

Guest Editorial

Instead of Job Training



Practitioners ask, "Can advertising be taught?" But their concern is merely whether job skills can be conveyed in the classroom. A more basic question asks, "Should advertising be taught?"

Advertising teachers know that only a fraction of the students in every class will ever work in the business. If the courses only convey job skills, many students are wasting their tuition dollars.

Fact: There are more students currently enrolled in advertising courses and programs than there are advertising jobs.

Fact: As repeated in *College to Career* by Joyce Slayton Mitchell, but often ignored, half of all graduates enter careers unrelated to their majors.

Fact: Advertising is not a guild or closed-shop profession where non-advertising students are barred from jobs. An advertising major, lacking job experience, is qualified for the same jobs as an English, economics or history major. In fact, many practitioners consider an advertising major a negative factor when evaluating a prospective applicant. Whether that is right or proper is irrelevant. It simply is.

Since the overwhelming majority of students in any given class will probably never work in advertising, the teacher must give priority to providing a worthwhile academic experience for those who will not enter an advertising career.

Should advertising be taught? Of course it should. Everyone associated with the business should want students to take advertising courses simply to acquire an understanding of what advertising is (and is not). Currently, advertising remains little understood by most college graduates.

Tell someone that you work in advertising and they will quickly accuse you of manipulation with subliminal messages. A Reagan-appointed FTC Commissioner once expressed concern that advertisers might resort to greater use of subliminal advertising appeals. The Florida state legislature passed a short-lived and ill-advised tax on services, including advertising, simply because it seemed like an easy solution to revenue problems.

Many people are know-nothings when it comes to advertising, and advertising education that tries to replace business' training programs only contributes to the problem. Degree programs are "sold" in terms of possible job placement, so only aspiring ad executives enroll. In class, broader concepts are ignored. Issues of advertising's social consequences or consumer deception are swept under the rug as irrelevant to training.

Member of the advertising practitioners' Hall of Fame, Charles Sandage is regarded by many as a founding father of advertising education. Sandage always insisted that such programs or courses should not focus on job training. He wrote over 30 years ago that, "A university should be concerned with training future leaders. This cannot be done if we become preoccupied with training our youths for their first jobs."

Advertising courses should strive to contribute to the intellectual growth of all students. If they fail to do that, they are worthless, regardless of the training.

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