

Experiential Learning Exercises in Services Marketing Courses

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Business schools are often accused of focusing too much on quantitative and technical skills and spending too little time on interpersonal and communication skills. Experiential learning assignments provide an effective vehicle for addressing these concerns and are particularly well suited for services marketing courses. The objective of this article is to present a portfolio of experiential learning exercises that can be used in services marketing courses to facilitate the integration of course concepts, teamwork and team building, communication and listening skills, and critical thinking and problem solving.

The best thing for being sad is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. . . . Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you.

—T. H. White (1939, p. 183),
The Once and Future King

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In *The Once and Future King*, the magician Merlyn counsels young King Arthur on the power inherent in learning. The novel contains a fascinating description of the lessons Merlyn arranges for Arthur so that he can truly experience what he will need to know in his future role as the leader of England. (This is experiential learning in the extreme since Merlyn transforms Arthur into an ant, a hawk, and various other creatures to gain the firsthand knowledge that he will need to be a great king.)

While university professors are not typically charged with schooling future kings, we do have the important task of preparing our students for careers in a rapidly changing, highly competitive workplace. Business schools have recently been accused of focusing almost exclusively on quantitative and technical abilities while spending too little time on interpersonal and communication skills (Louis 1990; O'Reilly 1994). While individual quantitative and technical abilities continue to be valued by organizations, the contemporary business environment demands additional skills such as oral and writ-

ten communication, critical thinking/problem solving, and teamwork (Floyd and Gordon 1998). To help students develop these competencies, our classes will need to become increasingly “learner centered” and collaborative (Cunningham 1995; Koch 1997). This will require instructors to “engage learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their own choices” (O'Banion 1997, p. 49).

What do “learner-focused” classes involve? A widely publicized study sponsored by the American Association of Higher Education, the Education Commission of the States, and The Johnson Foundation offers the following seven guidelines for creating a learner-centered environment in higher education (Chickering and Gamson 1987).

1. Encourage student-faculty contact. This is the most critical factor in keeping students motivated and involved. Contact both in and outside of class is very beneficial. Knowing a few faculty members well helps students be more intellectually committed to their academic work and future goals.
2. Encourage cooperation among students. Learning is most effective when it is a team effort—collaborative and social rather than competitive and isolated. Students can develop both listening and critical thinking skills when they share their ideas and listen to those of others.
3. Encourage active learning. Students must actively experience the class material and make it a part of themselves. This does not occur when students simply listen to lectures, memorize information, and take objective exams. Students need to process what they are learning by writing or talking about it and relating it to their other academic and life experiences.
4. Give prompt feedback. Students need timely, constructive feedback on what they are doing well and what they can improve. Class activities and assignments should provide

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ample opportunities for them to perform and receive suggestions for improvement.

5. Emphasize time on task. There is no substitute for spending an appropriate amount of quality time learning course material. Students need help with setting priorities and developing effective time management skills.
6. Communicate high expectations. Expecting more from students will motivate them to do better work. Instructors should be clear about the course expectations, give prompt feedback, and reward good performance.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Students come to college with different learning styles. What works for one student may not be effective for another. Students need the opportunity to learn in diverse ways and to succeed in demonstrating their skills so they will be more receptive to learning skills that do not come as easily for them.

These seven principles can be incorporated into marketing classes through the use of experiential learning activities that help students understand how their own experiences relate to course content. Experiential exercises place considerable responsibility for learning on the student, while the professor takes on the role of coach. This shift from “teaching marketing to helping students learn marketing” represents a major departure from traditional marketing education (Lamont and Friedman 1997, p. 24). It requires professors to give up some control over the flow of information in the class and, instead, preside over students who are “coproducers” in actively creating and presenting their own knowledge (Wright and Lovelock 1999; Wright, Bitner, and Zeithaml 1994). While students take on additional responsibility in the learning process during experiential activities, this does not imply that the instructor has less work to do (Kohn 1993). In fact, evaluating the outcomes of experiential exercises can require a substantial time investment compared to more traditional means of assessing student learning (e.g., multiple-choice exams).

This change in pedagogy may sound overwhelming to those who have not yet tried a more experiential approach to education. However, it can result in some wonderful experiences as teachers and students share the excitement of acting as partners in the classroom. Student comments indicate that they tend to enjoy experiential learning assignments more than any other aspect of the class (O’Hara and Shaffer 1995). And experiential learning activities do effectively address the criticism that business schools focus “too much attention on theories and concepts and not enough attention on communication, decision-making, and other skills that are at least as important to career success as content knowledge” (Lamb, Shipp, and Moncrief 1995, p. 10).

EXPERIENTIAL ASSIGNMENTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

While experiential exercises work well for many marketing topics, they are especially effective in services marketing classes (Hoffman and Bateson 1997; Lovelock and Wright

1999; Wright, Bitner, and Zeithaml 1994). Students are often both service consumers and service employees, and experiential learning activities help them understand how their own experiences relate to the course material and learning objectives. (Table 1 includes a list of the most common course objectives for services marketing classes.) Experiential learning assignments can be integrated into the classroom in many forms. The following activities are a sample of our most effective assignments for undergraduate courses in services marketing.¹ The summaries are brief so that we may present as many exercises as possible. Our experience with these exercises suggests that students’ enthusiasm and cooperation in participating in these activities greatly enhance their understanding of course concepts.

Exploring Basic Services Concepts

The purpose of this in-class exercise is to help students understand some of the basics of services marketing by applying these concepts to a “real-world” setting. The exercise should take place early in the course (in the third or fourth week, if possible) and can be done in either one or two class periods. Health care is a good service to use. Virtually all students have experience with this service, and it can be delivered in significantly different ways. Although the description of this activity is based on health care, many other services would work equally well (e.g., banking services, coffeehouses, or beauty salons).

At the end of the class period prior to this exercise, the professor hands out a packet of material and asks students to review it before the next class (see Figures 1-4). Typically, the packet includes (1) the Scale of Market Entities (see Shostack 1977), (2) the zone of tolerance (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1993), (3) the core benefit model (Shostack 1977), (4) the continuum of evaluation (Zeithaml 1981), and (5) two business press articles: “Reach Out and Cure Someone” by Purvis (1991) and “The Doctor Is On” by Hafner (1996).

At the beginning of the class period designated for the activity, the students are divided into groups. Each of these groups takes one of the following roles: traditional doctors (with regular office practices) or traditional patients, immediate-care doctors (affectionately known as “doc in the boxes”) or immediate-care patients, and doctors by phone or Web (as described in the two articles contained in the packet) or phone/Web patients. For each of the three types of doctors, the task is the same. Each “doctor” group (traditional, immediate care, and phone/Web) must design a core benefit model for its service. The model should show both the core and key supplementary benefits. Since these models will be shared with the class, they need to be created on overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides.

The total number of patient groups will depend on the class size and the number of concepts the instructor wants to cover with the exercise (the packet contains the specific concepts—Tangibility Scale, continuum of evaluation, etc.). For

TABLE 1
COMMON SERVICES MARKETING COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Developing an understanding of the unique challenges involved in marketing and managing services.
2. Identifying differences between the marketing of services and the marketing of manufactured goods.
3. Identifying and analyzing the various components of the “services marketing mix.” This includes the traditional four Ps plus the physical environment, processes, and the people involved in service transactions.
4. Understanding and discussing key issues concerning the managing and measuring of service quality and customer satisfaction.
5. Appreciating the intertwined role of service personnel and customers with respect to service delivery, service failures, and service recovery issues.
6. Discovering the sources of competitive advantage in service businesses.
7. Understanding how “service aspects” of every type of firm can become a competitive advantage.
8. Developing an appreciation for key issues in service organizations such as managing supply and demand, relationship management, and the overlap in marketing, operations management, and human resource systems.
9. Building important workplace skills (e.g., cooperation, teamwork, meeting deadlines, report writing) through team projects and cooperative learning activities.
10. Becoming better, more aware, and maybe less naive service consumers.

SOURCE: Adapted from Hoffman (1997).

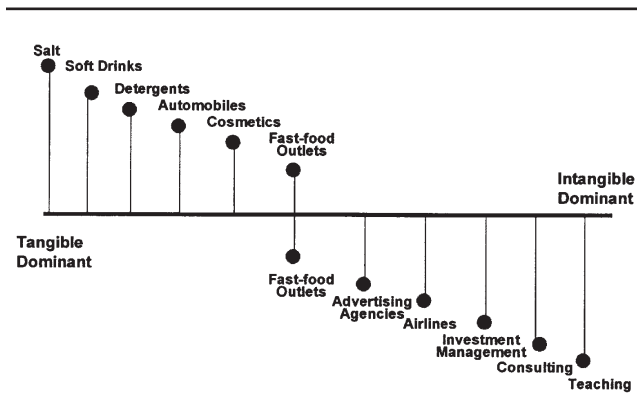


FIGURE 1: Tangibility Spectrum

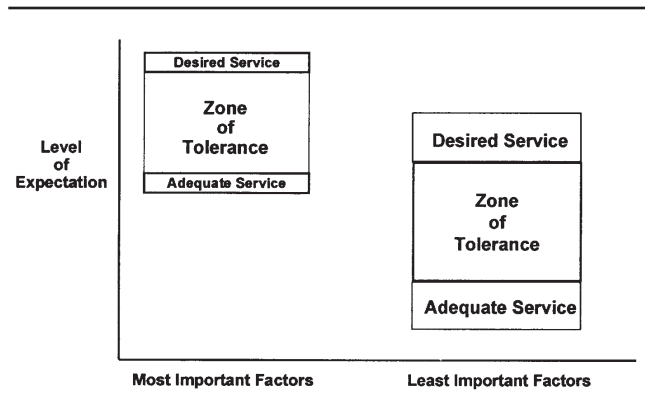


FIGURE 2: Zones of Tolerance for Different Service Dimensions

example, one set of patient groups will place the kind of medical service received (i.e., traditional, immediate care, or phone/web care) on the continuum of evaluation. Each group will then create lists of the search, experience, and credence attributes patients might use to evaluate the quality of their health care experience.² The instructor can assign as many groups to cover different concepts as is necessary to accommodate the class size. The patient groups also need to create overheads to share with the class.

When the groups have finished creating their overheads, the whole class reconvenes. The instructor asks the three “doctor” groups to share their core benefit models and invites the class to comment on the similarities/differences between the three types of service delivery. The “patient” groups then present their work. For example, one set of patient groups shows where they placed their service on the continuum of evaluation and describes the attributes associated with the service. This can lead to an interesting discussion of the differences between the three types of service delivery from the patient’s perspective. There should be relatively few search or

experience attributes for the doctors by phone/web (which implies that credence attributes are dominant) compared to the traditional doctors and the immediate-care physicians (who can rely more on search-and-experience attributes to offset the credence characteristics inherent in health care). Questions that can be directed to the whole class after the groups have presented include the following:

1. What do you think of the doctors by phone/web service?
2. Would you use this service? If so, under what circumstances?
3. What might the differences be in the training and skills that the doctors by phone/web might need versus traditional doctors?

One key benefit of this exercise is that students learn to apply theoretical concepts in analyzing service providers in their everyday environment. The group presentations also offer an excellent opportunity for the instructor to correct any misunderstandings that students have about the interpretation and application of the basic services marketing constructs before moving on to more complex topics.

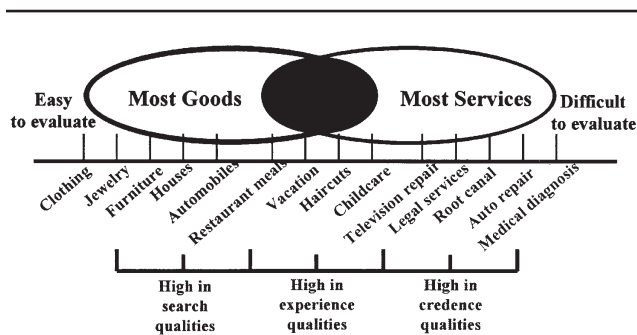


FIGURE 3: Evaluation of Services

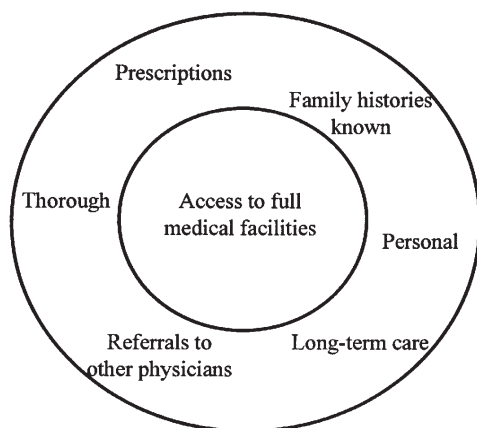


FIGURE 4: Traditional Doctors

Service Watch Assignment

This assignment encourages students to seek out (i.e., “watch” for) service-related articles in the popular press. The objective of this exercise is to help students realize that many services marketing practitioners routinely deal with the topics presented in the class. Students are asked to locate a current article that addresses a services marketing issue related to class discussions from the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, or other publications that are applicable to the course. Students then write a short paper pertaining to the following issues:

1. a brief summary of the key point(s) of the article;
2. a discussion of how this article relates to a key concept examined in this course and the implications for services marketing practitioners; and
3. the student’s personal reaction to the article based on the marketing perspective gained during the course.

In doing this assignment, students are forced to look beyond the textbook to find real-life examples of the concepts

discussed in class. This assignment can be used as a way to begin each class, particularly if due dates for various students are scattered throughout the semester. In particular, a student can be asked to provide a 2-minute summary of the article and discuss the marketing concept illustrated in the article. Once an article has been discussed in class, it is often easy for the instructor to refer back to the article in subsequent discussions.

Servicescape Video

In this exercise, student teams are asked to “produce” a short video segment (4 to 5 minutes) related to a specific servicescape. The servicescape is the environment where the service is delivered that has the potential to affect the customer’s experience.³ Although the assignment could include a local business, it probably could be done on most college campuses by looking at such servicescapes as a campus dining hall, a student recreational center, the library, the business building, and so on. Each servicescape segment might address the following questions:

1. What is done well in this servicescape? Use the video to point out specific examples.
2. What are the important issues in designing/maintaining this servicescape so that it will be a positive influence on customer expectations?
3. What part(s) of the servicescape could be improved or altered to positively influence the service experience? Use the video to point out specific examples.
4. Do any of the following characteristics (color, lighting, shapes, sound, smell) influence the customer’s experience? Explain.
5. Which roles (package, facilitator, socializer, differentiator) does this servicescape play? Explain.

Student groups can be assigned completely different services, or several groups may be assigned different aspects of one provider’s servicescape. For example, several student teams could be assigned the university golf course, but each might be responsible for a different aspect of the servicescape (e.g., parking lot, clubhouse, driving range, or the course itself). Alternatively, a different approach might be to make comparisons between providers who essentially provide the same service. In this case, students could compare and contrast the university golf course’s servicescape with (if available) the servicescape of a municipal golf course, a resort golf course, and/or a private country club golf course. Each course is likely to have a very different servicescape, which, in turn, is likely to have a different effect on its customers. Once the video segments have been “produced,” they can be shown to the entire class. Instructors can stop the videos to elaborate on various points and ask the producers questions. A major objective of the assignment is to illustrate how the servicescape can influence the customer’s service experience.

Physical Evidence Field Trip

The objective of this exercise is to build on the service-scape video exercise by comparing and contrasting two local service providers. This exercise can be used to demonstrate the differences in competitive formulas of two service firms that are providing the same core benefit. Students are typically asked to compare a fast-food franchise (e.g., McDonald's, Wendy's, Hardees, etc.) with a full-service restaurant (e.g., TGI Friday's, Ruby Tuesdays, Bennigan's, etc.). Ideally, two providers located next to each other should be selected to allow students to go easily from one to the other. Students are asked to answer the following questions:

1. For each provider, what is done well in this servicescape? Elaborate and point out specific examples.
2. For each provider, what aspects of this servicescape have a positive influence on customer perceptions of the overall service experience? Similarly, what aspects of this servicescape do not necessarily have a positive influence on customer perceptions of the overall service experience? Explain.
3. Which of the following characteristics (color, lighting, shapes, sound, smell) in each servicescape influences the customer's experience? Explain.
4. What other aspects (besides the servicescape) of physical evidence are present?
5. How does each provider (fast food and full service) use the servicescape as a differentiator? In their positioning strategy? To appeal to their target segment(s)? To facilitate service delivery?
6. How does each provider (fast food and full service) use physical evidence (other than the servicescape) as a differentiator? To enhance the customer's experience? To facilitate service delivery?
7. What suggestions would you make to improve the servicescape and other physical evidence for each provider (fast food and full service)?

A nice way to conclude the activity is to have all of the students come together at the same time at each provider's facility and relate their observations. A discussion about physical evidence is much more vivid when the students actually can observe it and instructors can elaborate easily on observations made by the students. If the field trip is carefully scheduled, the service providers' management may serve as "guest speakers" on physical evidence issues.

Company Complaint Letter

This exercise is beneficial in examining consumer complaint behavior, service failure points, and service recovery strategies. Students are instructed to write a letter to any company from which they have received bad or at least marginal service. The service encounter does not have to be one that left the student extremely upset; it may be simply that the firm did not supply service that met the student's expectations.

Students are directed to obtain the name and address of the appropriate person to whom they should complain and write a formal letter of complaint.

In the letter, students are asked to complain about what has happened and, if appropriate, make suggestions for any action the company could take to appropriately "recover" in this situation. To eliminate bias, students are specifically asked not to state in the letter that they are doing this as a class project. To give the company a chance to respond by the end of the semester, the letter is mailed early in the course, and responses are discussed near the end of the term. Later in the semester, students are asked to prepare a short (3 to 4 pages, double-spaced) paper analyzing the situation that led to their complaint, the nature of the complaint, what they expected the firm to do, and how they now feel toward the organization. If the firm did respond, students are asked to (1) describe what the response was and (2) discuss the adequacy of the firm's response (from the perspective of a consumer). If the company did not respond, students are instructed to (1) discuss why they think they did not receive a response and (2) write a letter to themselves (on behalf of the company) that addresses what they believe the firm should have done. Finally, students are asked to conclude their papers with a discussion of what they learned from this experience.

At the end of the semester (perhaps on the day the assignment is due), students might be asked to share their experiences with the rest of the class. Most of the time there will be some students who are excited and happy about how a provider responded to their letter, while other students end up very frustrated with the organization they contacted. The instructor can easily incorporate issues related to service recovery into the stories told by students. To extend this idea, students could role-play as different members of the organization that have an interest in this complaint letter (e.g., the customer contact employee, the manager, the attorney, etc.) and discuss what response (in their view) is appropriate. Students might even role-play the original service encounter and explore various recovery strategies to respond to the situation.

Customers' Roles in Service Delivery

Unlike consumers of goods, service customers often are actively involved in the production process. This assignment highlights the complexities of managing a service operation where customer contact is frequent. Students are instructed to select a service that requires a moderate or high level of customer participation.⁴ Students are then asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What service have you selected?
2. Describe your role as a customer in the service delivery.
3. How did you learn your "role"?
4. How important is the customer to the service delivery process?

5. How would you describe your level of participation (low/medium/high)? Explain.
6. What influence do other customers have on your service experience?
7. When might other customers enhance your experience? Diminish your experience?
8. When might you, as the customer, be able to enhance your experience?
9. When might you, as the customer, do something that diminishes your experience?
10. Is this a service that you might be able to provide yourself (without the service provider's assistance)? Why or why not?

This exercise works very well if the questions are passed out prior to the day this discussion occurs in class. Indeed, if students have prepared answers in advance, their level of participation is likely to be quite high. Even those students who normally do not volunteer their opinions in class can be encouraged to participate. Since students are encouraged to choose the services and identify their roles in service delivery, they become “coproducers” of their educational experiences.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXERCISES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

While undergraduate students often require numerous short projects or assignments to help clarify and define concepts, graduate students are usually ready to move beyond conceptualization to the issues that arise with operationalization and implementation. Thus, effective assignments for graduate students teach them to apply and implement services marketing concepts in actual business situations. This goal of translating theory into practice can be approached from two general directions. On urban campuses and with part-time graduate programs—where nontraditional students tend to be older, more mature, and have inside access to companies—the assignments can incorporate real consulting opportunities. For more traditional, full-time residential students, exercises can provide a similar business applications learning experience but from a consumer, competitive, or other more external perspective.

Consulting-Based Projects

Consulting projects work best when graduate students have completed the graduate business core courses and are well prepared to interact with the business community. Students will typically require assistance with the consulting process and with managing expectations of the client firm.

Services marketing audit for a nonprofit organization. In this project, graduate students volunteer to conduct a services marketing audit for a nonprofit organization. The outcome includes articulation and evaluation of the firm's current services marketing practices, identification of both “best practices” and areas for improvement, and detailed recommenda-

tions for future changes. Students may choose to work within a general marketing audit format (cf. Kotler 1997, chap. 24) or may use the services marketing audit developed by Berry, Conant, and Parasuraman (1991). Both of these sources provide a good framework (as well as many questions) for conducting a thorough audit.

A number of benefits accrue from this activity. The graduate students and the college benefit from an opportunity to provide service to the local business community. Students also benefit from the experience of working with organizations whose goals, cultures, structures, and management styles are quite different from the for-profit model to which most students have been exposed. Similarly, not-for-profit managers can benefit from the experiences of working with student consultants trained to approach issues and solutions from a for-profit perspective. Beyond functional business issues of accounting, finance, operations, and marketing, opportunities abound to develop team building, communications, and negotiating skills.

An additional benefit of this project is that it increases the appeal of the services marketing course to nonbusiness graduate students. For example, health care students have enjoyed the opportunity to work on projects, including patient satisfaction and service quality studies for numerous hospitals (e.g., Provident Health Partners, Boulder Community Hospital, Denver General Hospital, Denver Children's Hospital, and many others) as well as other health organizations (e.g., Belle Bonfils Blood Center, Colorado Organ Recovery, National Stroke Association, and the Colorado AIDS Project). Students from other disciplines and backgrounds have enjoyed working with organizations of interest to them. Liberal arts students have worked with businesses such as the Denver Zoo, Denver Art Museum, Colorado Symphony, and Very Special Arts of Colorado; students interested in careers in social services have consulted for Seniors Inc., The Adoption Centre, Big Brothers of Denver, and the Denver Dumb Friends League. Education students have consulted in settings such as the Jefferson County Adult Education program or the Adult Literacy Project, whereas government and public administration students have analyzed the Westminster Library, Dillon Amphitheater, and Colorado Women's Education and Employment.

Conduct a service quality gap analysis. Another consulting-based assignment requires students to conduct a complete gap analysis—including managers, contact personnel, and customers—for a client firm. The project is suitable for both for-profit and not-for-profit firms. SERVQUAL and gap analysis survey items are drawn from *Delivering Quality Service* (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry 1990) and, following Carman (1990), adapted to the needs of the client firm. Some questions may need to be reworded to reflect the firm's industry and services. Other questions are added to gather information unique to the client's needs.

Academic benefits of this project include an in-depth familiarity with the SERVQUAL gaps model, a deeper understanding of some issues involved in implementing the model, and an opportunity to integrate and apply statistical skills in a marketing management context. Some managerial benefits include the observation of SERVQUAL gaps as they actually exist in business settings and the articulation of actual differences between managers', employees', and customers' perceptions of the same service organization.

Not-for-Consulting-Only Projects

Blueprinting. Another nicely defined opportunity to apply services marketing tools to an actual business situation is provided by a blueprinting assignment (Shostack 1986). Blueprinting illustrates the balance of control that is necessary among operations, human resources, and marketing to provide an effective service delivery system. Students get ready for this project by preparing the Shouldice Hospital case.⁵ Excellent guidance for blueprinting is provided in the resource guide for Zeithaml and Bitner's (1996) *Services Marketing* text (see Wright, Bitner, and Zeithaml 1997). By completing this exercise, students learn the benefits but also the difficulties and ambiguities involved in creating a service blueprint. This project can be adapted to the traditional, younger, residential students by completing the blueprint from the consumer's viewpoint. The data-driven portion of the blueprint might stop at the "line of visibility," but backstage processes might be recommended by students.

Best practices. This exercise requires students to benchmark services marketing practices and procedures within a particular industry or on a particular issue. For example, groups may explore how health, financial, or professional service industries measure service quality and customer satisfaction. Alternately, students might explore a single issue, such as examining how high-priced service providers maintain their price leadership. In this case, students might interview executives from 20 top services firms in a variety of industries (e.g., Disney, Federal Express, PriceWaterhouse, or Vail Associates) to understand a variety of ways that premium pricing strategies are supported.

CD-ROM Interactive Simulations

Interactive simulation games are popular experiential activities that work in both graduate and undergraduate classes. A simulation called *Building Service, Driving Profits: RGP Financial Services* is particularly relevant for services marketing courses.⁶ The simulation allows users to transform their intellectual understanding of services marketing concepts into an operational understanding. It presents the scenario of RGP Financial Services, a business in trouble. Employee and customer satisfaction has been in a downward spiral for 2 years. During this same period, profits as a per-

centage of revenue have declined from about 20% to 10%. The challenge for students is to turn the company around.

The simulation is set up as a five-stage tutorial. The first four stages are presented as orientation sessions that provide background information about the company and that teach students how to implement the strategies they have chosen. Students can control a number of independent variables that include incremental hiring percentages, promotion expenses, starting salaries, raises, layoffs, training expenses, and investments in the service infrastructure. In the final stage, students try to positively influence the dependent variables (customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, cash, and profit as a percentage of revenue) by effectively manipulating the independent variables to design a cohesive marketing strategy.

The primary benefit of the simulation is that it allows students to transform their intellectual understanding of services marketing concepts into an operational understanding of the link between employee and customer satisfaction. The interactive nature of the simulation enhances the realism of the simulation as customers, employees, and members of the board of directors appear on the screen and voice their reactions to the student's strategic decisions.

DISCUSSION

Our intent in this article has been to provide specific suggestions as to how experiential learning activities might be incorporated into services marketing courses. Table 2 provides a summary of the activities. It is unlikely that instructors would want to incorporate all of these exercises into one course. Our hope is that we have provided enough direction to encourage instructors to select those activities of interest to them and adapt them to meet the specific needs of their students.

While our discussion has focused on services marketing concepts, experiential learning techniques are applicable to a wide range of marketing courses. We believe that the experiential learning activities we have described can help to transform the instructor from being "the sage on the stage" into "the guide on the side." In this process, many of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles for good practice in higher education are employed. For example, these experiential learning activities can encourage student-faculty contact as students seek direction, assistance, and insight from instructors as they work through the various exercises. Many of the exercises encourage cooperation among the students. None of the activities is designed or intended to pit one student against another. Instead, these activities are designed to encourage the entire class to learn from each other's experiences. These activities also encourage active learning. In fact, we have incorporated many of these activities into our courses so that students will process the material by applying or experiencing it. Students in our classes cannot merely show up for class and listen to lectures; students must become

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

<i>Experiential Exercise</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Key Services Marketing Objectives Addressed</i>	<i>"Learner-Centered" Principles Employed^a</i>
Exploring basic services concepts	Students take various perspectives in discussing the core benefits being provided by various medical service providers.	Develop an understanding of unique challenges in marketing and managing services; apply theoretical services marketing concepts to real-world settings.	3, 7
Service watch	Students seek out service-related articles in the popular press and illustrate their understanding of services marketing concepts.	Understand the unique challenges involved in marketing and managing services; identify various components of the services marketing mix.	3, 4, 5
Servicescape video	Students create a short video focusing on the servicescape and how it can influence the consumer's service experience.	Identify/analyze components of the services marketing mix; build important workplace skills (cooperation, teamwork).	2, 3, 7
Physical evidence field trip	Students visit two local service providers in the same industry to compare/contrast physical evidence from each.	Discover sources of competitive advantage.	1, 3, 5, 7
Company complaint letter	Students write a letter to a service provider whose service did not meet their expectations and then analyze the company's response.	Analyze various recovery issues; become a better and perhaps less naive service customer.	3, 6
Customers' roles in service delivery	Students are to identify a service requiring a significant level of customer participation and discuss the role that customers have in service delivery.	Appreciate the role of service personnel and customers in service delivery.	3, 5, 6, 7
Services marketing audit for a nonprofit organization	Student groups conduct a services marketing audit for a local nonprofit organization that can include discussion of areas in need of improvement and detailed recommendations for future changes.	Understand and communicate key issues in marketing and managing services; build important workplace skills (cooperation, teamwork, report writing).	2, 3, 5, 6
Service quality gap analysis	Student groups work with a client to identify and discuss various SERVQUAL gaps present in the firm.	Understand key issues in managing and measuring service quality and customer satisfaction.	2, 3, 5, 6
Blueprinting	Student groups create a blueprint (flow diagram of activities) of a provider's services (or of a specific process).	Appreciate issues related to the overlap in marketing, operations, and human resource systems.	1, 2, 3
Best practices	Student groups explore industry leaders to understand various practices used by the "best" firms.	Understand how service can become a source of competitive advantage.	2, 3, 5, 6
CD-ROM interactive simulations	Students participate in a simulation game that allows them to apply various concepts.	Understand key issues in managing service quality.	2, 3, 4, 7

a. The numbers in this column coincide with the seven guidelines for creating a learner-centered environment in higher education (Chickering and Gamson 1987) presented at the beginning of the article.

involved in the learning process. This diverse set of exercises clearly respects diverse talents and ways of learning. While it is probable that no one activity will work well for every student in the class, we believe our portfolio of experiential learning exercises provides opportunities for most students to become more full engaged.

CONCLUSION

The classroom environment is a service encounter in and of itself. Hence, as is the case with many service encounters, customer participation is inherent in the production process. The exercises provided here provide insight into the process of incorporating experiential learning into the classroom experience to help instructors “manage” coproduced educational service experiences. Experiential learning requires that we turn a larger portion of the responsibility for learning over to the students themselves—empowering them to contribute actively to their educational experience. As a group, the exercises facilitate the cross-functional integration of course materials. In addition, the assignments engage students in an active learning environment that promotes teamwork and team building, team leadership, oral and written communication skills, and listening skills and fosters the talents needed to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Experiential learning allows students to “create knowledge” as they wrestle collaboratively with the marketing concepts. Through discussions with their peers, they develop a better understanding of the scope and complexity of the material. This may be especially important in an undergraduate marketing class in which concepts can seem simplistic and irrelevant to students if they are allowed to simply skim the surface of the content through the traditional course lecture format.

Engaging in experiential learning can be a messy process. Schibrowsky and Peltier (1995) report that the potential for academic dishonesty is greater for experiential activities as compared to traditional activities. For instance, when using a simulation exercise, problems can arise from current students obtaining previous-player information, unauthorized collaboration among groups, the outright stealing of information from other groups, and the lack of participation (“free riding”) by some group members.

In addition, it is often difficult for some instructors to give up total control of the classroom environment and refocus their role from “bosses” to “coaches and facilitators.” The shift from “boss” to “coach” involves providing an environment that is safe and conducive to explore experiential exercises by (1) emphasizing to students the importance of the intrinsic rewards of completing the assignment (e.g., after participating in this assignment, you will have a better feel for what it is like to be a manager) and (2) instilling in students an appreciation for the process of learning, not just the result. Consequently, instructors of experiential exercises should

also shift the method in which assignments are evaluated and include more process-oriented evaluations in addition to outcome-oriented evaluations. Process-oriented evaluations may include group and individual presentations pertaining to the experience and/or written reports that explain the rationale of decisions. Process-oriented evaluations also may include information about timetables followed, procedures implemented to keep the exercise on track, and feedback from external constituents (e.g., clients) concerning how the students interacted with outside parties if applicable.

We have become a very outcome-oriented society. When a course has been completed, students are constantly asked by parents, fellow students, and instructors, “What grade did you get?” Few ask, “What did you learn?” A major benefit of experiential learning exercises is that they can help maximize student learning by combining process-oriented exercises with outcome-oriented information for evaluation purposes, which is important when creating an environment that is conducive to experiential learning. But just as Merlyn instilled a love of learning in young King Arthur by serving as his coach and mentor, we can inspire our students by empowering them to be coproducers of their own educational experiences.

NOTES

1. The Services Marketing Special Interest Group (SERVSIG) of the American Marketing Association (AMA) was formed to allow faculty with interests in services marketing to develop social and working relationships that focused on furthering services marketing research and services marketing education. During a SERVSIG meeting that occurred in conjunction with the 1998 AMA Summer Educators’ Conference in Boston, a panel was created to share ideas for course assignments that facilitated experiential learning. It is our objective to share this discussion with a broader audience through this article. Most of the ideas shared here have been passed along to the authors from other instructors and have been refined over time.

2. Search attributes of a product can be determined prior to purchase. Experience attributes can only be determined during and after consumption. Credence attributes are difficult to determine even after purchase and use.

3. Elements of the servicescape that affect customers include exterior features of an organization’s physical facility (such as signs, parking, or the landscape) as well as internal features (interior design, equipment, or decor) (Zeithaml and Bitner 1996). See Bitner (1992) for a thorough discussion of servicescapes.

4. For example, services with a moderate level of customer involvement include haircuts, tax preparation, and financial planning. Services with a high level of customer involvement include physical therapy, weight reduction programs, golf lessons, and services marketing classes.

5. The Shouldice Hospital Limited case is a 1983 Harvard Business School case (number 9-683-068) written by James L. Heskett.

6. The costs for adopting the simulation package are now minimal. The licensing fee has been waived, and the cost per disk is \$16. Students can purchase the disks individually or share the cost among groups. Additional information can be obtained from Customer Service at Harvard Business School Publishing: (800) 545-7685 (United States and Canada) or (617) 495-6117 (outside North America). A new simulation titled *Managing Customers for Profit* is now available also.

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