Success and Failure in Active Learning Instruction

Sessions to Undergraduate Marketing Students

The Good: Business faculty frequently invite business librarians into their classes to teach students how to use the Library’s resources for their classes’ projects.

The Bad: Undergraduate marketing students see the librarians talk about the same business resources over multiple years.

The Challenge: Move away from the “mug on stage” passive instruction delivery [where a professor is at the front of the room teaching while students watch], and keep instruction sessions fresh and relevant.

The Solution: Create and infuse innovative lesson plans for each class by using active learning like polling software and in-class exercises as a pedagogical tool.

However, using new instruction techniques is a trial-and-error process—some strategies will fail and others will succeed.

This poster details two lesson plans that utilized active learning in instructing Texas A&M University undergraduate marketing classes in the Spring 2016 semester. One lesson plan for the MKTG 425 Retail Merchandising class had a “Choose Your Own Adventure” theme where students used the online polling software Poll Everywhere to vote on which databases they wanted to learn and then answered corresponding practice questions. The other lesson plan for the MKTG 323 Marketing Research class involved step-by-step pre-written instructions for using several databases which had students learn the databases on their own and then present their findings to the class. Based on an informal assessment that included responses to the in-class exercises, the former lesson plan failed while the latter succeeded.

The two lesson plans to the right are described in step-by-step detail, breaking down what went well, what was less effective, and what can be improved.

What is Active Learning?

Active learning is “any instructional method that engages students in the learning process”, and usually involves student activity and participation (Prince, 2004, p. 1). Active learning techniques can improve student:

- engagement
- attitude
- recall and retention of information
- thinking and writing skills
- academic achievement (Borwell & Elson, 1991; Prince, 2004)

Lesson Plan: Choose Your Own Adventure

Class: MKTG 425 Retail Merchandising

Lesson Plan Summary: Students chose their own database adventure by using Poll Everywhere to vote on which of nine business databases[1] they wanted to see demonstrated. The databases that were demonstrated were BUSWORLD, PMR Market Research Handbooks, Statista, eMarketer, and SimplyMap. They also used Poll Everywhere to answer practice questions using the demonstrated databases.

Learning Outcomes: (1) Students will become familiar with recommended databases for their project by watching database demonstrations, and (2) students will gain hands-on experience with the databases by answering practice questions.

Before Class: Created a handbook with a list of relevant databases for the term project and asked the professor to have students bring computers to class.


Lesson Plan:

- Presented a list of the top five databases.
- Library introduced herself.
- Explained class objectives and what students will vote on in the database they want to see demonstrated.
- Librarian circulated around the classroom, asked students if they had any questions, and then turned to polling.
- Students worked through the database instruction handout, then turned in their choices to confirm answers or help each other.
- Librarian introduced the databases and explained the importance for students to bring a computer.
- Students were hesitant to share their choices, so each student was paired with another to discuss their database preferences.
- Two students were matched to discuss their database preferences.
- Librarian introduced the databases and explained the importance for students to bring a computer.
- Librarians demonstrated the databases in a hallway the librarians would have and showed the students the importance of choosing the right database.
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- Students were welcomed to take a lollipop after finishing the handout.

Lesson Plan Evaluation:

Students were attentive to the directions, overview of the databases, and the importance for students to bring a computer.

Next Time:

- Librarians demonstrated the databases in a hallway the librarians would have and showed the students the importance of choosing the right database.
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Lesson Plan: Learn and Present a Database

Class: MKTG 323 Marketing Research

Lesson Plan Summary: Students broke into their semester-long project’s groups (four to five people per group), and each group used one database[2], performing research to determine if the restaurant Shake Shack should open a location in College Station, TX. This was a similar prompt to the class project. Each person followed step-by-step instructions that included questions they needed to answer about the databases’ context (e.g., how many restaurants are in College Station?), and then evaluated the database using the five Ws and H method (who, what, where, when, why, and how). Each group selected one to three people to demonstrate the database to the class.

Learning Outcomes: (1) Students will become familiar with databases for their project by presenting one database, and watching classmates demonstrate other databases. (2) Students will learn how to evaluate databases with the 5Ws and H method, and (3) students will show their database knowledge by demonstrating the databases to others.

Before Class: Created a handbook with a list of relevant databases for the term project, created step-by-step instructions for each database, and confirmed with the professor that the classroom had computers.

Lesson Plan:

- Presented a list of the databases’ instructions and a list of the top five databases.
- Librarians introduced herself and explained class objectives and what students will vote on in the database they want to see demonstrated.
- Librarians introduced the databases and explained the importance for students to bring a computer.
- Librarians demonstrated the databases in a hallway the librarians would have and showed the students the importance of choosing the right database.
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Lesson Plan Evaluation:

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Next Time:

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Conclusion

In libraries, the traditional approach to instructing databases usually involves a librarian demonstrating databases to passive students; however, there is room for innovative teaching techniques that can increase student engagement, and consequently, retention and understanding of material. For example, library instructors can utilize active learning like think-pair-share and peer instruction, as well as incorporate interactive technologies like Poll Everywhere to help facilitate library learning.

By selecting two lesson plans that used active learning to teach reference databases to marketing students, this librarian was able to understand how to improve upon active learning techniques. Some of the improvements include making students accountable for their learning through peer instruction, building in opportunities for students to think independently and discuss in groups (think-pair-share), and ensuring that every student has a computer to participate in the lesson. The librarian will continue to incorporate these improvements and active learning ideas while developing new lesson plans in order to keep the library sessions fresh and relevant.
