



Greening An Integrated Marketing Communication's Course: An Assessment Of Sustainability Literacy

By: **Pia A. Albinsson** and G. David Shows

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This article showcases efforts of incorporating Sustainability Issues in an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) class during three semesters during the academic years of 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. The course was re-designed using Fink's (2013) course recommendations of designing significant learning goals. In addition to the way the course was delivered (both face-to-face and online), the instructor worked with a Higher Ed publisher to customize a textbook to include sustainability issues related to the course content (i.e., reflecting IMC topics). The course re-design included sustainability assignments such as Virtual Field Trips (visiting corporate websites and other organizations to study their CSR statements and sustainability efforts). Sustainability related articles were pre-requisites for all assignments. In addition, the students had to watch several movies, including "So Right So Smart," "Story of Stuff," and other voluntary (not controlled for) movies dealing with social justice, natural capital or the dark side of "business as usual" provided through the university's sustainability film series.

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Greening an Integrated Marketing Communication's Course: An Assessment of Sustainability Literacy

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Abstract

This article showcases efforts of incorporating Sustainability Issues in an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) class during three semesters during the academic years of 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. The course was re-designed using Fink's (2013) course recommendations of designing significant learning goals. In addition to the way the course was delivered (both face-to-face and online), the instructor worked with a Higher Ed publisher to customize a textbook to include sustainability issues related to the course content (i.e., reflecting IMC topics). The course re-design included sustainability assignments such as Virtual Field Trips (visiting corporate websites and other organizations to study their CSR statements and sustainability efforts). Sustainability related articles were pre-requisites for all assignments. In addition, the students had to watch several movies, including "So Right So Smart," "Story of Stuff," and other voluntary (not controlled for) movies dealing with social justice, natural capital or the dark side of "business as usual" provided through the university's sustainability film series.

In recent years there has been an increase in research on the integration of sustainability issues in the marketing curriculum (e.g., Bridges and Wilhelm 2008, Albinsson, Perera, and Sautter 2010; Borin and Metcalf 2010; America 2014), some of which offers educator's tools, resources and learning activities to use in their courses (Albinsson et al. 2010; America 2014; Borin and Metcalf 2010; Rowe 2002). However, there is limited literature on the assessment of the integration of sustainability in the marketing curriculum. Albinsson et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative content analysis of students' open-ended responses on follow-up surveys and course evaluations and found that students exposed to learning activities with a sustainability focus had a greater understanding of the topic and the need for business practices to change. Although there are numerous sustainability literacy scales available, they are normally used on a whole university student population for classification purposes and not in individual classes. For example, the Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) is

commonly used by Higher Education Institutions to assess sustainability literacy among its populations (Horvath, Stewart and Shea (2013). We address this gap in the literature by showcasing the efforts of integrating sustainability topics in an Integrated marketing communications (IMC) course at a southeastern U.S. public university.

Two assessments were performed via an online survey, one the very first day of the semester (N= 77) and one the last week of the semester (N=68). While students self-selected themselves into the course based on scheduling preference and interest, only 20 students out of 77 reported knowing the course was taught with a sustainability focus. Measurement items and scales were adapted from the UNC Chapel Hill Student Sustainability Literacy Survey (SSL). In addition to the sustainability related items, demographic questions, knowledge of specific marketing terms and awareness of campus efforts were assessed via open-ended questions. A summated scale item was created from the six SSL scale items. Simple t-tests were utilized to compare the pre and post concept surveys.

Results show that integrating sustainability topics in an Integrated Marketing Communications class can positively affect students' awareness and knowledge of sustainability topics. The findings illustrate that individual instructor's efforts of integrating sustainability topics in marketing courses can have a positive effect on student learning outcomes and possibly influence change in behavior (more students began recycling or changing other consumption patterns). For instructors who work at higher education institutions where no official sustainability oriented courses or programs are offered, these results can assist in motivating and encouraging the same in their decision to start or continue their curriculum changes of greening their courses.

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Keywords: Marketing Education, Integrated Marketing Communications, Sustainability Literacy, Integration, Assessment

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: Efforts of individual educators to incorporate sustainability topics related to course material can positively influence students' awareness of the relevance of sustainability to their careers and individual lives.

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