



Research Shows that Sales Center Education Makes a Substantial Difference in Student Performance After Graduation.

A summary of FSU Sales Institute research recently published by Willy Bolander, Leff Bonney, and Cinthia Satornino, in the Journal of Marketing Education.

Labor statistics point to an increase in sales as a key occupation in the present and future workforce. In his recent book, *To Sell is Human*, Daniel Pink points out the number of sales people in the United States outnumbers the entire federal government workforce by five to one. He goes on to cite labor statistics that show changing workforce dynamics where some companies may lose as much as 40% of their sales talent by 2016. Yet the same changing dynamics are expected to create two million new sales jobs by 2020, increasing the demand for professional salespeople.

The news of an ever-expanding demand for salespeople in the U.S. workforce is not lost on the faculty working in business schools, especially in marketing departments. Professional selling has long been a common path for business school graduates entering the workforce. Studies show that professional selling is one of the most common job types for students graduating with a degree in business. Some studies put the percentage of marketing majors accepting a job in sales as high as 88% and as high as 60% for all other business majors.

As a result of these facts, business schools are embracing professional selling as a formal area of study. Between 2007 and 2011, sales as a significant area of study grew from 45 schools in 2007 to 101 schools in 2011 (Fogel et al. 2012). Likewise, 34 schools have formal sales centers recognized by the University Sales Center Alliance (USCA), a 300% gain since the USCA's founding (www.universitysalescenteralliance.org). The Sales Education Foundation also reports that the number of universities offering sales education programs is growing at rapid rate (www.salesfoundation.org/who-we-serve/universities/). However, even with a growing need for, and supply of, business graduates with formal sales education, a key question remains: does a student's participation in a sales education program impact his or her performance after graduating and entering the workforce?

This is exactly the question that researchers at the FSU Sales Institute wanted to answer with their latest research project. To do this, the research team at FSU administered a survey to



recently hired sales reps of one of its long-standing corporate partners. The survey identified which reps had participated in a collegiate sales programs and then went on to ask about key selling behaviors that the reps use in their day-to-day selling activities. These survey responses were then matched to actual sales performance data for each rep.

The results of the study were quite interesting. While the entire study can be retrieved from www.fsusalesinstitute.com, some specific points of interest include:

1) Sales reps hired from sales programs significantly outperformed other new hires.

While some have anecdotally suggested this to be the case in the past, this research is the first peer reviewed study that uses actual sales performance data to support this claim.

2) Sales program graduates reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment. Given the high cost and prevalence of salesperson turnover, it is useful to know that, empirically, sales program graduates exhibit higher levels of commitment.

3) Sales program graduates are more likely to use certain selling tactics in their persuasion attempts. For example, sales program graduates do a better job of making effective presentations and making personal connections with potential customers. This, in part, is what helps them outperform other newly hired sales reps.

Those interested are welcome to visit the FSU Sales Institute website to read the entire article, along with other pieces of valuable sales and sales management research.