) interpretive aspects. Do not merely raise the questions but also provide a two or three sentence starting point for the discussion. These questions should be circulated by e-mail to the students in the class and the instructor by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday preceding the class. Your team will also be responsible for summarizing the key points of the discussion that emerged during class discussion. This should be turned in to the class and the instructor by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday following the class.

Assignment 2:

- A. Although the instructor will lead the discussion of the contemporary papers, your team is responsible for summarizing the key points of the discussion that emerges during class discussion of these papers. This summary should be e-mailed to the class and the instructor by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday following the class.
- B. Although the review/synthesis and meta-analytic papers may or may not be discussed in class, your team must also prepare a one-page summary outlining at least two interesting questions that may be addressed in future research on the topic. These questions should be circulated by e-mail to the students in the class and the instructor by 5 p.m. on the Wednesday following the class.

You may wish to consult the instructor in developing these assignments. Such consultation is optional (but may be helpful) and feel free to reach out to the instructor to set up these consultations in advance of the assignment due dates.

The instructor will lead the discussion on August 24, August 31 and September 7. Discussion leadership assignments for students will start on September 14. The teams will be indicated formed after the first week of class..

ATTACHMENT 3

THE WRITTEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT

The purpose of this assignment is to get you started on identifying or building on a concrete research idea. Although the substantive content of the research may emerge during the course, the following outline provides a sense of what the finished product would look like. The suggested length of each section is indicated:

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1 page)

- * Statement of Research Thrust
- * Intended Contribution(s)
- * Positioning vis-a-vis sponsor's interests

II. THE RESEARCH ISSUE(S) (4 pages)

- * Key questions/issues
- * Relevant Literature Review
- * Models/hypotheses/propositions to be explored
- * Lead-in/justification for method

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY (4 pages)

- * Overview of method
- * Study design
- * Data sources, description
- * Data collection plans (sample, method)
- * Data analysis plans

IV. EXPECTED FINDINGS (1 page)

- * Anticipated Results
- * Expected contributions
 - Conceptual
 - Methodological
 - Applied (Practice)
- * Future research agenda

V. APPENDICES (5 pages)

1. Timetable (1 page)

- * Start date for key phases
- * Completion date for key phases

2. Funding/Support Needs (2 pages)

- * Formal budget
- * Justification(s) for key budget elements
- * Current and needed facilities

3. Research Vita (2 pages)

- * General information
- * Distinctive competence/skills

It is important to get started on this assignment as early as possible. Students should set up individual meetings with the instructor starting with the third week of classes to explore ideas and expectations regarding their specific proposal.