

SELLING SALES EDUCATION: PROPOSING A NEW MAJOR IN PROFESSIONAL SELLING

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ABSTRACT

Professional selling is one of the most common occupations for students graduating with a bachelor's degree [1]. Accordingly, more universities are embracing sales as a formal area of study and the number of sales education programs in the United States is growing exponentially. In 2019, a university in the mountain states region proposed a new Bachelor of Arts in Professional Selling. Since introducing a sales minor and certificate in 2013, this university experienced growth in sales class enrollment and launched new courses. After a thorough analysis of the internal and external environments, curriculum was developed with corporate partners and sales experts.

Keywords: Sales education, professional selling, curriculum, sales, Bachelor of Arts

INTRODUCTION

Professional selling is one of the most common occupations for students graduating with a degree in business. Research from Florida State University puts the percentage of marketing majors accepting a job in sales as high as 88% and as high as 60% for all other business majors [1]. Likewise, Harvard Business Review estimates that more than 50% of US college graduates, regardless of their major, are likely to work in sales at some point [4].

While sales careers offer an abundance of opportunity for new college graduates, many enter the profession unexpectedly, and often unprepared. The turnover rate for sales hires who are new to the profession is approximately 60% [3]. In response, there is a growing number of university sales programs designed to help students get a head-start on sales training and connect with corporate partners eager to hire. According to a survey of sales managers, sales program graduates ramp up 50% faster than their non-sales educated peers and turnover 30% less [9]. Companies are interested in developing these alliances because university sales programs can save them up to \$200,000 per hire within the first 18 months of employment [5,12].

In 2019, a university located in the mountain states region proposed a new Bachelor of Arts in Professional Selling. The Center for Professional Selling at this university was established in 2011, and a minor and certificate in sales were introduced in 2013. The Center is housed within the Marketing Department and has four full-time faculty members teaching sales classes and/or contributing to program development (two tenure-track and two non-tenure track). Since introducing the minor and certificate, this university has experienced growth in sales class enrollment and launched new sales

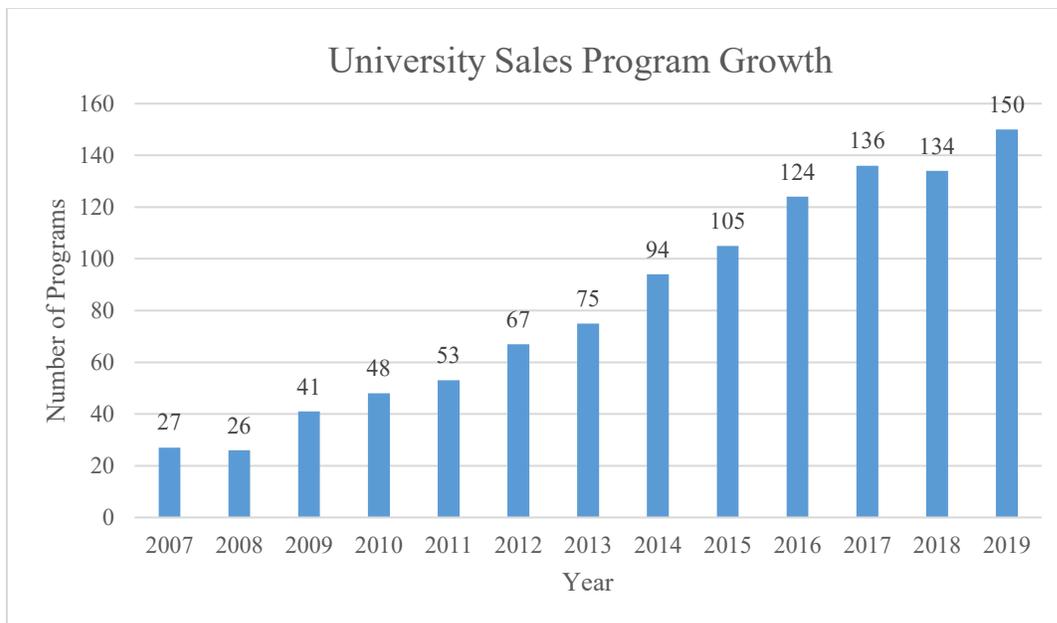
courses. As the local market leader in sales education, it is the only school in the state that is a member of the University Sales Center Alliance and was named a “Top University for Sales Education” by the Sales Education Foundation.

As university sales education grows, this university is continually searching for ways to maintain its position as the local leader in sales education and provide students with the career-ready skills employers desire. After extensive research and an examination of the feasibility of a sales major, the Center for Professional Selling has proposed a Bachelor of Arts degree that will provide value to students, businesses, the local economy, and the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) requires business schools to be current in the practice, which requires continued investigation and alignment between industry needs and business curriculum [13]. Due to this directive and as a result of the aforementioned trends, business schools are embracing professional selling as a formal area of study. In the 13 years between 2007 and 2019, the number of universities offering a sales education program grew 455%, from 27 schools in 2007 to 150 schools in 2019 (as shown in Figure 1) [9]. Yet, the 136 programs established by 2017 accounted for less than 3% of the colleges and universities in the United States [12]. The University Sales Center Alliance has also experienced significant growth, with 53 schools meeting accreditation criteria in 2019, up from 8 schools in 2002 [12].

FIGURE 1 [9]
Sales Programs Identified by the Sales Education Foundation



When sales is taught in a university setting, it positively affects performance. Research from DePaul University indicates that among salespeople hired over a 10-year period, those coming from sales education programs hit the break-even point in their territories 30% faster. Additionally, their tenure

with the company averaged 40% longer. Another study found that sales taught in higher education enhanced performance over time [17].

Another argument for increasing the number of sales education programs is that the economy is suffering in the absence of them. Many good sales positions go unfilled for lack of qualified applicants. Many more jobs are filled by people who are unprepared to excel at them. For at least five consecutive years, Manpower, the recruiting and workforce development firm, has ranked sales as one of the hardest positions to fill [5].

A university sales education provides an excellent return on a student's academic investment. The Sales Education Foundation reports a job placement rate from sales programs at over 92%. On average, top sales students receive 2.8 job offers before graduation, with an average starting salary of over \$60,000 per year [8].

Workforce Demand

Across the United States, employment of wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives is projected to grow 5 percent from 2016 to 2026 [2]. Sales workers in the services and wholesale sectors will continue to be in demand because these occupations remain critical in building and maintaining customer bases for businesses [2].

Sales is one of the largest occupations in Colorado, employing over 326,000 people [3]. It is also growing; sales occupations in the Denver metropolitan area are projected to grow 14% from 2017 to 2027 (as shown in Figure 3) [3]. Since 95 percent of this university's students are from Colorado, and 80 percent of alumni live in Colorado, sales education positions the university to meet workforce demand.

FIGURE 3
Employment Projections by Occupation – Sales [3]

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2017	2027 (Projected)	Percent Change
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood	183,235	209,377	14.3%
Boulder-Longmont	20,073	21,765	8.4%
Fort Collins-Loveland	19,729	22,684	15.0%
Greeley	10,962	12,977	18.4%
Colorado	326,697	369,904	13.2%

Almost all research regarding sales talent underscores the abiding necessity of training and development, and, at 10.5% of the total employed workforce, salespeople should be a major focus for companies and educators. The demand for qualified sales professionals is evident in the companies partnering with the Center for Professional Selling. Corporate partners dedicate financial resources and significant amounts of time on campus with the goal of meeting potential sales candidates.

The lack of qualified sales professionals and the likelihood of college graduates entering sales positions signify a need for expanded sales education. Accordingly, this institution that already offered a Minor and Certificate in Professional Selling began due diligence to determine the optimal construction of a Major in Professional Selling, as well.

The university evaluated and benchmarked programs at University Sales Center Alliance member schools. Of the 53 members, fourteen offer a sales-related bachelor’s degree, many of which are considered leaders in sales education (shown in Figure 2) [11]. Additionally, the vast majority of sales programs are concentrated in the Midwest and on the East Coast, illustrating a local needs gap.

FIGURE 2
University Sales Center Alliance Schools with Sales Majors

Full Member	Degree Offered
Ball State University	BA Professional Selling
Baylor University	BBA Bachelor of Business Administration, Sales Major
Elon University	BSBA Marketing Major, Sales Focus
Indiana University	BS Business, Professional Selling Major
Kansas State University	BSBA Professional Strategic Selling Major
Kennesaw State University	BBA Professional Sales
University of Akron	BBA Sales Management
University of Toledo	BBA Professional Sales
Weber State University	BS Professional Sales (not in the College of Business)
Associate Members	Degree Offered
High Point University	BSBA Sales
St. Ambrose University	BA Sales (Business or Healthcare)
St. Catherine University	BS or BA Sales (Business-to-Business or Healthcare)
University of Central Oklahoma	BBA Professional Selling
University of North Alabama	BBA Professional Marketing, Sales Concentration

A review of this table (Figure 2) makes it clear that a wide variety of degree options exist. Based on the requirements of our university, planners needed to decide between offering either a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS).

Bachelor of Arts vs. Bachelor of Science

The institution in this study did not have requirements that must be satisfied to qualify as a BA degree or a BS degree, nor does the literature provide specific guidance. Studies of business programs were nonexistent, but a study of large Canadian universities (20,000+ students) found that 95% of BA degrees did not require any specific math courses [14].

The same study, however, found that 55% of BS degrees required at least one specific math course and most of those were calculus [14]. In another study of 329 psychology programs, few differences were evident between BA and BS degrees, except in doctoral-granting institutions. In those instances, the majority of BS programs required at least one calculus course, but none were required in the BA [15]. It was the opinion of the faculty at our university that the BS degree should have more specific math classes than that BA.

In a study of psychology students, it was found that students chose the BA to avoid science courses and students chose the BS to avoid language requirements [16]. The researchers also found that

“consideration of math and science degree requirements was more influential on degree choice for those pursuing a BA than for those pursuing a BS” [16, p.179]. Our own internal research found that many students who wanted to major in the College of Business opted for degrees elsewhere in the university due to their perception that business degrees were math intensive.

For most of its history, the College of Business, where the new sales degree will be housed, offered six different degrees - five were BS and one was BA. The BS degrees were in Accounting, Computer Information Systems, Finance, Management and Marketing. These majors share the same general studies requirements as well as a 36-credit hour Business Core. There are no specific science courses in these majors, but there are specific math courses that include Finite Math for Management & Social Sciences, Calculus for Management & Social Sciences, Business Analytics 1 and Business Analytics 2. The BA is in Economics and it does not include the same required math courses as those in the BS degrees.

Four new degrees were recently developed to meet student demand. One was in Banking and another in International business and both of these were developed to be BS degrees. These degrees adopted the same math courses required in the other BS degrees offered in the College of Business. Two BA degrees were also developed- Entrepreneurship and Global Business Studies. Two factors aided with the BA decision for the new majors:

1. There is a strong perception among the business faculty that a BS must require numerous math courses, including calculus, as evidenced by the current BS offerings. Proposing new degrees as a BS that did not have the same or as many math courses would have created conflict among the faculty members.
2. Internal research indicated we were losing possible business students due to the requirement of math courses that are perceived to be very difficult. By not requiring those courses, specifically calculus, in the BA, students who did not want to take math courses now had an option of a major in the College of Business.

These factors impacted the decision on whether to make the Professional Selling degree a BA or BS. The sales faculty also researched courses required at sales programs across the country and met with numerous stakeholders, including alumni of the program, industry professionals, the sales center advisory board and individuals from other collegiate sales programs. The decision to create the major as a Bachelor of Arts was reached from this due diligence.

To be successful, recruitment of students to the new degree would be critical. Calculus and other higher level math courses were not determined to be critical for student success and not worth the risk of losing prospective students due to their avoidance of multiple math courses. By offering the degree as a BA, it also removes the potential conflict within the faculty. The faculty are supportive of the BA and are needed to help recruit students to it.

Opportunities for Internal Collaboration

The structure of the Center for Professional Selling aligns with the Classroom to Career Hub (C2 Hub), a new innovative venture introduced by this university's Career Services department. According to the C2 Hub, its goal is "...connecting students and employers, facilitating real-world learning experiences

and upskilling homegrown talent for Colorado’s workforce pipeline” [7]. The C2 Hub and Center for Professional selling both support student academic and professional opportunities through strategic corporate partnerships. The Center currently collaborates with Career Services on multiple events every semester (such as practice interviews and a sales “Meet & Greet”). Partner companies are also integrated into content delivery and performance-based projects so that students learn first-hand what will be required of them in a sales position after graduation. Commonalities between the Center and C2 Hub may present further opportunities to work together.

Additionally, the proposed degree includes 24 hours of general electives, which allow students to pursue a minor or certificate for a specialized area of sales. For example, a biology minor would serve well in pharmaceutical or medical sales. Virtually any industry that a student is interested in has a need for sales professionals. Faculty from the Center have visited cross-disciplinary classes as guest lecturers to discuss academic and career opportunities in sales.

The proposed program does not intend to compete with the existing Marketing degree, although some students may opt to change their major. Both majors are in the Marketing department, therefore, a switch could have a negative impact on the Marketing *major* headcount, but minimal impact on the overall Marketing headcount. There is potential to positively increase the department headcount; the proposed degree requires nine Marketing classes (plus electives), whereas a Marketing degree requires nine Marketing classes (including electives).

The proposed degree is structured primarily using existing classes. Two new courses will be introduced: Marketing and Sales Metrics, and Inside Sales. Both classes were designed to appeal to both sales and marketing students, and potentially other programs within the College of Business. These new courses can be taught either online or a traditional face-to-face format. Demand for online electives is high – the Fall 2019 semester had multiple sections surpassing 40 students. The new courses increase online elective options for all Marketing students.

Adherence to University Role and Mission

The university’s mission is *“To provide high quality, accessible, enriching education that prepares students for successful careers, post-graduate education and lifelong learning in a multicultural, global, and technological society. To fulfill this mission, [the university’s] diverse university community engages the community at large in scholarly inquiry, creative activity, and the application of knowledge”*.

The proposed major supports this mission as it provides the only sales major in the state that will transform the lives of students by opening doors to rewarding, high-paying careers that are in high demand and will be for the foreseeable future. Students pursuing this degree path will learn cutting-edge sales processes through a combination of active and experiential learning that will expand their knowledge center from the classroom into the regional community. An added benefit for students enrolled in this major is that sales skills are requisite in all facets of life, both professionally and personally. At its core, a major in Professional Sales will equip students with the ability to build strong, healthy, long-term relationships with a myriad of individuals in a wide variety of diverse communities.

Curriculum

Since 2013, the university has offered an 18-credit Minor and Certificate in Sales. The two programs are structured identically, designed to give majors inside and outside of the College of Business a sales-related option. The sales major would expand on the minor and certificate and introduce additional course requirements in sales. These additions are focused on further preparing students for careers in professional selling.

Curriculum for the proposed degree was developed in consultation with corporate partners and the University Sales Center Alliance to identify best practices and competencies required for sales professionals.

The proposed Bachelor of Arts in Professional Selling is an extended major. This allows students flexibility to pursue a minor if they aspire to work in a specific area of sales (such as medical, financial services, IT-software, sports, etc.). Students can elect to apply the 24 electives to a minor, but they are not required to do so if they prefer to focus on business curriculum.

The proposed curriculum was developed in consultation with the Center for Professional Selling's Advisory Board. The Board is comprised of 15 corporate partners that hire all levels of sales personnel. According to an article in Harvard Business Review, "Curricular input from industry partners is vital, because it keeps instruction relevant to the tools and practices graduates will need in their careers. In the fast-evolving world of professional selling, identifying the competencies required by business and integrating them into curriculum is an ongoing challenge" [5].

Sales degree programs at University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) schools were also evaluated. The USCA is a consortium of sales centers that sets and monitors program standards.

The proposed credit requirements are outlined in Figure 1, and the full list of course requirements is provided in the Appendix.

**FIGURE 1
CREDIT REQUIREMENTS**

General Studies	33
Major Courses	63
Electives	24
Total to Graduate (minimum 40 hours upper division)	120

While sales classes are housed in the Marketing department, Management courses are included as elective options to attract "degree completers" or students with sales experience needing a degree to progress to a management role.

Learning Objectives

Students majoring in Professional Selling will be assessed on the four business core learning goals.

Goal 1 – Communication:

Business students will be able to communicate effectively.

Objective 1.1 – Prepare effective written communication

Objective 1.2 – Deliver effective oral presentations

Goal 2 – Decision Making:

Business students will be able to discover business problems and propose recommendations drawn from appropriate frameworks.

Objective 2.1 – Evaluate the situation using appropriate methods and tools

Objective 2.2 – Recommend potential solutions using appropriate methods and tools

Goal 3 – Business Environment:

Business students will be knowledgeable of ethical and global frameworks and how they relate to business decisions.

Objective 3.1 – Business students will be able to assess ethical considerations in business decision making.

Objective 3.2 – Business students will demonstrate an understanding of the implications of operating in a global business environment.

Goal 4 – Core Knowledge:

Business students will demonstrate competence in required business topics.

In addition to the core business learning goals, students in this program will also meet the Professional Selling program learning outcomes. These are:

LG: Professional Selling Knowledge and Competence – Demonstrates proficiency in knowledge of:

Objective 1: Sales Process

Objective 2: Sales Presentations

Objective 3: Inside Sales

Objective 4: Sales Research

Resource Estimates

The Center's faculty members are actively involved in creating and maintaining corporate partnerships. There are currently fourteen partners. Funding from these partnerships is used to provide resources for many of the Center's activities such as professional networking events, faculty and student travel to national sales competitions, student awards at role play competitions, scholarships, and faculty release time.

The Center also works with sponsors who do not contribute financially, but provide in-kind support such as student awards for sales assignments and recording platforms for competitions.

There is no need for additional faculty in the immediate or foreseeable future because program requirements include mostly currently offered courses. If enrollment grows substantially, there could eventually be a need for additional faculty. However, it is anticipated that growth could be covered by affiliate faculty who bring current sales experience to the classroom.

The Center is currently managed by a Director. There is no immediate or foreseeable need for additional program administration resources. No additional staff support in the Department of Marketing will be needed to support a Major in Professional Selling. If enrollment grows substantially, there could eventually be a need for additional staff support or student employees.

The Center recently moved into dedicated space in the College of Business building. The space includes offices for two faculty, two offices for the recording of student role plays, and a conference room that is used to meet with corporate partners and will be used in the future for role plays. There are no additional space requirements associated with the introduction of a Major in Professional Selling. There is no immediate need for additional equipment and materials.

Conclusion

The sales faculty members at this university are optimistic about the impact the proposed major will make. The overarching goal is to prepare students for rewarding, high-paying sales careers that are in high demand now and the foreseeable future. It is anticipated that the major will be available for student declaration as early as Fall 2020.

The professional sales landscape is ever-changing, and this university's sales faculty plan to evolve the program similarly. This faculty continually engage in professional development opportunities, conferences, and discussions with industry professionals to keep content and curriculum up-to-date with industry practice.

The sales faculty at this university recognize that internal support from the Department Chair, Dean, and other leaders has been essential for program growth. The Center has been provided with resources that enable growth, and the absence of such support would have been a significant barrier.

By sharing the research and proposal process, this university's faculty hope the result can serve as a potential blueprint for other institutions looking to create a sales majors.

APPENDIX
Proposed Course Requirements: Bachelor of Arts in Professional Selling

General Studies (33 Credits)	Major Courses (63 Credits)
<u>Written Communication (WC)</u>	MKT 1250 – 3 Introduction to Sales
Written Communication I – 3 (typically ENG 1010)	BUS 1850 – 3 Introduction to Business
Written Communication II – 3 (typically ENG 1020)	BUS 1950 – 3 Business Communication
	BUS 3040 – 3 Global Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability
<u>Oral Communication (OC)</u>	ACC 1010 – 3 Fundamentals of Accounting
CAS 1010 – 3 Public Speaking <i>or</i>	CIS 2010 – 3 Foundations of Information Systems
CAS1710 – 3 Interpersonal Communication	MGT 2210 – 3 Legal Environment of Business I
	MGT 3000 – 3 Organizational Management
<u>Quantitative Literacy (QL)</u>	FIN 3150 – 3 Personal Financial Planning
MTH 1210 – 3 Introduction to Statistics <i>or</i>	MKT 3000 – 3 Principles of Marketing
MTH 1310 – 3 Finite Math for Management & Social Sciences	MKT 3160 – 3 Sales Management
	MKT 3250 – 3 Personal Selling
<u>Arts & Humanities – 6</u>	MKT 3330 – 3 Marketing and Sales Metrics
	MKT 3320 – 3 Inside Sales
<u>Historical – 3</u>	MKT 3350 – 3 Social Selling
	MKT 3750 – 3 Multicultural Marketing
<u>Natural and Physical Sciences – 6</u>	MKT 4250 – 3 Advanced Selling (senior experience)
<u>Social and Behavioral Sciences</u>	Electives: Select 12 credit hours in consultation w/faculty advisor:
ECO 2010 – 3 Principles of Macroeconomics	CAS 3100 – 3 Business and Professional Speaking
ECO 2020 – 3 Principles of Microeconomics	MKT 1260 – 3 Customer Service
	MKT 3300 – 3 Marketing & Sales Metrics
<u>Global Diversity – 3</u>	MKT 3410 – 3 Marketing Channels
	MKT 3610 – 3 Business-to-Business Marketing
<u>Multicultural</u>	MKT 3710 – 3 International Marketing
MKT 3750 – 3 Multicultural Marketing	MKT 3910 – 3 New Product Development
	MKT 3981 – 3 Internship in Sales
General Electives (24 hours)	MKT 4110 – 3 Brand Management
	MGT 3530 – 3 Human Resources Management
	MGT 4050 – 3 Purchasing and Supply Chain Management
	MGT 4620 – 3 Performance Management & Reward Systems
	MGT 4640 – 3 Employee Training & Development

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