

## Coronavirus Adaptations

MKT 4350, Personal Selling

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Two sections of a service learning course

This course involves a great deal of active learning. Lectures ended in late February. Since then, we have had worked on different skills with active learning exercises including: mindfulness, improvisation, and Pecha Kucha presentations. Here is what is left and how I am approaching it.

### Remaining Assignment 1: Role Playing

What remains for in-class are role playing exercises. I generally have two classes set aside for quick, five to seven minute role plays that serve as icebreakers for the big role play assignment. These are described in the literature as brief, in-class role plays or BIRPs. (I kid you not.) These are graded Present/Absent (P/A). Then I have the rest of the semester filled with 15 minute role play exercises, four per class period. Each student plays the role of a salesperson and sells a business product to a classmate who plays the role of the potential customer. The rest of the class observes each role play and gives feedback. I point out positives and suggestions for improvement (professionally) for the class to learn. The role of salesperson is weighted heavily in the grading. That of customer and critic less so. In fact, the critique serves as a tool to keep students engaged while other students are performing the role play.

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Since the BIRPs are warmups and we just finished Pecha Kucha presentations, I cancelled this part of the role plays. Being a P/A grade, it is rare for a student not to earn the few percentage points for this assignment, so I graded everyone Present. To help students prepare for the role plays, I shared with them videos from a national competition so they can see top performances selling the same products that they are assigned to sell.

For the main role play exercise, I was uncomfortable relying on technology to run the role plays as I always have. My main concern was an issue of equity that some students may have difficulty accessing or using the technology, and that might affect their performance and grade. My second concern was that I might not be knowledgeable enough to help resolve issues. Instead, my plan is to use Skype to connect with students (Zoom is my alternative if I have trouble with Skype). I will play the customer for every student. This is a practice that several other faculty members employ in their classrooms. Grading: I rolled the points for the customer role into the seller role grade.

Since students won't be able to critique as they normally would, I have assigned a number of videos from the national competition for them to critique outside of class time. Students must write a one page critique of each role play using the course material as a guide.

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I will give students feedback as I always do, both immediately after the role play and then on Blackboard.

In addition to this in-class activity, students have two major, outside assignments that had to be modified: shadowing and fundraising.

### Remaining Assignment 2: Shadowing

Students are asked to spend a day with a professional salesperson and write a reflection paper about the experience. In this paper they are asked to relate the experience to the class material. Business is an applied discipline and a few hours with a practitioner helps to drive home what they have learned in the classroom. Abstract concepts suddenly become concrete. Vernacular suddenly becomes meaningful. During grading, I highlight sections of each paper that I think will improve learning outcomes since each student's experience is unique. On the last class day I ask students to read the highlighted sections from their reflection papers to create peer learning.

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For those who have completed their shadowing assignment, they will submit their reflection papers as they normally would. However, for those who have not, since it is not safe to spend a day with anyone outside of your home, I have offered an alternative assignment. They can conduct an interview of a professional salesperson using a list of questions that I provided, and probing questions, which they need to learn to ask. Since the original assignment is more work, I have been thinking of giving some extra credit to those students who have done the shadowing, but I don't want to announce that for fear that it might encourage risky behavior. Since students will not be able to share their experiences with their classmates, I will cut and paste key, anonymous sections and create a document to distribute to the class.

### Remaining Assignment 3: Fundraising

The service learning component is to raise money for a local charity, Sondra's Song. Students must use the techniques learned in class to raise the money, i.e., face-to-face, interpersonal selling, not GoFundMe pages. A number of students have already raised the necessary funds. For those students, they simply need to mail checks to the community partner and submit their reflection papers to me.

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If the student has not completed the fundraising portion of this assignment, it becomes even more difficult. Face-to-face selling, such as this fundraising exercise, is extremely risky, so I have

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removed many of the restrictions in the syllabus. Students may now use email, social media, and other means of fundraising. I encouraged students to use the telephone as much as possible on this assignment as that most mirrors the business world and the nonprofit sector. I have already heard from one student whose strategy of calling on coworkers and local businesses is now completely obsolete because of the new mobility restrictions. I offered suggestions on how to succeed and a quick lecture on resourcefulness.

### Other Coronavirus Workarounds

Submissions: I only accept assignments on paper. Assignments can be submitted via email now.

Research: Students are still expected to participate in the College research pool. However, they can only engage in online studies, or complete the alternate research paper.

Exams: Our last exam was in February and I use the role play in lieu of a final exam. I have a couple of students who need to take makeup exams. I can't use the same format (short answer) because the students could easily look up the answers in their notes or books. However, I need to strive to make the exam comparable to the original. I will need to create essay questions and explain that verbatim responses from the text will be considered plagiarism. I will schedule an equal, 80 minute time for the makeup exam.