
Advertising in Communications: Home Is Where the Scholars Live

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Abstract

The question asked: “Where should advertising be taught? In colleges of communications or colleges of business?” The answer becomes obvious when you realize the question is greater than the teaching of a course. To be on a college campus requires that it be assessed by more than the schedules for a course with the advertising title.

Keywords

Advertising education, advertising programs, marketing, marketing education, advertising scholarship

Once upon a time, when the U.S. president was Ronald Reagan, a Principles of Advertising course instructor encountered anger from a Journalism major that her program required the course. Her ire was even more basic than the course. She didn’t think that advertising should be taught in the same unit as journalism. As she put it, “Journalism is all about finding the facts and telling the truth. Advertising is just selling.” In his characteristic cynical sarcasm, the instructor

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replied that both are deciding to give and withhold facts to support a particular point of view, but only advertising tells people that is what is being done. (Maybe it was more prescient than cynical, with the creation of Fox News many years in the future.)

Of course, the student raised the often unspoken question of where advertising should be taught, but that question does not have a simple answer. The following assessment provides an answer, but it must be read with an understanding that to speak of courses, programs, or faculty “in general” does not imply a universal. As with many things of higher education, the only universal might be that everyone thinks what he or she does is universal or that if it isn’t, it should be.

Regardless of where it might be located on campus, advertising program requirements include a basic marketing course. Even when the campus communications unit offers an advertising major, marketing departments often include advertising-like courses under titles such as “Promotional Strategies” or “Marketing Communications Management.” Where universities don’t have a mass communication college or programs, business colleges might offer multiple advertising courses or, in some rare cases, have what they call an advertising major. Many marketing students think that their major is synonymous with advertising and selling or that the marketing job is defined as “creating a message.” In colleges of communications, some of the advertising programs don’t help the discussion as they chase fads of name changes to something about being “strategic communications” or “strategic message management,” or the name that sounds like it should be in business, “integrated marketing communications.” This leads to my anticipated big program title that might land on any part of the campus, “Integrated Strategic Mass Communications That Aren’t Journalism.”

As Charles Sandage told the tale, his mid-20th-century creation of the first advertising program at the University of Illinois involved faculty both from what was then the College of Commerce and from the School of Journalism and Communications. When he moved to have all of the advertising faculty to be in one unit, he said it should be in one college or the other. And advertising almost became a department in the College of Commerce, a step that was apparently blocked by one unnamed faculty member (Sandage, 1993, pp. 244–247). It seems that it was only by happenstance or coincidence, pushed along by Sandage’s administrative charisma, that a Department of Advertising ended up in the College of Communications. A quarter century later, a University of Illinois provost recommended a questionable cost-saving move of dissolving the College of Communications, moving the tenured advertising faculty and courses to the College of Business. As the excrement hit the air-movement device, the business faculty didn’t want the advertising courses or people, and the advertising program alumni came on with a strong defense of its value in communications.

In the modern age, marketing department faculty who teach advertising sometimes have doctorates in communications. Advertising departments sometimes hire faculty with degrees in business.

But to ask where advertising “should” be taught asks the wrong question. On a campus, it isn’t about teaching one or two courses. To say where it should be taught must be because it brings something of value that should be on campus, that it is a field of scholarship.

At a 1962 Association for Education in Journalism conference, Vincent Norris’s presentation on the “image of advertising education” declared that it isn’t respected on campus because it isn’t an academic discipline. As he put it, “Merely being taught at a university does not make something an academic discipline—certainly typing, etiquette or football would not claim that designation—nor does the rank of professor make one a scholar.”

Right after he received tenure at the Pennsylvania State University, Norris wanted to get rid of his advertising professorial title. As he would describe it in later years, since the university wouldn’t accept his title as being an “Associate Professor of Anti-Advertising,” he became a part of the Journalism faculty. However, although he would loath to admit it, he remained an advertising scholar and educator: He published in advertising journals; he taught courses whose progeny are part of many advertising programs.

Yet, Norris’s assertion provides a more pragmatic reality. If the question is where to teach a narrow collection of skills, then it doesn’t matter where it is taught. If the question is where it can be an academic discipline, where advertising can be a field of scholarship that belongs on campus, then the important question is really where advertising can thrive.

Research and Publications

When I was an undergraduate, my classes were taught by faculty members who mentioned their research during the course of a semester. The teacher of my first advertising course wrote the textbook. The sociologist who studied religions provided notes on the conflicts of Christian missionaries in India. The entomologist went into details on the speciation of the fireflies from illumination patterns he studied. Even doctoral students talked about their dissertations. During my dalliance as a law student, property law was taught by the professor who also had written a book on the subject. The criminal law and procedures professor had chaired the committee used by the state legislature to perform a major overhaul of their criminal codes.

The late Claude R. Martin Jr., the creator, and for many decades the coeditor, of the *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, often observed that most advertising courses were taught in colleges of communications, but most advertising research was by people in colleges of business. His statement

was more impressionistic than pragmatic, but it doesn't state what kind of advertising research people from colleges of business publish.

The uncomfortable discovery is that a lot of their advertising research is not really about advertising. They are not interested in teaching advertising courses. While it is a gross oversimplification and not a statement about *all* of their work, many of the business-located advertising/publishing were not really interested in advertising. Instead, advertising provided the stimulus materials for their consumer psychology experiments. For some, every time there is a burst of new cases or activity at government agencies, a new regulation at the Food and Drug Administration or an interesting case from the Federal Trade Commission provided a "hook" for a hot topic, with an experiment tied to something about advertising regulations.

Memo to a newly hired junior business faculty member at a school that won't be named: "Attached is the list of department approved journals. Any research published in a journal not on this list will not count for tenure, promotions or annual reviews. Book chapters, textbooks, conference papers also do not count."

A few years ago, a marketing department head at a school well known for its leadership in marketing education and scholarship asked those on a discussion line,

I am interested in learning about any experiences members have had in promoting journals with recently strong impact and immediacy scores—*Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* and *Journal of Retailing*, for example—to tenure and promotion committees that have traditionally relied (exclusively) on the four flagships in their deliberations.

Business schools have increasingly started using journal titles on faculty vitae as a surrogate indicator of research quality. For promotion and tenure, only articles published in a list of specific targeted journals are credited with possessing any academic value. And as indicated by the discussion line inquiry, getting anything on the lists beyond the broad marketing management journals can be difficult. If *Journal of Advertising* or *International Journal of Advertising* are on a school's list, there is a senior faculty member who published in those outlets, but getting them included is usually difficult. There are many faculty, myself among them, who have had research manuscripts rejected from the *Journal of Marketing* with a notation that the research was "not marketing" and should be submitted to an advertising journal instead.

Advertising research has not earned a solid position as a respected area of scholarship in colleges of business. At best, it exists as a subfield of marketing, and seldom a respected one, even within marketing.

Advertising Departments

No matter where an advertising class is located on campus, some students will sign up because the title created an expectation of an entertaining semester of viewing Super Bowl commercials (which, at some universities, is what they do), or they think the course would be revealing a “secret” formula for writing consumer-manipulating advertising copy (which students in communications programs know does not exist).

Despite the mistaken expectations, at the very least, an advertising course should create something like “advertising literacy” for students that will no longer view mass media content as part of the audience watching television commercials, driving past billboards, or waiting for their online video choice to start. Regardless of department or college, a single advertising course would deal with the strategy options that fall under the advertising budget, which tends to cover sales promotion and publicity as well as advertising. It should provide the business context for decision-making, information on common business activities and terminology, and maybe the different ways that businesses approach their decisions. An instructor very familiar with the business could also include insight into the advertising managers’ rationale for some common less-than-optimal practices.

That is a single class, and really, it can be taught anywhere department faculty allow it and are able to hire someone with the knowledge to teach it. It can be an advanced marketing elective or part of a collection of introductory communications classes. But to say where it *could* be taught has greater expectations than a single course.

Ask anyone familiar with communications colleges’ advertising education programs to name the core four or five courses commonly included in programs and they’d quickly agree on an introductory course, followed by courses on media, creative, research, and campaigns. There might be additional specialized courses or instead of media, a course on the Internet, plus some type of “advertising and society” or “advertising regulation and ethics” courses. That is a broad collection, but for a program, it is a bare minimum. Ask business faculty a comparable question and you get the introductory course and, for most of them, nothing more. They might not even see advertising as a stand-alone course unless it is tied with content on personal selling.

Of course, there are marketing courses that run heavily parallel to an advertising major: Marketing research can be very similar to advertising research. Both areas could have courses in consumer theories that would heavily overlap. But still, in business, or in marketing, advertising classes are an outsider.

The teacher of introduction to advertising in communications is a generalist, with knowledge and teaching interests in other program courses. An advertising scholar in a college of communications would possess some basic common knowledge of theories and research familiar to other areas in the rest of the

college. To teach advertising in business is to be a very narrow specialist, teaching a single advanced class, or maybe two, covering topics that few outside the department would ever be expected to know or understand. And, quite frankly, many in marketing would also admit to a similar ignorance.

To say whether advertising should be taught in business or communications becomes a nonquestion, at least to me.

If you are just asking about a single course, or fit, it doesn't matter all that much. It can easily be a marketing elective course. However, for seven decades, advertising has become much more than a single course that can fit with minor adjustments as an advanced elective in marketing or another type of communications business area alongside journalism or broadcasting or whatever "hot topics" create new Internet programs. If it is about just running a class, anyone from marketing or communications could drop in and read a textbook to the class.

The real issue is greater than where a course should be taught or whether a collection of the job training courses that generated Norris's criticism best fit. The business itself is more than terminology or job titles. Concepts and approaches to making decisions transcend what collateral courses are in a department.

To assert that advertising belongs on campus at all requires an assertion that advertising is an academic discipline. It is more than a course, or courses, or so I believe. It is not just a description of a business activity. Whether it is an important part of campus should not be subject to the whims or politics of business faculty.

Maybe advertising does not need to be a department, program, or minor to be treated as a respectable academic discipline, but it certainly helps. Advertising's contributions to campus scholarship go beyond whatever the department is named.

Not where "should" advertising be taught as a course, but rather, where it *could* be taught as an academic discipline. To adapt the words of Howard Luck Gossage, I long for the day when advertising would be a respectable discipline for a curious scholar of business practices. But I know it isn't going to happen in a marketing department or a college of business.

Advertising should be taught where it is allowed to thrive as an academic discipline. This has been allowed only when existing in the same unit as other communications fields.

End Comment

With the exceptions of Kim Rotzoll and Ivan Preston, many of my one-time teachers, still living or dead, would be surprised that I said this. Why I ended up in a college of business is a different tale. Yet I must recognize that, in the words

of comedian Mort Saul, if there are any readers of this that I haven't insulted, I apologize.

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