

Student Attitudes Toward Client Sponsors and Learning: An Analysis of the Effects of Incorporating a Client-Sponsored Project in an Introductory Marketing Course

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This study examines i) the effects of a client-sponsored project (CSP) on student attitudes toward a sponsoring client, ii) the effects of a CSP on student attitudes toward learning core marketing concepts, and iii) moderators of student attitudes toward learning core marketing concepts. Introductory marketing course students prepared marketing plans for a client-sponsor who awarded cash prizes. The CSP yielded i) positive student attitudes toward client sponsors and ii) beliefs that CSPs enhance learning of core marketing concepts and increase confidence in academic ability. Positive attitudes toward competition and instructor helpfulness strengthened student perceptions that the CSP enhanced learning.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators who strive for excellence in their teaching often search for ways to offer realistic, experiential, team-based projects for their students. One way that marketing educators provide such educational experiences for students is by incorporating client-sponsored projects (CSPs) into the curriculum (Humphreys, 1981). CSPs, which are sometimes referred to in the literature as client-based (CBPs), client-initiated, or live-case projects (West, 2010; Lopez & Lee, 2005), are an educational methodology wherein students work on a project that involves solving a current problem or challenge faced by an organization (i.e., the client sponsor). A CSP may be carried out for a not-for or a for-profit organization and is undertaken to partially or completely fulfill academic course requirements (Humphreys, 1981; Strauss, 2011; West, 2010). While the primary CSP goal is to enhance student learning of marketing concepts, it is also expected that the client sponsor will benefit from the work done by students (Harman 2009). Clients often initiate the project and support it with financial and human resources and the project may conclude with the preparation of a report and a presentation of results and recommendations to the client (Bove & Davies, 2009). CSPs can be either narrow or broad in scope; students may perform a specific task for a client (e.g., research on branding) or they may take on a broader task such as preparing a marketing plan (Haas & Wotruba, 1990). CSPs are frequently undertaken as group projects (e.g., Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009) and sometimes involve competitions between student groups (Strauss, 2011).

We aim to add to the growing literature on the use of CSPs in marketing education by exploring the effects of incorporating a CSP into an introductory marketing course. While recent research has focused

on strategies for implementing CSPs (West, 2010; Harman, 2009), our research focuses on providing evidence for the impact of CSPs on student attitudes. We investigate the impact CSPs have on student attitudes toward client sponsors. We also explore the effects that CSPs have on students' perceptions about CSPs as a means of learning marketing concepts. Our study provides some of the first evidence that participating in a CSP fosters positive attitudes toward the client sponsor and also adds support to other studies that have shown that CSPs enhance student learning outcomes (Ackerman & Hu, 2011). To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to show that competition between student teams may enhance student perceptions of learning that occurs as a result of participating in a CSP.

The paper begins by discussing theory and developing hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of CSPs in marketing education. The CSP is described and the results of the assessment of its impact on attitudes toward the sponsoring client and on student perceptions of learning outcomes are presented. Results of the analysis of the effects of instructor assistance, effective team work, and competition on perceived learning outcomes are also presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and study limitations, along with suggestions for future research on this important topic.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

CSPs and Client Sponsors

The marketing education literature asserts that CSPs offer benefits for client sponsors and for students (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009; Haas & Wotruba, 1990). One client benefit frequently mentioned in the literature is some form of a report that student consultants have prepared for the client sponsor (e.g., Clark, King, & Jurn, 2012). Bove and Davies (2009) report that clients perceive the quality of the product students produce while working on the CSP as a benefit. Similarly, Goodell and Kraft (1991) report that client sponsors benefit from positive public relations and from receiving low-cost marketing research advice. Others have reported that client sponsors appreciate the assistance they receive and believe that they benefit from timely information (Linrud & Hall, 1999).

Some researchers also acknowledge that a CSP can be a source of employees for the client sponsor (Strauss, 2011; Linrud & Hall, 1999; Haas & Wotruba, 1990). No doubt, part of an organization's willingness to sponsor a student project comes from their desire to assist in developing skills in the individuals they would like to employ. Client sponsors want employees with technical, analytical, and creative problem solving skills (Barr & Mcneilly, 2002). They also want marketing graduates who are able to work well in teams (Hopkins, Raymond, & Carlson, 2011; Schlee & Harich, 2010). CSPs are recommended as a means of fostering all of these skills (Strauss, 2011; Kennedy, Lawton, & Walker, 2001; Umble, Umble, & Artz, 2008). It is likely therefore, that client sponsors hope to benefit from sponsorship by gaining access to well-trained potential employees. To attract valuable employees however, client sponsors must ensure that students involved in their projects have developed positive attitudes toward them. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) suggests that without a favorable attitude toward the client sponsor, it is unlikely that a student would accept an internship or employment with the client sponsor. Thus, it is possible that organizations who undertake student project sponsorship assume and expect that participating in the project will result in students developing positive attitudes toward them. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1. Students who participate in a CSP will develop positive attitudes toward the client sponsor.

CSPs and Student Learning

Initially, CSPs were often included in marketing research classes (e.g., Humphreys, 1981) but the range of marketing courses that have incorporated CSPs in the curriculum has now been greatly expanded (Clark et al., 2012). CSP use has been reported in introductory marketing classes (Umble et al., 2008; Sparkman Jr., Follows, & Zhou, 1990) and capstone marketing courses (Haas & Wotruba, 1990; Strauss, 2011; Razzouk, Seitz, & Rizkallah, 2003). They have also been reported in advertising (West, 2010),

entrepreneurship (Kennedy et al., 2001), services marketing (Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney, & Wright, 2000), and new product management courses (Goodell & Kraft, 1991). CSPs have been effectively utilized in small and large classes and have been offered at both large (Holler Phillips, 2011) and small (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009) universities. Although it has been suggested that CSPs are most appropriate for post-graduate courses where students have completed their graduate-level core business courses (Gremler et al., 2000), CSPs have been used extensively in both undergraduate (Karns, 2006; Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009) and graduate (Bove & Davies, 2009) courses.

CSPs have a positive impact on student learning because they are a form of experiential learning (Ayers & Underwood, 2007). Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). Experiential learning is learning by doing and it has become widely accepted in marketing education (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp, & Mayo, 2000). One benefit of experiential learning is that it encourages students to be involved in the learning process and this involvement assists students to retain and apply the principles they are learning (Bove & Davies, 2009). Marketing educators who want to adopt an experiential learning approach to marketing education have long been encouraged to embed learning in realistic contexts (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Working on real life projects such as CSPs provides experience which offers an opportunity for the involvement and meaningful engagement that is critical for deeper learning (Bobbitt et al., 2000).

CSPs also impact student learning because they foster creative problem-solving skills. CSPs are typically ambiguous (Strauss, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2001). They require students to generate solutions for a real business problem and to find the information they need to solve the problem. Students however, may not know what information is needed so some creative brainstorming is required to begin the project. Furthermore, the client-sponsor may be unable or unwilling to share desired information with the students so students must determine how to proceed without complete information. CSPs are also typically unstructured; the process by which students go about finding, analyzing, and using information to solve the business problem is determined by each student or student group (Strauss, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2001). The ambiguous, unstructured nature of a CSP means that students have to consider both theoretical principles and current business practices if an appropriate solution is to be found. Thus, because CSPs are unstructured and allow students to solve real, yet ambiguous and challenging problems, CSPs assist students to develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills (Strauss, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2011), both skills highly desired by employers.

While some may regard the ambiguity of a CSP as problematic, others suggest that this ambiguity is a very important advantage (e.g., Umble et al., 2008). Umble and her colleagues (2008) analyzed six team-based competitions in six different core business classes and concluded that complex, unstructured projects are more effective than traditional academic analysis in several important ways, one of which was to engage students in critical thinking and analysis. Indeed, Umble and her colleagues (2008) determined that to maximize CSP benefits for students, a CSP must be complex and unstructured with no single right answer to a problem.

A CSP is also an appropriate mechanism for delivering both theory and practice as advocated by the professional school approach to marketing education (Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Boyt, 2002). In contrast to a more academic approach which focuses on theory, the professional school approach aims to blend theoretical marketing knowledge with practical business skills so that students are equipped to enter a business profession upon graduation. Thus, a professional school approach attempts to meet both student and employer needs. Strauss (2011) concluded that CSPs are an appropriate methodology for those who wish to adopt a professional school approach.

The marketing literature suggests that CSPs enhance student learning of important marketing concepts (Ackerman & Hu, 2011). As discussed, they are a means of connecting the theory learned in the classroom with current business practices (de los Santos & Jensen, 1985). As such, CSPs are motivating to today’s “net-generation” students who prefer realistic and relevant learning activities (Matulich, Papp, & Haytko, 2008) and who value interactive courses with hands-on experience and connection to the real world (Bridges, 1999). The motivation that ensues from participating in real-world projects translates into more positive learning outcomes. For example, a study that explored the relationship between student

learning style and teaching methodology revealed that regardless of learning style, students report that they learn more in marketing courses that involve projects and live cases than in traditional lecture-based courses (Ackerman & Hu, 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that student projects such as CSPs facilitate student learning to i) manage iterative information flows, ii) break down problems and tasks, and iii) negotiate coherent solutions to problems at levels comparable to learning that takes place in real work projects (Skilton, Forsyth, & White, 2008). Therefore, it is expected that:

H2a. Students who participate in a CSP will view a CSP as an effective method for learning marketing concepts.

H2b. Students who participate in a CSP will view a CSP as an effective method for gaining confidence to perform school work.

Instructor's Role in a CSP

Although the ambiguity and unstructured nature of a CSP can be viewed as an advantage (Strauss, 2011; Umble et al., 2008), it may also be viewed as a problem (Kennedy et al., 2001). Because of its ambiguity and lack of structure, some students find working on a CSP difficult and disconcerting. Students who are used to more structure may be frustrated (Haas & Wotruba, 1990) and view a CSP as too time consuming (de los Santos & Jensen, 1985). Students who expect very specific assignment instructions report that they waste time trying to determine what to do next when working on a CSP (Strauss, 2011). Although a very structured CSP with very specific instructions may negate some important CSP benefits, students certainly need assistance from instructors if they are to successfully complete a CSP. Indeed, while it is expected that students will take on more responsibility for their own learning when they engage in an experiential methodology such as a CSP, it is not expected that the instructor will have less responsibility for student learning when CSPs are employed (Gremier et al., 2000). Rather, although the assistance provided by the instructor may differ from that offered in a more traditional lecture-based class, as with other methodologies, an instructor is expected to play a pivotal role in CSP effectiveness. Therefore, it is expected that CSP effectiveness regarding learning marketing concepts and gaining confidence in academic ability will be influenced by the level of assistance provided by the instructor. Specifically, it is hypothesized that:

H3a. Higher levels of instructor assistance with a CSP will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective methodology for learning marketing concepts.

H3b. Higher levels of instructor assistance with a CSP will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective methodology for gaining confidence to perform school work.

CSPs and Teamwork

CSPs are often carried out by teams rather than individual students since teamwork is recognized as a critical element of a business school curriculum. Employers want marketing graduates who are able to work in teams (Schlee & Harich, 2010) and CSPs are viewed as an effective means for students to develop these desired leadership and teamwork skills (Strauss, 2011; Bove & Davies, 2009). In addition to being a means of delivering education in a manner that is congruent with how the business community functions (i.e., it is common practice for business to use teams of people to solve problems), teams are used in marketing education because they can enhance learning outcomes for students (Neu, 2012; Skilton et al., 2008; McCorkle et al., 1999). Therefore, marketing educators are encouraged to embed learning in social experiences that can be found in team-based projects if they want students to reap the rewards on the experiential learning approach to marketing education (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The importance of teams to marketing education is evidenced by extensive literature; team projects have been discussed in the marketing education literature for over three decades (Neu, 2012; Humphreys, 1981).

It is also possible however, for a team to function ineffectively and impede student learning. This may be the reason for the considerable attention given to exploring strategies to develop effective team

projects (Stege, Mankin, & Jewell, 2011; Chapman, Meuter, Toy, & Wright, 2010; McCorkle et al., 1999; Williams, Beard, & Rymer, 1991). Issues such as managing free riding and social loafing (Poddar, 2010); assessing the team's performance (Deeter-Schmelz & Ramsey, 1998); building trust (Huff, Cooper, & Jones, 2002); integrating business courses to enhance team-based learning (Bobbitt et al., 2000); ensuring that students develop positive attitudes toward working on teams (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003); increasing student satisfaction with teamwork experiences (Wood, 2003); assisting students to be more effective classroom team members (Lancellotti & Boyd, 2008); designing a curriculum so struggling students are not harmed by group experiences (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011); and avoiding unintended negative consequences of group projects (Neu, 2012) have all been discussed in the literature. Taken together, the literature suggests that CSP projects that are completed by effectively functioning teams will have more positive outcomes than those completed by dysfunctional teams. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4a. Higher levels of team effectiveness will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective method for learning marketing concepts.

H4b. Higher levels of team effectiveness will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective method for gaining confidence to perform school work.

CSPs and Competition

Interestingly, there is very little discussion in the literature regarding competition and CSPs. A notable exception is the report of an introductory marketing course that incorporated a CSP in which students from three course sections course competed with one another for non-monetary prizes (i.e., bonus points, grades) (Sparkman Jr. et al., 1990). Others have reported on CSPs that involve team competitions where students could win cash prizes of up to \$1000 (Umble et al., 2008).

Although empirical evidence is lacking, a variety of benefits believed to be offered by team competitions have been reported in the literature (Ross & Byrd, 2011). For example, Sparkman Jr. and his colleagues (1990) reported that competition generates interest among students. The student audience seemed attentive and interested during the final presentations and most students reported that they worked harder and spent more time on the CSP than on comparable projects. Sparkman Jr. et al. (1990) concluded that motivation seemed to be due to the competitive aspect of the project. Similarly, in a capstone marketing course in which the CSP involved competition between student groups, students reported that they liked the project's competitive aspect and wanted a higher proportion of the grade based on the competitive ranking (Strauss, 2011). This literature suggests that enjoying competition will be motivating to students and enhance the learning outcomes related to CSP. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5a. More positive attitudes toward the CSP competition will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective method for learning marketing concepts.

H5b. More positive attitudes toward the CSP competition will result in enhanced student views that a CSP is an effective method for gaining confidence to perform school work.

METHOD

Participants

To test our hypotheses, a convenience sample of 592 students enrolled in several sections of an introductory marketing course at a large business school in northeastern United States was used. The introductory marketing course is required for all students at the university and is typically taken during the sophomore year. Students in this sample were enrolled in one of twenty-eight sections taught by seven instructors during the 2011/2012 academic year. Sixty-six percent of the students were business majors, 16 percent were liberal arts majors, and 18 percent were undeclared. Fifty-five percent of the students were male.

The Project

The CSP was initiated by the client sponsor who proposed the CSP at an initial meeting held in late spring 2011. Faculty members were receptive to the idea. One marketing instructor was selected as faculty coordinator to liaise between the client sponsor and instructors.

The marketing instructors and a client sponsor representative met throughout the summer to develop the CSP. The client sponsor suggested several possible projects based on current business problems facing their company. The marketing instructors then selected one project for the fall and spring semesters of the 2011/2012 academic year; projects were selected based on the course objectives and the students' interests and abilities. Marketing instructors worked together to develop an assignment that required students to develop marketing plans to increase consumer product sales: *pet products* (fall) and *sporting goods* (spring).

The CSP was completed by groups of four to five students who began working together on the project within the first few weeks of the semester. Teams submitted a written report and presented their recommendations in class during the third-to-last week of classes. One team from each section was chosen to present their marketing plan to a team of judges in a final competition that was held during the second-to-last week of classes. Executives from the sponsoring client's company along with senior business-faculty members from the university served as judges for the final competition. Winning team members shared cash prizes: \$1000 for the first place, \$750 for the second place, and \$500 for the third place team. The remaining competitors received \$25 gift certificates from the client sponsor. The CSP contributed twenty percent to a student's final grade. Grades were determined without input from the client sponsor and final competition results were not considered in determining project grades. Peer evaluations however, did impact project grades.

Client-sponsor representatives met with students at the university twice during the semester. During the initial meeting that took place early in the semester, several client-sponsor representatives presented information about the company and the project needs. The second meeting, which took place toward the middle of the semester, was devoted to answering student questions. Students were also encouraged to visit the sponsoring client's business locations.

Measures

Consistent with other research, student perceptions provided a measure of CSP effectiveness (Ackerman & Hu, 2011; Anaya, 1999; Maher & Hughner, 2005). Students were asked to report their attitudes toward the sponsor on pre- and post-project surveys administered during the first and last week of classes. In addition, at the end of each semester, students were asked to report i) the extent to which they perceived that the CSP helped them to learn marketing concepts and had increased their confidence in their ability to perform school work, ii) the extent to which their instructor had provided effective assistance with the project, iii) how well their group functioned as a team, and iv) their attitudes toward the project's competitive aspects. Student perceptions were measured on 7-point Likert scales anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7).

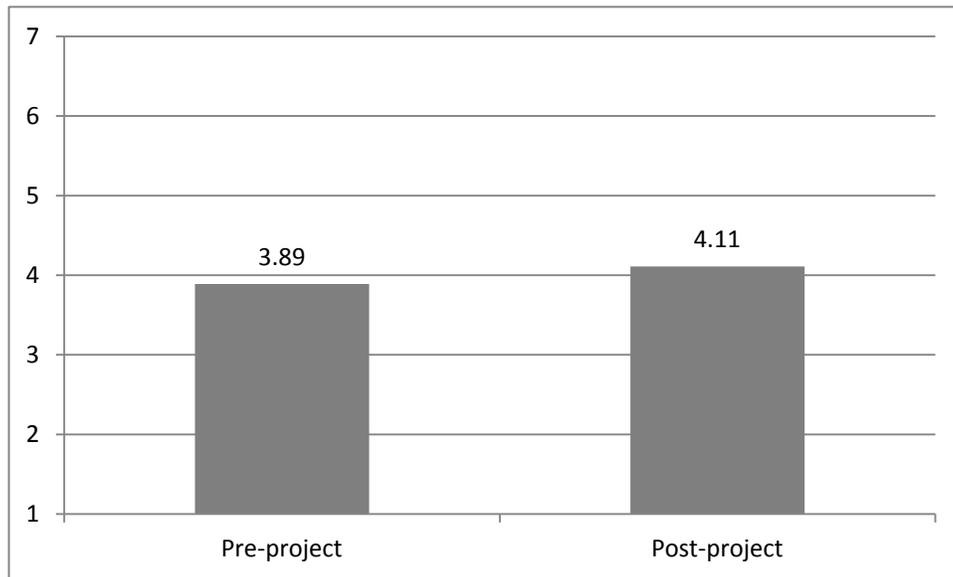
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

CSPs and Client Sponsors

Hypothesis 1 predicted that students who participate in a CSP would develop positive attitudes toward the sponsoring client. Attitudes toward the client sponsor were measured with one item: "I would like to work for ____ (the client sponsor)" with end points anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). Although multiple-item measures are commonly used in marketing research, evidence shows that single-item measures can often perform equally well (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). Students' desire to work for the company was measured both before the project was begun and after the project was completed. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis where pre- and post-project perceptions was the factor and desire to work was the dependent variable. The results showed

significant increases in students' desire for employment with the client sponsor ($M_{pre} = 3.89$, $M_{post} = 4.11$, $F(1,1207) = 6.49$, $p < .01$; see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
PRE- AND POST-PROJECT MEANS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD
EMPLOYMENT WITH CLIENT SPONSOR



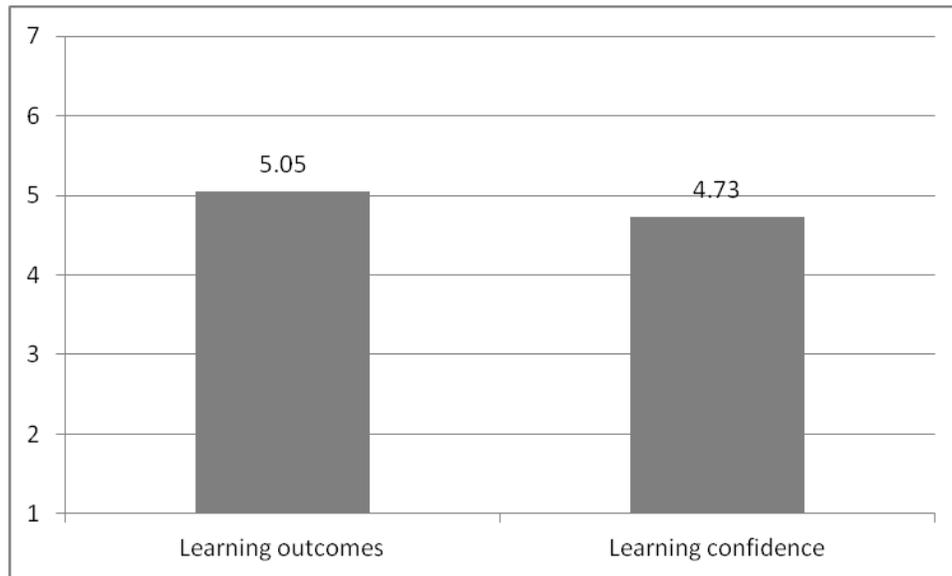
CSPs and Learning Outcomes

Hypothesis 2a and 2b predicted that students would report that participating in a CSP helped them to a) learn marketing concepts and b) gain confidence in their ability to perform school work. Student perceptions of the extent to which the CSP had helped them to learn marketing concepts and gain confidence in their academic ability were measured with single 7-point items anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). Results of a one-sample *t*-test with 4 as the test variable revealed that students perceived that the CSP had helped them to learn marketing concepts ($t(570) = 17.77$, $M = 5.05$, $p < .001$) and had had a positive effect on their confidence to perform school work ($t(569) = 10.75$, $M = 4.73$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported (see Figure 2).

Hypothesis 3a and 3b predicted that higher levels of instructor assistance would enhance student perceptions that participating in a CSP helped them to a) learn marketing concepts and b) gain confidence in their ability to perform school work. Instructor assistance was measured with three items: my professor i) was helpful with, ii) provided valuable assistance with, and iii) provided clear instructions for this group project. Items were anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). Reliability analysis indicated that the scale was reliable (Cronbach alpha = .94) and the items were averaged to create a scale for instructor assistance. Hypothesis 4a and 4b predicted that more effective teams would enhance student perceptions that participating in a CSP helped them to a) learn marketing concepts and b) gain confidence in their ability to perform school work. Perceptions of team effectiveness were measured with three items: our team i) worked well together, ii) had fun, and iii) was dysfunctional. Items were anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7) and the third item was reverse scored. Reliability analysis indicated that the scale was reliable (Cronbach alpha = .81) and the items were averaged to create a team effectiveness index. Hypothesis 5a and 5b predicted that more positive attitudes toward competition would enhance student perceptions that participating in a CSP helped them to a) learn marketing concepts and b) gain confidence in their ability to perform school work. Attitude toward competition was measured with two items: i) I enjoyed the competitive aspect of this group project and ii) cash rewards made the

effort worthwhile. Items were anchored with *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). The two items were significantly correlated ($r = .533, p < .001$) and were averaged to create an index of attitudes toward competition.

FIGURE 2
POST-PROJECT MEANS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LEARNING CONFIDENCE ATTITUDES



A multiple linear regression was calculated to test the predictions that professor's assistance, team effectiveness, and attitudes toward competition influence students' beliefs that CSPs help them perform better in their marketing class (i.e., learn marketing concepts). A significant regression equation was found ($F(3,542) = 234.781, p < .001$), with R^2 of .565. *Professor's level of assistance* and *attitude toward the competition* are found to significantly influence student belief that CSPs help them perform better in their marketing class (i.e., learn marketing concepts). Student attitudes about their *team's effectiveness*, however, are not a significant predictor. A tolerance of more than 0.20 and a VIF of less than 5 indicate multicollinearity is not a problem. Hypotheses 3a and 5a are thus supported while H4a is not.

A second multiple linear regression was calculated to test the prediction that professor's assistance, team effectiveness, and attitude toward competition influence students' confidence to perform school work. A significant regression equation was found ($F(3,542) = 244.510, p < .001$), with R^2 of .575. *Student attitude toward competition* is found to significantly influence student's confidence in performing school work. *Professor's level of assistance* and student belief in their *team effectiveness* are marginally significant predictors of increased confidence to perform school work. A tolerance of more than 0.20 and a VIF of less than 5 indicate multicollinearity is not a problem. As such, we have full support for H5b and partial support for H3b and H4b.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with previous research, our work shows that students view a CSP as an effective means of learning marketing concepts and increasing their ability to handle their academic work. Our research however, provides new evidence that participating in a CSP results in changes in student attitudes regarding the client sponsor. The evidence shows that student attitudes toward the sponsoring client are

more positive at the end of the semester when the project has concluded than at the beginning of the semester prior to commencement of the project. Client sponsors and instructors may assume that sponsoring a project will yield positive student attitudes toward the client sponsor. To our knowledge however, this is one of the first studies that offers support for such an assumption. Other writers have offered practical advice for instructors on how to recruit client sponsors (Clark et al., 2012). Our results extend this work by providing instructors with convincing evidence for client sponsors they are attempting to recruit. The evidence provided here has the potential to be persuasive to client sponsors as it reveals that participation in a CSP enhances student attitudes toward the client sponsor.

The effect of competition between student groups on academic performance has received little attention in the marketing education literature to date. The literature that does address competition between groups provides only anecdotal evidence of the positive effects of competition on learning (Sparkman Jr. et al., 1990). One study that provided empirical evidence to show that students perceived benefits from participating in a CSP competition did not examine the role played by project competition on learning outcomes (Umble et al., 2008). Our study addresses this gap as it provides evidence that students with greater appreciation for competition have more positive perceptions of the CSP's effectiveness in helping them learn marketing concepts. Our study also provides evidence that more positive attitude toward competition yields greater confidence in the ability to do academic work in the future. Furthermore, our research suggests that attitudes toward competition are more predictive than beliefs about the team's effective functioning regarding student attitudes about learning marketing.

The CSP presented here was an experiential approach that required students to engage in creative problem solving, which enhances student learning. Students thus had more responsibility for their own learning than they would have had if the course consisted only of lectures. As others have suggested, this did not mean that the instructors involved in the CSP presented here had less work than they would have had in a more traditional course (Gremier et al., 2000). Some have argued that instructor assistance is critical to a CSP's success and is desired and needed by students who work on CSPs (Kennedy et al., 2001). The empirical analysis presented here supports this view. Students whose instructors are perceived as providing more assistance have more positive views regarding the CSP's effectiveness in helping them learn marketing concepts.

It is common for marketing courses to provide students with opportunities for team work. Indeed, the primary impetus for including group projects in marketing education appears to be the desire to provide students with opportunities to develop team-work skills. Some have reported that effective team functioning (i.e., high trust levels within the group) will motivate students to work harder (Huff et al., 2002). Chapman and his colleagues (2010) report that students who participate in group projects report that the group projects (note: not client sponsored) are a good learning mechanism. Our research extends this work as it explores the relationship between group functioning and learning outcomes for CSPs. Our results suggest that team work also enhances learning. We demonstrate that students from well-functioning teams develop positive perceptions regarding a CSP's effectiveness in helping them perform school work.

The marketing education literature points out that CSP benefits include ideas and cutting edge information provided by students to the client sponsor for minimal cost (e.g., Bove & Davies, 2009). Although the current study did not address this issue, comments from client-sponsor judges revealed that the client sponsor appreciated students' ideas. As a result of ideas put forth by students in the final competition, the client sponsor decided to pursue new products for the pet and sporting-goods markets. This study has been able to demonstrate changes in attitudes toward the client sponsor during the semester by using pre- and post-project measures of these attitudes. Pre- and post-project measures of marketing knowledge and attitudes toward competition would have provided additional useful information. Unfortunately, pre-project measures of these variables were not taken. Future studies should conduct pre- and post-project measures wherever possible.

This research has relied on student perception measures rather than more objective measures. Although there is evidence that student self-reports of cognitive growth are a valid measure of learning (Anaya, 1999), more recently, difficulties with relying on student perceptions as an indicator of learning

have been identified (Sitzmann, Ely, Brown, & Bauer, 2010). Sitzmann and her colleagues (2010) suggest that self reports of learning measure affect rather than knowledge. Measuring student perceptions does provide useful information however, and students' perceptions of learning outcomes continue to be reported in the literature (Ackerman & Hu, 2011). Regardless of this practice, as per the recommendation of Sitzmann and her colleagues (2010), objective pre- and post-project measures of knowledge would add confidence to the findings presented here and should be considered for future studies that explore the CSP effectiveness for marketing education.

Future investigations of CSP effectiveness could explore the CSP's impact on the instructors. The CSP described in this paper is consistent with other CSPs in that it placed an additional burden on faculty members. Faculty members met throughout the summer and additional meetings were required with faculty, students, and client-sponsor representatives during the semester. Some suggest that faculty are reluctant to use CSPs in their courses because CSPs are too big to manage and not worth the trouble (Lopez & Lee, 2005). Although faculty perceptions were not included in this study, comments made by faculty members during both semesters indicated that instructors found the CSP a lot of work and some also found the project's ambiguity frustrating. Given the advantages of incorporating CSPs in a marketing curriculum, more work is needed to fully understand the barriers that prevent faculty from fully embracing this educational methodology. Similarly, future studies could shed light on the factors that contribute to faculty members' willingness to include a CSP in their curriculum as well as their ability to effectively coach their students toward success.

The centuries old educational pedagogy of 'learning by doing' is evident in many business schools today and many marketing educators have embraced this pedagogy. While some suggest that CSPs are most appropriate for advanced students (Gremier et al., 2000), this research has shown that incorporating a CSP into a student's first marketing course is perceived as an effective method for assisting students to learn core marketing concepts. It is also shown to be an effective way to generate positive attitudes toward the sponsoring client and its industry. As expected, the students' perceptions regarding the CSP's effectiveness for learning marketing is related to instructor assistance, team effectiveness, and attitudes toward competition. While these results suggest that a CSP must be carefully managed, the results also suggest that marketing instructors should not hesitate to introduce a CSP at a marketing program's earliest stages.

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