

Developing Masters Degree Program in IMC: A Competency Approach

Matthew H. Sauber, PhD¹
Judy Foster Davis, PhD²
Elizabeth A. Edwards, PhD³
Department of Marketing
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

¹ Matthew H. Sauber, msauber@emich.edu, is Professor of Marketing in the Department of Marketing, Eastern Michigan University. He specializes in integrated marketing communications, electronic commerce, database marketing and direct marketing.

² Judy Foster Davis, judy.davis@emich.edu is Professor of Marketing in the Department of Marketing; and Faculty Program Coordinator for the Integrated Marketing Communications program, Eastern Michigan University. She specializes in integrated marketing communications strategy, advertising, and policy issues related to the discipline.

³ Elizabeth A. Edwards, eedwards@emich.edu, is Professor of Marketing in the Department of Marketing, Eastern Michigan University. She specializes in market research and survey research methods, consumer behavior, and integrated marketing communications.

Developing Masters Degree Program in IMC: A Competency Approach

Abstract

The authors share their experience of developing a Master's of Science Degree in Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The program development used an interdisciplinary framework by including faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of technology, and the Division of Continuing Education and infused interactions among stakeholders – faculty, students, administrators, and practitioners. The process focused on learning outcomes at the program level as opposed to course levels. The result produced a more realistic program where competencies addressed student learning. The following details the processes used to identify learning outcomes and develop specific courses in the IMC Program.

Introduction

Recent changes in marketing communications and their reflection in the industry prompted several marketing faculty members in the College of Business (COB) to look at educational possibilities in this area. Having been involved in the practice and teaching of marketing communications, these individuals closely followed the recent IMC practices documented by such authors as Duncan and Everett 1993, Phleps, Harris and Johnson 1996, McArthur and Griffin 1997, Eagle et al. 1999, and Kitchen and Schultz 1999. They also examined what was being taught in IMC at the college and/or university level (Kerr, Patti, and Chien 2004).

Formation of Steering Committee

With blessings and direction from the Deans in the College of Business and the College of Arts and Sciences, a Steering Committee was formed, in the winter of 2006, to develop and launch a Master's of Science program in IMC. The committee membership consisted of faculty from marketing, management, communications, journalism, and media technology. The committee also included administrators from the College of Business, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Technology, and Continuing Education. The Steering Committee was given the following objectives:

- Develop and launch a Master's of Science Degree program in Integrated Marketing Communications, fully delivered online, by the fall of 2007.
- Identify all stakeholders, students, faculty, and practitioners, as an early step in the program development.
- Position the IMC program with quality contents and delivery to attract practitioners who seek mastery in integrated marketing communications and committed to standards for the industry.
- The IMC curriculum development should use a competency approach to achieve learning outcomes.
- The IMC program should be evaluated by the stakeholder periodically and be subject to continuous improvement.
- The proposed program should be cost effective in terms of size, growth, and delivery.

Information Collection and Benchmarking

The Steering Committee gathered information about marketing communications courses and programs offered by higher learning institutions. It reviewed the literature on course contents, pedagogy, and learning outcomes using published papers, program websites, Internet searches, and professional associations such as the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), the International Advertising Association (IAA), the American Advertising Federation (AAF), the American Marketing Association (AMA). The Committee members further identified and benchmarked the IMC programs offered by major universities – for example, the IMC program at Northwestern University, the online IMC program at West Virginia University, the IMC concentration at the University of Denver School of Business, and other IMC programs at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Emerson College in Boston, and Golden Gate University in San Francisco.

Competency Development Process

Based on the review of literature, information gathered from IMC programs taught at other universities, and input from practitioners, the Steering committee developed the following competencies for the proposed IMC program:

- Understand the primary role of IMC in building brand image and brand equity
- Identify all stakeholders as an early step in the IMC process.

- Identify the situations when each functional area of IMC can be effectively utilized.
- Discuss various factors in the global environment and how they influence IMC decisions.
- Explain how brand equity is built, measured and managed.
- Identify the factors that shape consumer decision making.
- Plan IMC message communication strategies.
- Identify the strengths, weaknesses and applications of communications vehicles.
- Explain the meaning of developing the same message across difference vehicles.
- Demonstrate how marketing objectives are translated into effective media strategies.
- Explain how the Internet and other new media vehicles can be used to build customer relationships.
- Discuss the roles of direct marketing in acquiring and retaining customers and building loyalty.
- Explain how to measure the results of a direct marketing campaign.
- Discuss how to use research for creative development and measuring the impact of brand communications programs.
- Explain the applications of sales promotion to build traffic, launch new products, and build brands.
- Identify the ethical and regulatory issues surrounding IMC.
- Develop evaluative standards to determine success/failure of any given IMC campaign.
- Develop a comprehensive and viable IMC plan for a real-world profit or not-for-profit organization.

Relevant to the area of their expertise, the members of the committee were asked to develop a list of competencies for each subject area pertaining to IMC. The subject areas include:

- IMC principles
- Audience behavior
- Brand development
- Communications research
- Creative strategy
- Media planning
- Direct marketing
- Public relations
- Sales promotion
- Campaign strategy
- Ethic and regulations

This approach is recommended by Magill and Herden (1998) as “the next step [to] move from rather vague generalities about abilities, skills and knowledge to more specific, measurable outcomes” (p. 572) in developing an educational program. The developers were told not only to define the competency they recommend, but also to specify the level of achievement relevant to that competency. Using Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of cognitive learning, the committee successfully identified a list of IMC competencies that students should attain at the following levels:

Awareness - the student can recognize the activity and describe it.

Knowledge - the student has an understanding of how the activity will be performed. It also implies that the student will be able to evaluate and recommend actions related to the activity.

Skill - the student can perform the activity effectively.

To finalize the competency list, the committee further discussed them with practitioners in management position as well as communications and media agencies to ascertain IMC applicability and relevance. Finally, the committee addressed the competency by designing and developing twelve 3-credit courses -- culminating with a capstone experience in which students prepare a cohesive IMC plan for a real-world client – in the proposed Master’s of Science in IMC.

References

Bloom, B. 1956. *Taxonomy of educational Objectives*, New York, David McKay.

Duncan, T. R. and Everett, D. 1993.

Eagle, L., P. Kitchen, K. Hyde, W. Fourie, and Padiseti, M. 1999. "Perceptions of Integrated Marketing Communications among Marketers & Ad Agency Executives in New Zealand." *International Journal of Advertising* 18, 1: 89-119.

Kerr, C.Patti, and Chien, M. 2004. "Integrated Marketing Communication: New Discipline with an Old Learning Approach: A Syllabi Analysis." Paper presented at the *Conference Proceedings Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy*, December 2004, Wellington New Zealand.

Kitchen, P. J, and D. E Schultz. 1999. "A Multi-Country Comparison of the Drive for IMC." *Journal of Advertising Research* 39, 1: 21-38.

Magill, S. L. and Herden, R. P. (1998), "Using educational outcomes and student portfolios to steer management education", *Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 22, pp. 567-589.

McArthur, D. N., and T. Griffin. 1997. "A Marketing Management View of Integrated Marketing Communications." *Journal of Advertising Research* 37, 5: 19.

Phelps, J. E., T. E. Harris, and Johnson E. 1996. "Exploring Decision-Making Approaches and Responsibility for Developing Marketing Communications Strategy." *Journal of Business Research* 37, 3: 217-23.