From Student to Professional: Teaching Professionalism in the Marketing Classroom

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From Student to Professional: Teaching Professionalism in the Marketing Classroom

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Abstract
Developing professionalism skills in the classroom is vital to the business college experience as educators strive to ensure preparedness and success of their graduates. Marketers especially need enhanced professionalism training, as their careers involve interactions with many constituents. In this paper, the authors develop a semester-long emphasis on professionalism that introduces the concept, embeds its importance throughout the course with discussion and relevant exercises, and includes a component to monitor and evaluate professional behavior. Assessments at the beginning and end of
the semester provide evidence for learning outcomes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that speak to the effectiveness of its implementation.

Keywords
Professionalism, marketing education, marketing curriculum, career development, identity theory

Have you ever called someone by the wrong name? Sent a text message to the wrong person? Has your focus been distracted by a device, leading to missing the key point of a conversation? While these mistakes can happen to anyone, they can be extremely costly to newly-minted marketing professionals working in their first career position. As marketing educators, it is important to bring "meaningful insight for business preparedness" into our courses (Gray, Peltier, & Schibrowsky, [10], p. 233). This paper presents practical ways to incorporate professionalism in the marketing classroom to give students the opportunity to learn crucial lessons in a low-stakes environment before transitioning to careers. As marketing education research has consistently noted, additional research on career development in the classroom is needed (Cummins, Peltier, Erffmeyer, & Whalen, [5]; Gray et al., [10]). This paper contributes to marketing education call by providing a framework to implement professionalism as a key course component. This paper presents a pedagogical framework, couched in identity theory, where the authors embed professionalism into marketing classes through positive reinforcement and strategic modules focused on professionalism topics to bolster the classroom environment and students' job readiness.

Specific to the collegiate classroom, Wilson et al. ([30]) define professionalism as:

- exercising specialist knowledge and skills with judgment;
- identifying as a member of a community based on shared practices and values, where the norms of acceptable practice and values are determined within the community rather than imposed from without; and
- having a sense of responsibility and service, based on a belief that what you and your professional community does is of genuine value (p. 1224).

This paper utilizes this definition of professionalism as a way of embracing a positive learning community where students collaborate with their professor to identify the attributes of desirable working professionals, which they will emulate in the classroom. By combining attributes of community involvement and participation, business etiquette, and an open forum for respectful discussions related to business practices, a learning community can be formed in a way that students will be motivated to contribute and grow their skill sets.

Professionalism, as discussed in this paper, extends beyond attendance, participation, and manners; professionalism is an all-encompassing aspect, integrating many components that help students develop into business-ready professionals. As evidenced by the definition above, a key part of incorporating professionalism is to clearly define it with examples of desirable practices, values, responsibilities, and norms for students to adhere to while engaged in this learning environment. For the current project, professionalism assessed work-ready activities, such as timeliness, preparation, avoiding technology distractions, respecting physical classroom space, and proper communication with
faculty as well as other students. Additionally, this project focused on educating students on behaviors in the workplace, communication with varied stakeholders, conflict resolution, texting etiquette, and e-mail etiquette. Specific modules were incorporated to ensure students clearly understand the concept of professionalism, its importance and, additionally, to provide examples and discussion surrounding best and worst practices. This teaching aligns with Ewing & Ewing's concept of a "work-ready graduate" ([9], p. 132) by paralleling professionalism in the classroom with professionalism in the workplace.

While these materials could be introduced in a multitude of courses, the authors suggest that professionalism be incorporated into the marketing classroom given that many marketing career roles have an intense focus on relationships. Professionalism matches well with marketing curricula, as communication with both external and internal stakeholders is critical, along with promotion to respective target markets. While key modules on professionalism do not need to be introduced in all marketing courses, or could be spread out throughout a curriculum, the assessment of these activities can be accomplished throughout a student's entire college career. By continuing to enforce professional behaviors, these behaviors will become second nature to students entering the workforce.

Career Development in the Classroom

As expectations grow for students to be "real world" ready upon college graduation, faculty members must creatively integrate experiential activities into their curriculum to close the identity gap between what employers are looking for and what higher education provides (Ahmad & Pesch, [1]; Ewing & Ewing, [9]; Okoro, Washington, & Thomas, [21]). A PwC Global report states that 77% of CEOs believe a lack of soft skills is the biggest threat to business (PwC Global, [23]). Further, most employees lack skills in professionalism to succeed and excel in business as they do not have training in areas such as self-presentation, proactivity, and social networking (Rollag, [27]). As members of Generation Z enter the workforce, there needs to be an increasing focus on developing the soft skills of the current generation of college graduates (e.g. Tulgan, [29]).

While hard skills focus on specific technical attributes that are typically taught with clear objectives in mind (e.g., computer skills, professional writing), soft skills can be more difficult to teach due to their inherent nature and lack of clearly-defined approaches. Despite a certain level of innateness, it is possible to develop soft skills in the classroom (Clark, King, & Jurn, [4]). A survey of business executives identified soft skill attributes including communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork and work ethic (Robles, [24]). Research among undergraduate marketing majors also emphasized the importance and need for interpersonal skills in the workforce (Hartley, Routon, & Torres, [13]). Honea, Castro, and Peter ([16]) further detailed key competencies for success to include interpersonal skills, along with written and oral communication.

Areas of professionalism such as timeliness, preparedness, accountability, and communication skills are key elements that are vital for students to learn and practice to succeed in internships and careers (Cummins, Peltier, Pomirleanu, Cross, & Simon, [6]; Jordan, [18]; Mishra, [19]; Young & Murphy, [31]). Within a classroom, faculty have begun to incorporate modules to teach skills that can assist in the career development, with evidence suggesting that students enjoy course components where they get real world insights and skill development (Allen, Dugan, Popa, & Tarasi, [2]; Gray et al., [10]). Projects
focused on the professional social media tool, LinkedIn, allow students to practice professionalism to expand their network (Peterson & Dover, [22]). Clearly, professionalism extends beyond the confines of a work office, with professionalism existing both in and out of the workplace. However, there has been little research in the marketing education literature on implementing activities in the classroom to assess these professional behaviors, with the exception of one recent article where professional classroom behaviors are assessed through gamification (Robson, [25]).

Theoretical Background

This paper's recommendation to integrate professionalism into the marketing classroom builds from identity theory, specifically by looking at how the integration of professionalism in the classroom positively affects the students' identity as future businesspeople in the classroom and how it translates to their careers. The fundamental assumption of identity theory is developed by social identity approach, which focuses on how group membership contributes to self-definition (Homburg, Wieseke, & Hoyer, [15]). The social identity approach is based on two separate theories: self-categorization theory (e.g. Haslam, Powell, & Turner, [14]) and social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, [28]). Self-categorization theory indicates that people who have a desire to simplify the world categorize people into groups (e.g. clubs, occupation), while social identity theory posits that people strive to enhance their self-concept and self-esteem by improving their social identity. Social identity research finds people can build both qualities through their identification with groups (Tajfel & Turner, [28]). In the case of this research, students are classified into a group as undergraduate marketing majors where they desire to enhance their social identity among their peers. By including professionalism components into the marketing classroom, these students begin to consider their identities as both students and future business professionals. This research allows students to identify as marketing professionals to develop their level of professionalism.

Ewing and Ewing ([9]) use identity theory in a conceptual piece to model student-professor interactions in the classroom. They posit that students will be more likely to succeed in their careers if their daily routines model those in a professional environment, which they refer to as verification behavior. In the present article, the authors explore the role identity theory plays in shaping business students into business professionals by developing a classroom atmosphere that mirrors the business climate in which students will populate following graduation. By providing a structure for students to practice professional behavior that is reinforced throughout the semester, the authors posit that student behavior evolves over the course of the semester to more closely mirror norms in professional environments.

Three overarching elements are presented when discussing how identity theory impacts behavior (Burke & Stets, [3]; Ewing & Ewing, [9]). These include: 1) identity standards that guide behavior (e.g. students compare their self-appraisal to perceived and observable feedback); 2) the interactive environment that will impact performance and identity validation (e.g. how students interact in a classroom mirroring a business setting); and 3), the social connections provide a key source of identity-related feedback. Given this, Ewing and Ewing ([9]) advocate that business students work to verify identities amongst themselves as well as with interactions between students and professors. In their model, Ewing and Ewing ([9]) posit that when professors provide feedback in the context of a corporate environment that is consistent with that identity, the student will respond positively. They
also suggest this feedback can be counterproductive if done inconsistently; instead, identity theory supports the need for a consistent solution that will help shape behaviors on a regular basis (Ewing & Ewing, [9]). Therefore, a consistent approach in the teaching and execution of this professional feedback increases the likelihood that students will identify with this business identity. The remainder of this paper provides a consistent assessment of professionalism in the classroom as it relates to expected corporate behaviors.

Professionalism as a Course Component

Historically, many instructors awarded points simply for attendance (Hansen, [12]; Hovell, Williams, & Semb, [17]). As sound pedagogy emphasized increasing expectations for engagement, instructors transitioned from "attendance points" to "participation points," where students earned points for in-class contributions (Green, [11]; Muncy & Eastman, [20]). The current project builds on the participation grade by teaching students about what constitutes valuable professional behaviors that can easily translate to the workplace. This paper details how three instructors added professionalism as a graded component in their marketing courses to encourage students to be thoughtful about their actions, communications, and classroom habits, as well as their overall contribution to the learning community. This system, detailed below, rewards students for positive contributions that align with the level of professionalism that will be both expected and appreciated in the workplace.

At the beginning of the semester, the authors presented a slide deck on professionalism as a starting point for the work-ready discussion. This slide deck provided a starting point for discussion on what a business student identity should entail, best practices, and behaviors to avoid. Building on the examples in Robson ([25]), professors set baseline classroom standards for etiquette by being on time, staying alert, and refraining from digital distractions during class. Additionally, the authors mentioned the role that professionalism plays in creating a collaborative learning environment, which includes a strong relationship among peers, while promoting an environment that allows for positive contributions by both faculty and students. Examples of professionalism in the classroom were provided, and discussion connected these behaviors to the workplace. This classroom discussion during the first week of the semester also highlighted the varied requirements of professionalism, which at a bare minimum implied regular attendance and quality participation, but also encompassed a higher level of positive professional behaviors. Parallels between the professional behaviors expected in the marketing classroom and business environment, which provided a foundation for this class discussion, are shown in Table 1.
Table 1. Classroom behavior and workplace norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Behavior</th>
<th>Example of Classroom Expectation or Application</th>
<th>Workplace Norm(s) Exhibited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Be in class on time (better: early), with appropriate materials out, and ready to work.</td>
<td>Treating class time as an important client meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undistracted</td>
<td>Appropriate use of technology and minimizing side conversations.</td>
<td>Eliminating distractions; showing respect to others and the sincerity of the task at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know everyone's name</td>
<td>If Student A wants to build on Student B's comment, Student A should refer to Student B by name when making such remarks.</td>
<td>Relationship building, showing value to other's ideas, and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>Respecting peers and their ideas.</td>
<td>Collaboration, civility, and encouraging diverse thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>Adding a greeting and salutation to each e-mail.</td>
<td>Writing professionally when communicating with leaders, colleagues, and clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress code</td>
<td>Business attire (selected days).</td>
<td>Considering norms of appearance expected by different clients and environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Asking productive questions and sharing valued insights.</td>
<td>Active participant in relevant conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Understanding deliverables and submitting assignments on time.</td>
<td>Meeting deadlines and expectations of leaders/clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized environment</td>
<td>Respecting the physical classroom by maintaining an organized workspace.</td>
<td>How an employee would keep their desk, office/cubical, conference room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>Communicating with business leaders who attend class in a professional manner.</td>
<td>Communicating with prospects, clients, and external business partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about syllabus content.</td>
<td>Understand common workplace practices and policies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A dress code of business casual or better is enforced as a requirement for marketing classes at Institution 1; for classes incorporating professionalism at Institutions 2 and 3, this was a requirement only for presentations.
The examples found in Table 1 were provided to students, along with discussion around the positive and negative implications that arise from professional and unprofessional behaviors. Expectations were set to show that professionalism goes beyond verbal discussions and the in-classroom experience to include written, e-mail communication and all other forms of contact related to the class. Professionalism was also encouraged between students and the professor and, just as importantly, between students and their peers, as the instructors have anecdotally found that strong rapport in the classroom leads to richer discussions and higher engagement. This introduction helped establish the framework for how professionalism would be incorporated and evaluated for the rest of the semester. As students recognize the relevance of professionalism to their future as a business leader, they are able to better envision themselves as young professionals. Additionally, this new classroom standard provides a springboard for additional discussions and activities related to professionalism throughout the remainder of the course.

For each of the components of professionalism that are emphasized, it is important for the instructor to connect these classroom business student identity behaviors to what Ewing and Ewing ([9]) deem work-ready identity standards by paralleling classroom professional behavior with those exemplified by marketing professionals. In the current project, the authors set these identity expectation standards for professionalism through open dialogue between students and instructors at the beginning of the course. Grading expectations were then provided to the students. This was important to enhance the learning experience and students' professional identity by reflecting a business environment with key performance indicators.

In addition to assessing professionalism throughout daily classroom activities, the instructors led professionalism-focused discussions of hot topics that students may face in the workplace. For the current project, the instructors presented and discussed topics related to two modern communication formats: texting and emailing. The authors related these topics to classroom behaviors and career workplace scenarios. These discussions provided students with ownership and buy-in to the importance of these skills in the classroom and workplace. Each module provided rich, in-class discussions that lasted 20–30 minutes each.

Assessing Professionalism in the Classroom
Employers assume graduates will have a baseline level of professionalism when they begin their career. To mimic this expectation, each student begins the semester with a full-credit professionalism score to parallel the workplace notion that professionalism is assumed and then either lost or maintained. To reflect this in the classroom, the authors recorded full points for professionalism in the learning management system (LMS) prior to the first day of class. This allowed students to see a 100% grade for professionalism, setting the stage for its assessment. In broad terms, any activity that would be expected of an employee in a workplace setting was also expected from a student. For example, employees would be expected to notify their employer of an absence, so it was expected in the classroom as well. If this didn't happen in the classroom, professionalism points would be deducted. For the current project, key professionalism components that were noted included: timeliness to class, use of technology appropriately (e.g. phones/computers), dress attire (certain days), disrupting class (e.g. conversations or leaving classroom), professional e-mail correspondence with faculty (e.g.
addressing/signing e-mails), as well as responding to faculty e-mails and proactively notifying faculty of absences or any issues that arise.

The LMS provided a convenient way for students to see, in real time, if they were meeting identity standards set forth by the professor. As undesirable behaviors were observed, feedback was provided in the comments on the LMS (e.g. that unprofessional behavior was noticed with the date and providing a recommendation for improvement). In most cases of unprofessional actions, students received a warning – essentially one comment suggesting how an action could have been more professional – before they lost points. Repeat offenses resulted in (repeated) lost points, with a comment(s) in the LMS reflecting why points were retracted. It was important for instructors to note the date(s) and reason(s) for the "nonverification" with professionalism identity, so that students could revise their behaviors and increase the likelihood of future verification (Ewing & Ewing, [9]).

For students who were acting professionally from a behavioral viewpoint, but whose contribution to the course could have been higher, suggestions for increasing their involvement and presence in the learning community were provided as comments in the LMS. While the instructors recognized individual differences and preferences for varied participation levels, the discussion the first week of class encouraged everyone to stretch themselves as they engaged in this learning environment. Follow-up comments via LMS and individual conversations helped students consider their identities as developing business leaders.

Professionalism scores and feedback were updated weekly, so students could learn and improve their professionalism. Additionally, this also provided positive verification (by maintaining points) to students who were acting professionally through their contribution to the learning environment. Utilizing the LMS in this way gave faculty a way to commend good behaviors and also acknowledge areas for improvement without using valuable class time. Additionally, for faculty uncomfortable calling students out for things like texting in class, comments in the LMS provided a way to politely say, "I saw that. I didn't call you out on it, but realize it is not professional and please don't do it again." This is comparable to how managers may not discipline employees for texting during a meeting, but how this behavior could negatively impact employees' future opportunities to grow within their careers.

Methodology

Professionalism was included as a course component in seven sections of undergraduate marketing courses, taught by three faculty members at universities in the Midwest during the same semester (Fall 2019). Two of the universities (identified as "Institution 1" and "Institution 2" in the results) are public institutions, and the third institution is a private university. Of the seven class sections, all were taught in a face-to-face format during a traditional 15-week semester; four sections were personal selling classes, two were digital marketing, and one was an introduction to marketing course.

Each class section experienced the same content related to professionalism, and the attempt was made by all three instructors to deliver content as similarly as possible. A survey was administered during the first week of the semester before any mention of professionalism as a course component. Following the initial survey, class discussions defined the boundaries and expectations of professionalism in the classroom, setting essentially the same environment for all students regardless of section, instructor, or institution. Throughout the semester, all sections experienced delivery of
identical, 30-minute modules on professionalism topics throughout the semester, followed by a survey at the end of the semester that included both qualitative and quantitative measures. All student responses were collected at the beginning and end of the semester through surveys created in Qualtrics.

During the first week of class, before any discussion about professionalism, students completed a survey where they defined three terms and rated their confidence in their definitions of each of the three terms: "professionalism," professionalism in the workplace," and "professionalism in the classroom." The confidence measures were adapted from Dingus and Milovic ([8]) by changing the term of emphasis from "Value Proposition" to "Professionalism."

Regarding the implementation of professionalism as a graded component, a varied approach was taken. Five of the seven sections (those at Institution 1 and Institution 2) included professionalism as a graded course component equivalent to approximately five percent of the overall course grade, whereas the other two sections (at Institution 3) followed the same procedure without a graded component.

To document a lack of professionalism in courses with the graded component, the instructor built a simple spreadsheet with all students' names and corresponding date of the class. For any unprofessional activity, the instructor made a quick note to reflect the reason. For example, the instructor would document: late, texting, or left class. Outside of class, the instructor would similarly note any unprofessional behaviors that occurred during electronic communication (e.g., students who failed to properly address/sign e-mail, failed to notify faculty of absence, or emailed a question that was easily available on the LMS). At the same time, when students demonstrated exceptional professionalism (e.g., sending a proactive e-mail, engaging the class in exceptional discussions, or making a positive impression on a classroom visitor/guest speaker), they were commended by the instructor. Peer feedback regarding students' professional and unprofessional behaviors (e.g., in group projects or team meetings) could be incorporated into classroom policies but, in the current study, all documented behaviors during the semester were observed and noted by the instructors.

Throughout the 15-week semester, professionalism modules were implemented identically and at the same point in the semester for all seven sections. The modules' content focused on professionalism in general and while in the classroom, as described earlier. In these classes, specific modules revolved around professionalism in the workplace, communication with varied stakeholders, conflict resolution, texting etiquette, and e-mail etiquette.

The survey administered at the end of the semester asked students whether professionalism was emphasized in their home life prior to college, whether the focus on professionalism improved their learning environment, and how well-prepared they feel for their internship or job. This survey also asked students to use a five-point, Likert-style scale to indicate the degree to which they believe specific course components were effective in their development and refinement of professionalism skills. The components assessed included having professionalism as a graded component (for five applicable sections), the professionalism modules and structured discussions about professionalism, and seeing the professor demonstrate professionalism. Additionally, students provided qualitative
responses about how the emphasis on professionalism impacted their learning environments and preparation for their career paths.

Analysis and Results
The authors collected 268 initial professionalism confidence responses across the seven sections during the first week of class. The end-of-semester survey was completed by 205 students. Data from these surveys provide both quantitative and qualitative findings about the inclusion of professionalism as a course component in a variety of marketing courses. In particular, the qualitative comments from students demonstrate the deeper impact of adding professionalism as a course component and how it aided them in identifying as a marketing professional. All results are presented in aggregate and are broken down by class section to emphasize the generalizability of including professionalism as a course component in a variety of marketing courses.

During the first week of class, students were asked to think about the definitions of "professionalism," "professionalism in the workplace," and "professionalism in the classroom." Then, students were asked to individually rate their confidence on a scale from 0 to 100 for how well they could define the same three terms. The average confidence levels across all seven sections are 60.33 for "professionalism," 57.81 for "professionalism in the workplace," and 62.54 for "professionalism in the classroom." These scores are indicative that, without training, students truly do not feel well-versed in how to define professionalism on its own or within the context of a workplace or classroom. Confidence ratings are broken down by class section in Table 2.
Table 2. Mean responses to survey administered first week of course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Respondents</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in Knowledge of ... (0–100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Professionalism&quot;</td>
<td>60.33</td>
<td>61.14</td>
<td>54.91</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>69.48</td>
<td>52.20</td>
<td>56.57</td>
<td>61.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Professionalism in the Workplace&quot;</td>
<td>57.81</td>
<td>58.14</td>
<td>55.77</td>
<td>60.90</td>
<td>67.71</td>
<td>61.16</td>
<td>53.94</td>
<td>57.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Professionalism in the Classroom&quot;</td>
<td>62.54</td>
<td>60.21</td>
<td>54.61</td>
<td>71.38</td>
<td>67.93</td>
<td>69.54</td>
<td>58.58</td>
<td>65.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 1 and 2 were digital marketing classes at Institution 1; Sections 3, 4, and 5 were personal selling classes at Institution 2; Section 6 was an introduction to marketing class at Institution 3; Section 7 was a personal selling class at Institution 3.
A variety of results are provided to emphasize the importance and benefits of incorporating professionalism into the marketing classroom. First, grade data was collected in five of the seven class sections, providing the ability to objectively assess the inclusion of professionalism as a graded component. Then, findings related to student perceptions provide insight into how the focus on professionalism is helpful. Qualitative comments from students also highlight how the classroom learning environment is enhanced by the addition of professionalism considerations.

**Professionalism as a Graded Course Component**

As the goal of the project was to inform and develop professional behavior in the classroom, it is important for the faculty to positively validate classroom behavior expected in the workplace – classified as verification behavior – and seek to adjust unprofessional behavior – referred to as nonverification behavior (Ewing & Ewing, [9]). Throughout the semester, nonverification behaviors that did not meet expectations for professionalism were documented and noted weekly in the LMS for five of the seven sections. As mentioned previously, initial observations were noted; however, points were not deducted (e.g. students were given a warning).

Approximately half of the students (51%) identified with the professional classroom environment and did not receive any warnings, and therefore, they did not lose any points and received 100% for their professionalism course grade. Thirty-two percent received an initial warning for behaviors such as technology distraction, classroom attire, arriving late, or leaving in the middle of class. Of these students receiving a warning, only 35% continued with the nonverified, unprofessional behavior. In other words, for two-thirds of the students who received a warning, this was enough to stop the behavior and reorient the students to identify with the business expectations of the classroom. For students who did not heed the second warning, points were deducted. Overall, 90% of students received full credit, with 10% received reduced grades for professionalism. Results indicate that providing consistent, systematic feedback reduces the incidence of the behavior reoccurring from the same student.

**Perceived Impact of Professionalism as a Course Component**

All three instructors observed anecdotally that the emphasis on professionalism made a noteworthy impact on students' awareness of the importance of exhibiting these behaviors in and out of the classroom. During discussions stemming from the professionalism modules, students enjoyed sharing about their own experiences when coworkers, peers, and managers exhibited professional business practices as well as unprofessional behaviors. Frequently, discussions around unprofessional behaviors observed both in and out of the classroom were deemed interesting to the students and provided a springboard for discussion of what that person could or should have done better to be identified as a professional.

Students in these courses found the emphasis on professionalism helpful in developing their identities as young professionals by embracing and embodying the standards set for their classroom. The survey administered at the end of the semester identifies student perceptions on having professionalism incorporated into their classes. Of the 205 students who completed this survey, 73.20% indicate that professionalism is a skill that was specifically emphasized in their home life before beginning college. Interestingly, this result is noticeably higher for the two class sections at the private institution than...
the five other class sections. Regardless of the students' level of professionalism training prior to the course, 88.30% of students found that the course's focus on professionalism improved the learning environment. In expanding these skills to the workplace, 84.90% of respondents felt that the focus on professionalism improved how prepared they feel for their upcoming internship or job. Mean responses are reported in Table 3.
Table 3. Responses to survey administered at conclusion of course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Breakdown by Course Section</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td>205</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is professionalism a skill that was specifically emphasized in your home life before coming to college?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Responding Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>73.20%</td>
<td>65.40%</td>
<td>65.20%</td>
<td>71.40%</td>
<td>63.60%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>86.40%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did this course's focus on professionalism improve the learning environment?</td>
<td></td>
<td>88.30%</td>
<td>84.60%</td>
<td>91.30%</td>
<td>82.10%</td>
<td>81.80%</td>
<td>95.80%</td>
<td>89.40%</td>
<td>93.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did this course's focus on professionalism improve how prepared you feel for your internship or job?</td>
<td></td>
<td>84.90%</td>
<td>84.60%</td>
<td>73.90%</td>
<td>67.90%</td>
<td>90.90%</td>
<td>95.80%</td>
<td>87.90%</td>
<td>93.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective were specific course components at helping you develop and refine your professionalism skills?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Having professionalism as a graded component.*</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Discussions about professionalism modules.*</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Seeing my professor exhibit professionalism.*</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Items with an asterisk (*) were assessed on a 5-point scale where "1" = "Not Effective at All" and "5" = "Extremely Effective". The mean responses for these items are shown.
Additionally, students were asked about the effectiveness of the professionalism components in the course. These were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. Interestingly, the graded component, while effective, averaged 3.63 for its effectiveness in helping students develop professionalism skills. What students reported as most effective for development were the components not directly assessed by grade. Students rated seeing their professor exhibit professionalism as the most effective contributor to their skill development with a score of 4.15. Discussions about professionalism modules were also very effective with an average score of 3.93.

Qualitative Feedback from Students
At the end of the semester, students were given an opportunity to provide commentary related to professionalism being incorporated into their course content. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with no negative feedback received; in fact, the most negative comment was actually a true compliment, that "It would have been nice to learn this as a sophomore, not as a senior." The strategic emphasis on professionalism also appears to have increased the standards and expectations students imposed upon themselves for these classes.

As a follow-up to the quantitative questions, students were asked to provide text responses to an open-ended question in the survey at the end of the semester. The question asked, "Specifically, in what ways did this course's focus on professionalism affect the learning environment?" Students' comments to this open-ended question can easily be separated into categories related to learning environment, workplace, and character development. Five comments from students are directly quoted in each of the three categories below to demonstrate the impact of incorporating professionalism in the classroom, where "it" refers to "professionalism."

Professionalism Influences the Course Learning Environment

- It made a more collaborative and respectful classroom. Class time was productive and business-like. There is more respect around the room compared to other classes where we don't talk about professionalism. Everyone was held to a higher standard. -Introduction to Marketing Student

- This course made sure that, even though technology is present and in front of us, we were using it in the ways that directly correlated with the course so that we weren't distracted by outside things when learning in the classroom. -Digital Marketing Student

- It treated attendance how an actual job would, as well as how we professionally conduct ourselves in our actions. This made the class very well structured and easy to understand what exactly was expected of us, allowing us full concentration on learning the material. -Personal Selling Student

- I think that focusing on professionalism helps the class to take the course more seriously. It gives the classroom a more professional vibe and students seem to be much more focused and aware. -Digital Marketing Student

- Made the environment much more engaging. It kept me wanting to come to class. -Personal Selling Student
Professionalism for Career Preparation

- It made students more aware of what to expect as well as what is appropriate and not appropriate in the workplace. Times are changing with technology and not everyone is accustomed to it. So we talked about there being a right and wrong time to be on our phones, etc. -Personal Selling Student

- It taught students how they are expected to behave in the classroom and work-world. Students need to pay attention, be polite, and exhibit what we have learned throughout the semester. -Personal Selling Student

- Coming to class feels like going to work sometimes because of the beforehand preparation that needs to be completed. -Digital Marketing Student

- Got you thinking in the right mind-set toward what it is like working in the real world and what employers will expect. -Personal Selling Student

- It was a way to showcase your professionalism and get graded for performing well, which I think is important—especially in the classroom. -Personal Selling Student

Professionalism to Build Character

- Helped me get an understanding of how I should be acting in every aspect of my life and helped me prepare for class better. -Personal Selling Student

- I think it helped me understand to treat my education as a workplace. -Introduction to Marketing Student

- It was helpful to discuss topics that we all engage in daily but never really talk about what is acceptable or not. -Personal Selling Student

- While other classes that I have are more laidback, the established professionalism guidelines gave me a good idea of the tone of the classes and how students were expected to behave in it. It helped illuminate ways to make navigating a professional environment more approachable. -Digital Marketing Student

- Made me take the course more serious and apply it to the real world. -Personal Selling Student

Discussion and Conclusions

As evidenced by both quantitative and qualitative results, incorporating professionalism into the classroom can be an effective way for educators to strengthen learning environments and enhance students’ identification with the business world. The all-encompassing nature of careers in marketing, where marketers regularly interact with both internal and external stakeholders, can provide a challenging environment. Not only did over 88% of students feel that the professionalism focus improved the classroom environment, but 85% felt better prepared for their internships or full-time opportunities as a result of this intentional classroom focus.

It is beneficial for educators to ensure marketing students have developed a skillset that includes professionalism as a component to enhance their identity as future business professionals who are
able to represent their organizations well both internally and externally. A noteworthy finding was how impactful students felt it was to see their professors exhibiting professionalism; while many faculty likely do this, the students seemed to enjoy the intentionality of this focus in these courses. Many marketing courses include students from a variety of majors, so exposure to intentional professionalism as designed in this study may vary widely for the students. As this was the first course in which these students experienced a specific professionalism component, a department-wide approach may reinforce professionalism to a degree where the incremental difference is less noticeable, yet the overall impact is even greater. The more students can be prepared in the classroom to focus on these important details that are often unmet, the more easily they will adapt to learning the desirable norms and expectations within their companies and industries.

Our results demonstrate the positive impact of incorporating professionalism as a course component across varied marketing courses of different sizes (with enrollments from 23 to 110 students) at three different institutions, both private and public. Instructors who use these methods find the focus on professionalism motivates students and generally prevents negative classroom issues from arising. Or, if negative issues do arise, this provides instructors with a clear framework to handle those instances and correct the behavior. Anecdotally, the authors noticed students in these classes engaged with guest speakers and corporate partners who visited the classroom at a deeper level than what they observed in typical interactions. The influence of the professionalism focus was far-reaching.

To maximize efficiency with monitoring student behaviors, the authors recommend a simple system to track professionalism. As mentioned previously for this project, the instructor created a spreadsheet with the class roster and course meeting dates. When any nonverification behavior occurred, the professor made a simple note of it on the corresponding class date. The instructor can then upload these short comments weekly to the LMS (e.g. a sample note of student nonverification behavior – "Jan. 27: Late to class; warning – no point deduction."). By having professionalism as a single grade column/item in the LMS gradebook, all comments will occur in the same place, making it easy to observe any consistent issues in real time. Additionally, instructors note that nonverification behaviors essentially cease to exist after the first or second documented incident, minimizing additional work once students embrace professionalism in the classroom.

Even with the most efficient of methods, the level of grade documentation recommended here is challenging, if not impossible, for large class sizes. However, the authors find that professionalism and work readiness can still be implemented and effective without a detailed graded component even in larger sections. In the present research, one large section of 110 students (Institution 3, Section 1, an Introduction to Marketing course) was included to understand this impact. In this section, the instructor introduced professionalism, discussed the same short modules focused on professionalism and, in general, incorporated the essence of a work-ready environment – albeit without the graded component. Even without the graded component, instructor and students noted the helpfulness and effectiveness of the topic. While most marketing classrooms are of a more manageable size, even class size is not a true limitation to incorporating professionalism in the marketing classroom. Based on anecdotal evidence and student feedback, the authors find that any focus in this area is better than no focus.
Future Research Ideas and Extensions for the Classroom

This paper focuses on the impact of incorporating professionalism and finds great support for its addition to the traditional marketing classroom. In the current project, professionalism is presented via short modules and guided discussions, as well as the instructor modeling professional behavior. However, content focused on professionalism can be integrated into any marketing course in a variety of ways. For example, professionalism could also be included in course content through written projects focused on content (e.g., in any class, students could analyze the tone of an e-mail or memo and then craft a superior response), longer written projects designed to bridge ethics and professionalism (e.g., writing a code of ethics, as suggested by Dingus & Milovic, [7]), or role plays (e.g., in a sales management class, students could practice communicating in a professional manner during a role play where the sales manager is conducting a performance evaluation with a salesperson who did not perform well on the assigned metrics). Additionally, it would be interesting to study professionalism in non-marketing business courses (e.g., Introduction to Accounting) and courses in other university areas (e.g., Engineering, Psychology, Communications). Marketing is a highly relationship-oriented industry, so comparing results across different majors would provide valuable insight.

Students enjoyed modules related to professionalism, noted anecdotally by the enthusiasm for discussions. While the current research utilized professionalism modules on topics such as texting with clients and colleagues, tips for emailing, and general guidance for overcoming conflict in the workplace, there are a myriad of topics students would enjoy in future iterations. In particular, additional topics related to skills that demonstrate professionalism, which students expressed an interest in, include emotional intelligence, time management, goal setting, written communication vs. verbal communication, how to deliver bad news, gift-giving and entertainment, submitting travel and business expenses, handling assertive vs. aggressive tendencies, how to demonstrate confidence, and how to build rapport in the workplace. Additionally, instructors can also advise students about potential pitfalls that may exist when entertaining clients at events where alcohol may be consumed (e.g. Rodriguez, Honeycutt, & Ragland, [26]) or how to approach happy hour events during their internships. Beyond classroom discussion and guidance from the instructor, the authors believe students would also benefit from interviewing marketing professionals about their experiences in the workplace.

In addition to the current research, many additional opportunities exist to expand this pedagogical practice through future research. Different modalities should be tested – is the implementation of professionalism consistent across online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning environments? As universities and workplaces transition to a more digital format (e.g., through MS Teams, Webex, or Zoom), additional opportunities to teach, train, and develop digital professionalism norms can give students confidence in their internships and full-time roles. For example, professional etiquette could still be demonstrated and assessed via synchronous online sessions (e.g. logging in on-time, appropriate background/lighting for video, avoiding disruptions on camera, etc.). In an online and hybrid environment, asynchronous professionalism, such as electronic communication, can still be incorporated and assessed as it is in this project. Additionally, to further understand the impact of professionalism as a course component, future research should also directly measure professionalism.
before and after; or, for classes where a client-based project is included, an objective measurement from the third-party of students' professionalism would be influential.

As this body of research grows, one could even develop a professionalism scale specific to behaviors of young business professionals; such a scale may be a beneficial addition to conversations between students' internship supervisors and internship directors. Similarly, faculty can align professionalism objectives specifically to course content or job tasks specific to the particular relationship and skillset needed in the careers related to the respective courses. The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion that, in future iterations, faculty may want to create a specific rubric for measuring professionalism in their courses. Additionally, comparisons can be made across different courses to test for differences in including professionalism as a course component. As educators, preparing students for successful careers is always on the forefront of our minds, and the present research demonstrates the importance of preparing students to identify with the business world on a professional level.

Disclosure Statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


