MARKETING LAB COURSES:
PRACTICAL CURRICULUM, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Sponsors of Marketing Lab courses receive cost-effective, top-tier consulting from a team of students at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. Students work with faculty and project mentors to apply Chicago Booth’s unique analytical rigor to sponsor companies’ marketing projects, presenting their data-driven insights at the end of the 10-week course. Note that, in the following pages, titles were current at the time of writing and may not reflect individuals’ current positions or companies.
Attilio D’Attilio
Director, Business Development Strategy, Pluto TV

SWITCHING ON STUDENT EXPERTISE FOR REAL-WORLD PROJECTS

Pluto TV is disrupting the world of traditional television. By making hundreds of channels and thousands of movies and TV shows available as free advertising-supported content, the streaming service fills a unique and accessible space in a world otherwise dominated by subscriptions, allowing end users to watch content wherever they want.

Earlier this year, Galen D’Attilio, business development strategy executive at Pluto TV, and his team were researching consumption of video-on-demand (VOD) with the intent to learn more about audience consumption habits. Leonid Vanshelbaum, ’07, director of new business development at Pluto TV, suggested they reach out to Chicago Booth’s James M. Kilts Center for Marketing and engage the students in their Developing New Products and Services lab course for answers. In these highly popular lab courses, Booth students work with clients and apply their knowledge to companies’ real-world problems. More than 2,100 students have taken a marketing lab course at Booth, collaborating with nearly 200 companies, from Google and Uber, to Walmart, Airbnb, PepsiCo, and more.

“Initially, the project was focused on the consumption and behavioral habits of both linear and video-on-demand products,” D’Attilio said, “but the scope naturally evolved into a study of VOD user need states, and that resulted from an astounding amount of data that the team collected.”

The Booth students dove into the project with gusto, doing extensive paneling and surveying of both nonusers and current users. They sought to understand what consumers were looking for in a platform, who was most likely to consume Pluto TV’s content, what might attract consumers, how users might interact with each other, and more. Students categorized their findings and developed a rubric that the company could then use to inform product experimentation and decisioning.

D’Attilio said the Booth students closely examined everything from social interaction to the discoverability of content—whether through recommendations or through users’ ability to control video playback. They also explored many other potential contributors for how Pluto TV may further develop robust products.

Ultimately, D’Attilio was impressed with what the students brought to the project. “It was clear from the very beginning, in conversations with Booth faculty, that the level of expectation from them was already high, and so my own expectations reflected that,” D’Attilio said. “But the end product still ended up exceeding everyone’s expectations.”

The Booth students’ work resulted in a behavioral mapping that will allow Pluto TV to formulate strategy and prioritize product development initiatives into the future based on user need states. “The rubric has given us a lot of insight into potential consumption categorizations, and how we would score concepts so that we could understand what has the highest potential to contribute to incremental user engagement,” D’Attilio said.

D’Attilio praised the students’ preparation and skill, as well as the level and rigor of their data analysis. “The actual end results—from a rubric perspective—were very much in line with what you would expect from a strategy consultant with many years of experience.
Carrie Sweeney, '11  
Senior Partner Manager, Pinterest

PINNING FOR PURCHASES

Pinterest users—also known as pinners—are avid shoppers. Using the Pinterest app, they save ideas for recipes, parties, home decorating, and fashion, often as inspiration for future purchases.

This presents a challenge for the growing social network: How can it give pinners the information they seek, while simultaneously helping marketers reach an eager audience?

To answer this question, Carrie Sweeney, '11, senior partner manager at Pinterest, turned to the James M. Kilts Center for Marketing and to students enrolled in Booth's New Products and Services Lab course. She knew Booth students would dig into the data and study consumer behaviors. Ultimately, the students in the class provided Pinterest with fresh insights and strategies that could help the company generate an additional $12 million annually in profit.

For Sweeney, turning to Booth for marketing insights was a natural choice. When she was a student at Booth, she enrolled in the New Products and Services class taught by Art Middlebrooks, clinical professor of marketing and executive director of the Kilts Center for Marketing, and she found the experience transformative. Later, after she earned her MBA and took a job at Google as a senior account executive, Sweeney sponsored a successful marketing lab project with Professor Middlebrooks’s class to develop a plan for YouTube to reach its next $100 million in revenue.

So when Sweeney joined Pinterest, both she and Professor Middlebrooks were excited to collaborate on another marketing lab project. "It didn't take much convincing," Sweeney said of her pitch to Pinterest executives. "The caliber of Booth students and the school speaks for itself. The students benefit from real-world exposure, and the company benefits from getting really thoughtful analysis on important topics."

For the marketing lab project, Booth students spent 10 weeks examining Pinterest's user data and business model, and conducted research in an effort to understand pinners' motivations and behaviors, marketers' preferences, and the company's objectives. Students brainstormed more than 60 new ideas, then screened those ideas for strategic fit, innovativeness, consumer needs, feasibility, userbase growth, and revenue potential. Three top concepts were then tested in a quantitative survey.

Ultimately, the students recommended that Pinterest add a feature allowing pinners to toggle between two modes in the app. In shopping mode, pinners could click on products to find out where to buy those products—an opportunity for marketers. In browsing mode, pinners could turn off the shopping features and simply explore. The students forecast that adding a shopping mode would produce $12 million in profits annually.

The students' work was highly detailed and targeted, and Pinterest is seriously considering implementing their ideas. "They really got down to tactical, smart recommendations that we could act on," Sweeney said. "That's such a Booth thing."

For Sweeney, the marketing lab project was another chance to explore the intersection of retail and technology—interests that she first developed as a student. At Booth, her team placed second in the 2010 Edward L. Kaplan, '71, New Venture Challenge (NVC) for Future Simple (now called Base), a customer relationship management platform for small businesses.

When Pinterest recruited Sweeney for her current job, she recalled the thrill of participating in the NVC, which she said gave her the confidence to leap to a smaller company that was still figuring out its revenue strategy. "It's a fun challenge when your job is to figure out a platform full of affluent people signaling what they want to buy," Sweeney said. "Our job is to send them really thoughtful marketing that's helpful and not annoying, and then to measure it." Skills, she no doubt, learned studying marketing as a student at Booth.
Alex Ward, ‘08  
*Global Lead of Special Projects, Airbnb Inc.*

**A WIN-WIN EXPERIENCE**

When Airbnb wanted insights into consumer needs around home sharing, Alex Ward, ‘08, knew where to go for the answers. As a Chicago Booth student, Ward had gained invaluable hands-on experience in lab courses such as Building the New Venture. Now global lead of special projects on Airbnb’s host team, Ward saw a perfect opportunity to pay forward his experiential-learning growth by bringing a project to Booth’s Lab in Developing New Products and Services. In return, his company would benefit from the brainpower of thorough, curious, and analytical Booth students. “At Airbnb, we’re building so much so quickly,” Ward said. “It was really valuable for us to work with this team of creative, bright students.”

Ward and Airbnb asked the Booth Marketing Lab students to envision a tool kit to help developers, landlords, and other real estate professionals to position home sharing as a valuable building amenity for current residents and potential renters. “There is such a mobile workforce globally, and renters are traveling all the time. This is a way to help anyone afford to pay rent if they’re going to be out of town on vacation or on a business trip,” Ward said. “We want to help developers creatively think about this brand-new world of home sharing, specifically for renters that they’re trying to attract or retain.” The students delved into primary research to understand the renter mind-set, developed a perspective on key features to attract renters, and presented recommendations that Airbnb plans to roll out in the tool kit. They were able to think in innovative ways to frame the problem, gather data, and interpret the results to come up with fresh ideas.

“The students worked with us to think creatively about how we could build a research and survey structure to uncover really valuable data for our operators, and to develop new solutions,” Ward said. Given the fast pace of change and company growth, especially in the technology sector, Ward deemed the marketing lab as a win-win for students and companies. “The students get real-world exposure, and the companies get to work with the smart, scrappy, entrepreneurial students that Booth provides.”
HELPING UBER MEET RIDERS’ NEEDS IN THE ‘BURBS
What do you do when your fast-growing, multibillion-dollar company wants to continue innovating but finds itself constrained by current resource levels?

Uber’s Brian Moloney and Sameer Dohadwala partnered with Booth students for a solution. Toward the end of 2016, Moloney, Dohadwala, and their colleague Amanda Middlebrooks brought a straightforward challenge to students in Booth’s Marketing Lab course: Help us better meet rider needs in the suburbs of Chicago.

“We know the high caliber of students at Booth, so we knew getting a bunch of smart people to help us on a project was going to be valuable and beneficial,” said Dohadwala, who leads Uber’s strategy and planning for the central United States and Canada. “Our core business is in dense urban areas. Unlocking new areas of growth and meeting suburban customers’ needs is a challenge we want to take on.”

After an initial kickoff meeting, the team at Uber and the students held weekly touch-point discussions. Week after week, the students presented their findings to Uber, including data, customer feedback, and information they had gathered from third-party sources. Among their biggest findings: suburban customers care most about price consistency.

At the end of the quarter, the students presented their recommendation to Uber: institute a round-trip option for customers so that they can book both legs of a trip in a single transaction. Uber loved the idea and is currently investigating how to test round-trip rides in the market.

“They were very energized working on the project,” said Moloney, a senior operations manager at Uber, about the Booth students in the class. “We work with our colleagues every day, so for me it was a great experience working with talented and curious people who use the app regularly.”
Paul Englert, '99, wanted to rethink the future of the C. Mondavi & Family brand Charles Krug, the oldest winery in Napa Valley. His main objective was to make the 150-year-old brand more appealing to a younger generation of drinkers. Englert devised a hypothesis, and he wanted a truly objective assessment. So he sponsored a project for the Booth Experiential Learning Marketing Lab course. The project was dedicated to research on the wine market, messaging to millennial drinkers, and the Charles Krug brand. Not only did the students give a thorough assessment, they delivered above expectations, exploring questions Englert hadn’t thought to ask.

WHY BOOTH?

“In the wine industry, there are probably half a dozen agencies that companies tend to use in tackling marketing and brand changes, which means wineries tend to use similar methods of market research. Moreover, there are plenty of case studies where marketers will come in with a predetermined hypothesis, and that bias leads the inquiry. Instead of relying on these options, we wanted to have an outside-the-industry perspective, as well as a very disciplined and objective approach. In my mind, a Booth Marketing Lab was ideal.

What was great about the students’ research was that it approached the problem using innovative tools and unique angles, so I felt it was an intensely exhaustive market research project.”

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

“In terms of marketing, wineries tend to be conservative, so we wondered if there was an opportunity to distinguish our brand in a way that would attract our desired target audience. We wanted to explore the idea of an in-your-face approach with part of our message, using a voice that plays well in spirits and beer but is atypical for wine. We asked Booth students to research and answer some tough questions. Which parts of the Charles Krug story are relevant to millennial consumers? How do we go about marketing to this generation? What tone do we take? The students really took a step back and assessed the project from a holistic angle. They let the data lead the inquiry.

Relying on this approach, they formulated additional questions that were outside the original scope of the project and that I wasn’t expecting to see. Their recommendations were insightful. They showed us how we can evolve our messaging over time. For example, when the audience becomes more comfortable with the brand, we can more safely push the boundaries and expose them to edgy messaging.”

CREATIVITY THROUGH ANALYTICS

“The biggest value added was the creativity and the passion the students brought to the analytics of the project. They were able to capture what it’s like to be in the age group we’re targeting. We still reference the findings today.

At C. Mondavi & Family, we don’t have teams of internal researchers, so having a resource like Booth that we can tap when needed is of huge value to us—we would definitely come back.”
BOOTH STUDENTS INFORM AT&T’S SMART CITIES STRATEGY

Matt Foreman runs market development for AT&T’s Smart Cities, a unit in its Internet of Things (IoT) organization. At the 2016 Consumer Electronics Show, AT&T announced Chicago as one of the first Spotlight Cities where it would shine a global spotlight on the city by deploying its Smart Cities framework.

Foreman tapped into the diverse backgrounds and fresh perspectives of Booth students to gather local market research, gain a better understanding of unmet citizen needs, and obtain recommendations on what should be included in the Chicago deployment.

A student team took on the project as part of the New Product Development Marketing Lab class. The student team used qualitative and quantitative data to define what it means to live in a “Smart City.” The data gave them insights into potential customer profiles and provided the foundation for recommendations on what technologies were best suited to address their needs.

“The students were highly engaged, motivated, and easy to work with,” said Foreman. “They helped my team reflect on what it means to be a citizen on the receiving end of some of these smart technology deployments. In our discussions with mayors and leadership in many cities, we see them referring to citizens as customers now, which is a compelling paradigm shift in government operations.” He explained that the students brought to life new ideas that have been instrumental in developing strategies for Chicago and other city-improvement projects. “In our discussions with the city of Chicago, we’re exploring moving forward with solutions that address some of the recommendations generated from the students’ project.”
Tirso Iglesias, '07
Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Cacique, Inc.

Tirso Iglesias, '07, had seen this before: A famous brand comes to Chicago Booth with a marketing challenge for students and the James M. Kilts Center for Marketing.

The last time Iglesias was involved with the Kilts Marketing Lab, he was a student helping propose an innovative toothbrush that dispensed its own gel.

Now as vice president of sales and marketing for Cacique, Inc., Iglesias was asking the next generation of Booth students for innovative ideas to help expand the industry leader in Hispanic perishable foods into a new market.

Iglesias wondered how Cacique could take its popular foods beyond its large, loyal Hispanic consumer base. Already the market share leader in the categories of Mexican-style cheeses, creams, chorizo, and yogurts, Cacique’s next step was to tempt palates across the United States in a different category.

After students conducted research, crafted a survey, honed the sample size, and dug into the data, Cacique received much more than it expected.

“We didn’t end up with just one recommendation at the end of the project,” Iglesias said. “We had four or five that, over time, are really going to help us fill out our portfolio. Two of the ideas are already in R&D and should commercialize in the next year.”

Iglesias wasn’t surprised.

“Not much has changed about Booth,” he said. “I found the students to be extremely engaged, extremely interested, and quite frankly, they were always ready to tell us what we needed to hear rather than what we wanted to hear. You can tell they cared about the project being successful and not so much the grade they were going to get. I didn’t feel like they were an outside group.”

That engagement and students’ efficient use of time were important to Cacique’s bottom line.

“A lot of companies in our market have much larger budgets, so our leaps and bounds forward have to be very calculated and reliant on what gives us the biggest ROI,” he said. Iglesias credited the students’ strong recommendations to the Marketing Lab and to Arthur Middlebrooks, clinical professor of marketing and the executive director of the Kilts Center for Marketing.

“The structure in which Art runs the class and runs the projects makes the process easy,” Iglesias said. “You’re dealing with a very complex issue, and the way Art breaks it down into different modules, you don’t really feel like you’re working really hard, but you are. You’re making a lot of progress.”

During Marketing Lab, Iglesias couldn’t help seeing the project through students’ eyes—especially as his brother, Chris Iglesias, ’14, was one of the students on the Cacique project.

“I was curious to see how the class had continued to evolve since I graduated in 2007,” Iglesias said, “and to get a sense of how today’s students are thinking about consumer issues, problems, and trends.

“It’s a really bright group of marketers. How can we tap into that millennial mind-set and see what they’re looking for in products?”

The experience confirmed to Iglesias that Booth and the Marketing Lab are valuable partners for Cacique.

“The students interacted with full-time members of my marketing team, and we all felt the same way: These young professionals are really into this. How can we keep tapping into it?”
Breeze Richardson  
*Director of Strategic Partnerships, Chicago Public Media, WBEZ 91.5 FM*

Chicago Booth’s Marketing Lab courses are designed to give students hands-on, experiential learning while providing organizations extensive as well as cost-effective marketing research and consulting services. As one of several sponsors of the Marketing Lab courses, Chicago Public Media’s Breeze Richardson could think of no better project to give students than measuring and evaluating community engagement with Chicago Public Media’s nonprofit media brand, WBEZ. The results turned out to be much more than she expected.

**PIONEERING THE NEW NONPROFIT MARKETING LANDSCAPE**

“As a nonprofit with limited resources, we don’t invest in research like other media companies, but when we heard about the Booth Marketing Lab courses and noticed the Marketing Research course option, we saw a great opportunity to fill a gap that we have had for a long time at Chicago Public Media. It was an opportunity to work with incredibly smart people to try to answer the tough questions we had about our business.

We asked Booth students to create something that had never been done—a replicable survey that could measure community engagement with public media. We knew there wasn’t a right way to do it, and I thought that the project would be academically challenging in a classroom environment; students had to really ask themselves what we needed as a client, and how to design the survey to not only fulfill our needs but also potentially create a baseline that WBEZ could work from for years to come.”

**THE BOOTH APPROACH TO NONPROFITS**

“As an important outcome of the Marketing Lab program is simply having new voices, new ideas, and new questions being raised. It forces us, as mission-driven marketers, to think differently about our work.

Booth students come from an environment very different from WBEZ’s, which pushes us to think more critically about impacting growth and makes sure that we are in a position to better measure this impact across the board.

Looking back on the executive summary, it seems so obvious now how the research team wrapped their heads around measuring community engagement. Their entire analysis was based on three kinds of benefits that one can receive from WBEZ as an institution: informational, social, and altruistic. They then measured how much our audience expects us to fulfill these benefits, coupled with how well we were meeting those expectations.”

**HELPING ORGANIZATIONS UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES**

“We really wanted to make the most of this opportunity. This wasn’t some ancillary project but one that would go beyond the classroom exercise. The team was really able to push the envelope. They were able to collect 4,000 survey responses, which allowed for them to do not only regression analysis but cluster and segmentation analysis as well.

Throughout the project, communication was great. There was incredible teamwork and collaboration involving many integrated points of view. The lab team made sure to incorporate our input throughout the project. The students were extremely talented and committed; they really went above and beyond.

The student team absolutely exceeded our expectations. We still use the lab team’s findings. We have every intention of taking the student’s work as a foundation, not only for our institution but potentially to influence others across our industry.”
Sean Smyth, '05  
Vice President, Business Development, Groupon, Inc.

As members of the Marketing Research course, five Booth marketing students applied their skills to a real-world business challenge presented by deal-of-the-day website Groupon.

STUDENTS GAIN HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WITH Groupon

When Sean Smyth, '05, vice president of business development for Groupon, Inc., wanted to better define and understand his company's VIP segment, he immediately thought of Chicago Booth.

"As a startup, there were a lot of business decisions that Groupon was trying to get its head around," recalled Smyth. "We wanted to find some smart folks who could really dig deep into numbers and make recommendations about who our best customers were and why. We thought marketing students from Booth would be particularly well suited for the task."

Then full-time students, Vishal Arya, '11, Dilini Fernando, '11, Jillian Gerngross, '11, Stephen Hammond, '11, and Brian Luerssen, '11, were delighted to help. Although they didn't know who they would be working with when they initially registered, the students were attracted to the Marketing Research course for the chance to gain real-world experience. The opportunity to work with the blockbuster deal-of-the-day website, Groupon, was an unexpected surprise.

Gerngross recalled: "We had all been Groupon users, so we were customers of the brand. We knew what they offered. Working with them was an exciting way to be part of something that really had a buzz."

"It was great to work on a challenge that was relevant to an actual business," added Hammond. "They gave us an interesting problem, and the experience provided a fascinating glimpse into a very specific point in time with that company."

To better research Groupon's question, the team developed a three-step process for gathering data. They started with examination of purchasing and consumer data for Groupon customers in the Chicago area during a six-month period. Next, they used their findings to recruit a focus group comprising Groupon VIPs. Finally, they analyzed the responses of the focus group in order to generate an email survey, which they deployed to a segment of Groupon's subscribers.

Smyth said the Booth student's findings have become part of Groupon's institutional knowledge.

"We have evolved since this project, but their findings have had a lingering effect," Smyth noted. "We remember certain statements from the focus group they assembled. We still talk about those customers and their attributes." Equally memorable was the way the Booth students worked.

"Over the lifetime of the project, we were able to see different team members come in and serve in different roles," Smyth recalled. "As a team, I think they played to each other's strengths and worked in a manner where we as a client were not wholly dependent on the insight of just one individual. They presented a true team effort, and that really worked for us."

Smyth explained that Groupon's growth generates more questions because as a company it wants to optimize and understand more granular parts of the business. "We know that in Booth we can find people who can make sense out of chaos, to take some data and make an informed decision or a recommendation for a decision," he said. "Of course we would love to have Booth come back."