

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE? A COMPARISON OF “IVORY TOWER” AND “REAL WORLD” PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE CONTRIBUTION OF SALES RELATED COURSES IN UNIVERSITY CURRICULA

By Rajesh Gulati, Dennis Bristow, and Douglas Amyx

As a majority of college graduates with marketing degrees begin their professional careers in the sales area, delivering appropriate sales education becomes an important objective of business schools. This study advances research efforts in this area by examining perceptual differences between sales educators and sales managers with respect to the structure, content, and outcomes of professional selling and sales management courses currently being offered at most universities. Findings in this study reveal some important differences between sales educators who constitute the marketers of sales related education and sales managers, who as representatives of sales firms that hire graduates in sales positions, represent an important consumer group for such education. Findings in this study reveal some important differences between sales educators who constitute the marketers of sales related education and sales managers, who as representatives of sales firms that hire graduates in sales position, represent an important consumer group for such education. While results showed that both sales managers and sales educators indicated a preference for curriculums that incorporate one or more professional selling and one or more courses in sales management, about 10% of the sales managers viewed current university teaching formats for sales related courses as inadequate in terms of meeting the needs of students seeking related careers. Differences were also found in sales managers' and sales educators' perceptions of the level to which sales related courses contributed to students' related skill sets.

INTRODUCTION

Experts estimate that up to 80 percent of college students majoring in marketing begin their career in a sales related job (Heckman, 1998; Weilbaker, 2001). *Selling Power Magazine* (2005) reports that the top 500 firms belonging to various industries rely on approximately 17.5 million salespeople to achieve their revenue objectives. Further, the same report shows that between 2004 and 2005, those 500 companies added nearly 2 million new hires to their salesforces. In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Outlook Handbook (2004) reported continued growth expectations in the number of employment opportunities in sales related arenas and strong demand for entry level sales people with college degrees. Such statistics indicate that professional selling is an essential component of the business world and as such offers a variety of exciting and challenging career opportunities for university students graduating with degrees in marketing and related business disciplines.

In the last two decades, business schools in the U.S. have responded to this reality by integrating sales courses more concretely into the marketing curriculum. The emergence of sales centers at some universities (e.g., Savage & Associates Center for Advance Sales & Marketing at The university campus, therefore, is an important source for firms desirous of recruiting entry-level salespeople, a fact long acknowledged by researchers (see Muehling & Weeks, 1988). the University of Toledo; Fisher Center for Professional Selling at the University of Akron; The Center for Professional Selling at Baylor University; the Professional Sales Institute at Illinois State University; the Center for Professional Selling at Kennesaw State University; the Gregg Professional Selling Institute at Ball State University; the Sales Excellence Institute at the University of Houston; the Center for Sales Studies and Market Intelligence at the University of Indiana; the Russ Berrie Institute of Professional Selling at William Patterson University) underscores the value some marketing departments ascribe to sales education. The presence of sales centers in business schools

is, however, still uncommon. Marketing curricula at most business schools currently include either distinct professional selling and sales management courses or a combined course which incorporates components of both professional selling and sales management.

Realization of the relevance of sales related courses to students' careers has resulted in an increased focus on research in sales education. In the fall of 1995, for example, the *Journal of Marketing Education* devoted a special issue that addressed research on selling and sales management education. Topics explored in this issue included the development of writing skills (Donoho, Swenson & Taylor, 1995; McNeilly & Ranney, 1995), screening and selection process for sales jobs (Lollar & Leigh, 1995), relational selling and group dynamics (Macintosh, 1995), relationship selling (Tanner & Castleberry, 1995), and telemarketing (Milner, 1995). These and other similar studies (e.g., Marshall and Michaels 2001; McNeilly & Ranney, 1998; Ingram and LaForge 1992) have contributed to improving the quality of sales education in a continuing effort to provide students, who comprise an important consumer group for sales education, with necessary selling and sales management skills.

A related stream of research has delved into exploring how this consumer group perceives sales careers. Examples include studies that have investigated students' attitudes toward selling careers (Amin, Hayajneh, & Nwakanma, 1995; Belenger, Bernhardt, & Wayman, 1974; Dauner & Johnson, 1979; Lagace & Longfellow, 1989; Lysonski & Durvasula, 1998; Swenson, Swinyard, Langrehr, & Smith, 1993), as well as investigations into student expectations and perceptions of selling careers and sales jobs (Bellizzi & Hite, 1985; DeVecchio, 2000; Dubinsky, 1981; Harmon, 1999). In addition, recent studies have attempted to explore student perceptions regarding sales education and sales related careers (Bristow, Gulati, Amyx, & Slack, in press; Bristow, Gulati, & Amyx, in press).

Extant research, therefore, has addressed appropriately the interests and needs of students by attempting to make sales education more relevant and by eliciting feedback from this consumer group regarding sales careers. However, a second important consumer group, the marketing and sales organizations that hire students for entry level sales and sales management positions, have largely been ignored. These organizations consume the outputs of sales education in the shape of sales related knowledge and skills that reside in the students they hire and, therefore, comprise the consumer segment that is the ultimate recipient and beneficiary of the quality and relevance of sales education provided by business schools. Consequently, there is a need to conduct studies that explore perceptions and opinions that representatives of organizations have regarding current sales related education in order that educators, in the role as marketers, can improve further the product that is sales education. Much like the work others have performed in the area of supplier delusion (e.g., Ryals and Rogers 2006; Greek 1997; Turnbull, Ford, and Cunningham 1996), such studies may serve to reduce potential gaps between stakeholder perceptions of the university sales education product.

The need to obtain such feedback from organizations becomes more relevant in light of priorities formulated by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The AACSB has suggested that business education should focus on building relevant skills and imparting active learning (see Lamont & Friedman, 1997; Steven & Morris, 1997) and the standards laid down by AACSB emphasize that curriculum changes should be customer-driven (Bailey & Dangerfield, 2000). For sales education, this mandate can be more appropriately fulfilled if educators elicit feedback from representatives of hiring organizations such as sales managers in order to develop sales related courses that reflect the needs of these organizations. Obtaining input from sales managers regarding the structure, manner, and content of sales related courses be-

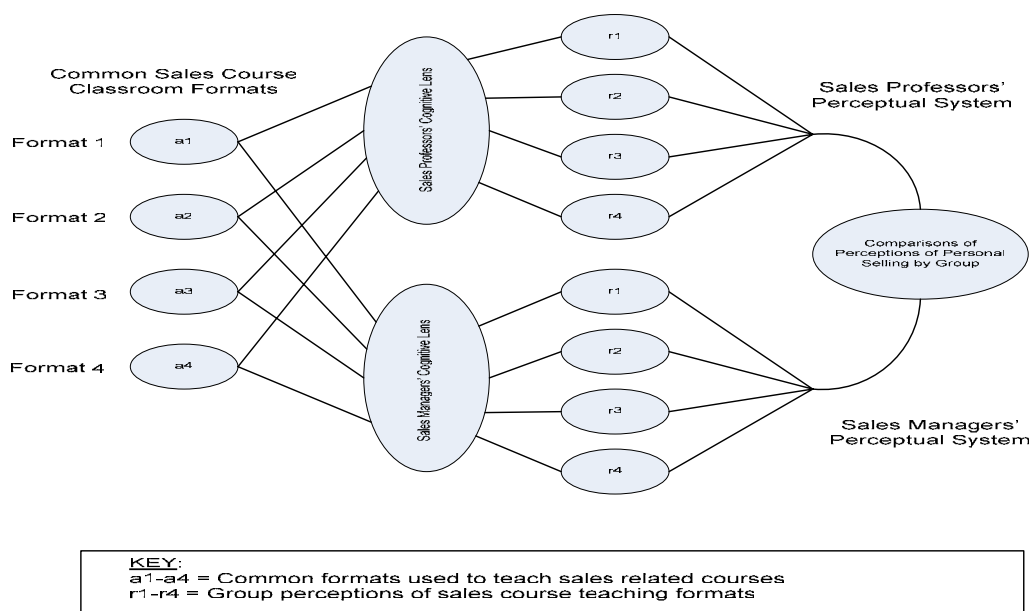
comes meaningful because these managers may have been recipients of sales education as students. Enriched by their experiences as salespersons and/or sales managers, these individuals can provide practical insights to academicians who design and teach sales courses.

This study adopts the consumer-driven perspective AACSB advocates and attempts to develop initial benchmarks with respect to sales related courses. In order to accomplish this, the current study attempts to determine if differences exist between academicians who teach sales related courses (the marketers of sales education) and sales managers (the ultimate consumers of sales education) with respect to the perceptions they hold toward sales education. The classic works of Egon Brunswik and his cognitive lens model (1952) suggest that such perceptual differences between educators and managers would indeed be predictable. Brunswik's model has been adapted and expanded (Bristow, Mowen, & Krieger, 1994) and the resultant Marketing Lens Model (see Figure 1) has subsequently been applied in a variety of research settings (Bristow, 1998; Bristow & Amyx, 1998, 1999; Bristow & Asquith, 1999).

The Marketing Lens Model (MLM) was developed to facilitate the assessment and comparison of stakeholder perceptions and ratings of the importance of and satisfaction with product/service attributes/components across diverse stakeholder groups. The MLM is based upon the predication that one's perceptions of his/her environment are strongly influenced by the individual's experiences, knowledge, and expectations (Brunswik, 1952). That is, different individuals and/or groups, having unique and varied experiences and knowledge, can be expected to exhibit distinctly different perceptions of the environment (or products) they share.

The MLM consists of three distinct components: (1) individual product/service attributes/components, (2) the cognitive lenses of relevant stakeholder groups, and (3) the perceptions of relevant stakeholder groups. As can be seen in Figure 1, the left side of the MLM consists of product or service attributes that are of primary importance to the stakeholder groups of interest. In any application, this component of the model consists of product or service attributes that are of primary importance to the stakeholder groups of interest. For example, as part of their marketing research, a marketer of laptop computers

Figure 1.
The Marketing Lens Model



might seek to determine the degree to which the perceptions of its own sales force members are consistent with or diverge from the perceptions of the target market with regard to the product's processor speed, dependability, user-friendliness, memory capacity, and software compatibility. In such a study, those elements of the laptop computer would represent the left side of the MLM. In the current study, the left side of the model is comprised of individual classroom formats commonly used to teach college/university level sales related courses.

The second component of the MLM consists of stakeholder groups' cognitive lenses that may account for discrepancies between stakeholder groups' perceptions of those teaching formats. This central component of the model consists of individual or group experiences that affect attitudes, beliefs, viewpoints, expectations, interpretations and so forth. As Brunswik suggested, those perceptual lenses account for distinctions in how different groups may perceive the same element of a shared environment. For example, imagine a sales trainee with virtually no industrial selling experience and limited knowledge of the product or the competition who is shadowing a senior manufacturer's representative with twenty years of field experience and in-depth product knowledge. Those two individuals, given their different experience and knowledge, might be expected to react very differently to the client who pounds his or her desk and shouts, "Are you crazy? I can get a similar product from your competitor for much less!" In the same way that the trainee and the manufacturers rep will differ in their perceptions of the same stimulus in their environment, the underpinnings of the MLM suggest that university educators and sales managers, groups comprised of individuals likely to have very different experiences, expectations, and/or objectives, could be predicted to exhibit dissimilar perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the various teaching formats.

The product attributes, as perceived and evaluated by each consumer group studied, are represented by the third element of the model (the

right side). Previous researchers using the MLM have assessed this cognitive side of the model via survey methods and analyzed the data via t-tests and Chi-square analysis (i.e., Bristow, 1998; Bristow & Amyx, 1999; Bristow & Asquith, 1999).

Based upon the literatures reviewed and the underpinnings of the MLM, this study seeks answers to the following four research questions:

1. What perceptual differences, if any, exist between academicians who teach sales courses and sales managers regarding the most effective format for teaching sales related courses?
2. What perceptual differences, if any, exist between sales managers and academicians who teach sales related courses as regards the contribution such courses make in developing professional selling skills in students?
3. What perceptual differences, if any, exist between sales managers and academicians who teach sales related courses as regards the contributions such courses make in developing sales management skills in students?
4. What perceptual differences, if any, exist between sales managers and academicians who teach sales courses as regards the adequacy of professional selling and sales management courses in preparing students for sales careers?

Although not stated in the research questions, such a study does allow for directional evaluation of perceptual differences between sales educators and sales managers. Specifically, the data allow for comparisons that reveal which group, sales educators or sales managers, has a more favorable perception on any of the issues evaluated. And, although not specifically stated in the research question, the authors expect that, in general, sales educators should have more favorable perceptions than sales managers. In seeking answers to the stated research questions, then, the current study aims to begin a process of evaluation of sales related courses and identify areas, if any, that need modification so that aca-

demicians are better able to meet the needs of graduating students and their prospective employers. The next section details the method employed to collect data. Thereafter the results of the study are presented and are followed by a discussion of the implications that flow from the results. Finally, the limitations and future research avenues are listed.

METHOD

Survey Instrument

The researchers consulted textbooks in professional selling (e.g., Futrell, 2002; Weitz, Castleberry & Tanner, 2001) and sales management (e.g., Dalrymple, Cron, & DeCarlo, 2002) in addition to using their sales related expertise and experiences in order to develop a list of statements that addressed the abovementioned research questions. This led to the formulation of (a) eleven statements that tapped perceptions regarding the extent to which professional selling courses contribute to developing necessary sales skills, (b) eight statements that addressed the extent to which sales management courses provide relevant managerial skills in students, and (c) seven statements that required respondents to evaluate the importance and adequacy of professional selling and sales management courses currently offered by colleges and universities. In addition, the researchers identified teaching formats commonly used in business schools to teach sales related courses and included them as components of a question in the survey instrument (see Table 1). Two separate survey instruments were developed to obtain feedback from academicians and sales managers. Each questionnaire contained the above noted 26 statements written into 5-point Likert type scales with end points of (1) disagree completely and (5) agree completely. In addition, each survey instrument contained questions and statements designed to seek demographic and other relevant information from the two respondent groups. Finally, each instrument included a list of the following teaching formats:

Format 1: One or more college/university courses in professional selling, no course in sales management.

Format 2: One or more college/university courses in sales management, no course in professional selling.

Format 3: At least one college/university course in professional selling and at least one course in sales management.

Format 4: One college/university course that combines both professional selling and sales management.

College/university sales related courses do not meet the needs of students intending to pursue a career in sales.

Educators were asked to indicate which of the formats would provide students with the best preparation for a career in professional selling/sales management. Sales managers were asked to indicate which professional selling/sales management teaching format most adequately met the needs of college students desiring a career in sales.

The survey instrument that sought to elicit information from academicians was reviewed for face validity and subsequently pilot tested with eight marketing faculty with expertise in one or more disciplines including professional selling and/or sales management, marketing research, and consumer behavior at a large mid-western university. This process led to the rewording of several items. A second pilot test revealed no problems with the clarity or comprehensibility of the items. The second survey instrument designed for sales managers was similarly examined for face validity and reviewed by several research analysts, industry-based sales managers, and the managing editor of nationally distributed sales magazine. In order to facilitate statistical comparisons, the researchers were careful to ensure that both survey instruments contained identical statements.

The two survey instruments were initially administered using electronic formats. As the response of sales managers to the electronically distributed questionnaire was marginal, the researchers incorporated the survey questions into a paper and pencil questionnaire which was then distributed to a sample of sales managers via the U.S. Postal service.

Participants

The survey instrument was distributed electronically using the e-mail addresses of a national sample of 1000 educators that were selected at random from the American Marketing Association member directory. Due to a variety of reasons (i.e., failure notice; returned mail; local configuration error; name-server error report; undeliverable message; etc.), a total of 669 out of the 1000 e-mailed surveys were delivered successfully. A total of 219 responses were received resulting in a response rate of approximately 33%. In addition to the 219 responses, another 40 e-mails were received indicating that those academicians did not teach sales related courses.

The researchers were interested in the responses of only those educators who were either currently teaching, or had in the recent past (i.e., in the last two years) taught sales related courses. As this information was not available in the AMA directory, the survey instrument contained a screening question to facilitate appropriate responses from the sample of educators. Out of the 219 responses received, the researchers identified 93 respondents who met the screening criterion and had completed the questionnaire. Hence, those 93 responses that were received from academicians who currently or had recently taught one or more sales related courses were included in the analysis conducted here. Approximately 66% of these respondents had taught courses in professional selling, about 60% had taught sales management, and roughly 37% of the respondents had taught both professional selling and sales management courses. Most of these respondents (approximately 81%) had professional selling experience and about 40% had

prior sales management experience.

As was true in the case of marketing academicians, the researchers were primarily interested in the responses of those sales managers who currently or had in the recent past (i.e., in the last two years) managed a sales force. Accordingly a screening question was included in the paper and pencil questionnaire to ensure that only responses that met the researchers' criterion were included for analysis. Survey instruments were mailed to a national random sample of 1500 sales managers taken from the subscription list of a nationally distributed sales magazine. A total of 203 questionnaires were received; 168 from managers who met the screening criterion and 35 from sales managers who did not. A total of 55 questionnaires were returned as being non-deliverable, thus resulting in a response rate of approximately 14%. The early and late respondent comparison procedure (see Armstrong & Overton, 1977) indicated no non-response bias.

On average, the sales managers who met the screening criterion had approximately 15.6 years of experience as professional sales people and 8.16 years of experience as sales managers. Approximately 30% of these respondents managed consumer goods sales forces while the remaining 70% were employed in the industrial goods sector. A vast majority of the sales managers (approximately 80%) had either a college or graduate school degree.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The two sets of data containing 93 responses from academicians and 168 responses from sales managers, respectively, were merged to facilitate analysis. The data were subjected to chi-square and t-test procedures in order to evaluate the research questions this study posed.

The first research question this study sought to explore dealt with evaluating potential perceptual differences between sales educators and sales managers as regards the format these two groups deemed as most effective in meeting the needs of students who desired a career in sales. A total

TABLE 1

Comparing the perspectives of sales managers and academicians on the most preferred teaching format of sales related courses for students seeking a career in sales

Teaching Format Selected	Participant Responses	
	Sales Educator n = 93	Sales Manager n = 168
One or more courses in professional selling, no courses in sales management	5 (5.4%)	19 (11.4%)
One or more courses in sales management, no courses in professional selling management		2 (1.2%)
At least one professional selling and at least one sales management course	71 (76.3%)	89 (53.3%)
One course that combines both professional selling and sales management	16 (17.2%)	40 (24%)
College/University courses do not meet the needs of students pursuing a career in sales	1 (1.1%)	17 (10.2%)
Chi-Square = 17.017; p = .002		

NOTE: Two cells have very low counts, one cell has no count, hence the chi-square value should be interpreted with caution.

of four teaching formats commonly used by business schools (i.e., one or more personal selling course and one or more sales management course, one personal selling course only, one sales management course only, a combined personal selling and sales management course) were identified. Data obtained from sales managers were evaluated initially to determine if the education levels of sales managers was in anyway related to the teaching formats they preferred; no statistically significant differences could be identified. The researchers subsequently merged these data with those obtained from sales educators and subjected the merged data set to Chi-square analysis. Table 1 presents the results of this analysis. Although the Chi-square is statisti-

Northern Illinois University

TABLE 2

Comparing the perspectives of sales managers and academicians on the most preferred teaching format of sales related courses for students seeking a career in sales:
Identifying Differences

Teaching Format Selected	Chi-Square	P-value
One or more courses in professional selling, no courses in sales management	2.567	.109
One or more courses in sales management, no courses in sales management*		
At least one professional selling and at least one sales management course	13.779	.000
One course that combines both professional selling and sales management	1.550	.213
College/University courses do not meet the needs of students pursuing a career in sales**	7.625	.006

NOTE: (*) One of the format options, i.e., could not be evaluated because one cell has no count.

(**) Chi-square value should be interpreted with caution as one cell has very low count.

cally significant ($\chi^2 = 17.017$; $p = .002$) suggesting that sales managers and sales educators differ

as regards the format they perceive to be the most beneficial for teaching sales related courses, the presence of very low counts in some cells and no count in one cell (see Table 1) makes any interpretation suspect. Consequently, a series of Chi-square tests were performed to more appropriately identify specific formats, if any, where the two groups had differing perceptions (see Table 2).

Table 2 reports a statistically significant Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 13.779$; $p = .000$) against the format which entails teaching at least one or more courses in personal selling and at least one or more courses in sales management. Taken to-

gether with the information Table 1 presents, this indicates that among the individuals who responded to the survey questions, a greater proportion of sales educators as compared to sales managers feel that this format best meets the needs of students seeking a sales career. Notwithstanding this statistically significant finding, it is worth noting that a majority of both sales managers (53.3%) and sales educators (76.3%) preferred this teaching format to any other format included in the survey instruments.

The information reported in Tables 1 and 2 also indicates that a greater proportion of sales managers, as compared to sales educators, feel that college/university sales related courses do not meet the needs of students intending to pursue a career in sales ($\chi^2 = 17.625$; $p = .006$).

However, this statistical difference has to be tempered in light of a very low count in one of the cells. Chi-square tests involving the other formats were not statistically significant, indicating that for the responding individuals, there

were no differences between sales managers and sales educators as regards their perceptions about the usefulness of other formats used in universities to teach sales related courses. Overall, then the results of Chi-Square analysis reveal that both sales managers and sales educators largely agree that offering (a) only a professional selling course, (b) only a sales management course, or even (c) a course that combines both professional selling and sales management are not appropriate formats for delivering sales related education. In order to answer the second research question which asked if sales educators and sales managers had different perceptions regarding the contribution of professional selling courses in developing professional selling skills in students, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results of these tests are presented in Table 3. The mean scores of the responses of both sales educators and sales managers to the various items listed in Table 3 indicates that on average, both these groups agree that professional selling courses in universities

TABLE 3

Results of t-tests evaluating potential differences between sales educators and sales managers with regard to the contribution of professional selling courses

Survey Question: If all entry level sales people (no prior sales experience) are compared, those salespeople who completed at least one personal selling course are likely to...	Sales Educator n = 93	Sales Manager n = 168	Difference	t-value
	Mean	Mean		
... possess superior oral communication skills	3.73	3.23	.50	4.011*
... be better prepared to prospect for new clients	4.17	3.47	.70	6.433*
... be better prepared to effectively qualify new prospects	4.16	3.51	.65	5.852*
... make more effective sales presentations	4.25	3.80	.45	4.152*
... be better prepared to deal with client objections	4.23	3.44	.79	6.663*
... be better prepared to close a sale	4.19	3.32	.88	6.920*
... be better prepared for success in a professional selling career	4.15	3.57	.59	4.829*
... better appreciate the importance of providing after sales service	4.31	3.39	.92	9.148*
... be more effective listeners	3.98	3.32	.66	5.049*
... better recognize the importance of understanding customer needs in professional selling	4.44	3.63	.81	8.586*
... be better prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas in selling situations	3.96	3.29	.67	5.329*

NOTE: (*) indicates that the t statistic is significant at $p = .00$ (2-tailed)

provide and improve an entry level salesperson's selling skills. The proportion of sales managers that indicated an agreement (either agree or strongly agree) with the eleven items listed in Table 3 ranged between 46% and 73%, while the proportion of sales educators indicating agreement with these items ranged between 75% and 78%.

For all the eleven items included in the study to address the abovementioned research question, however, the t-values indicated that the differences between the perceptions of sales educators and sales managers were statistically significant (see Table 3). More specifically, Table 3 reports that the sampled sales educators perceived more favorably than did the sampled sales managers the contribution of professional selling courses in (a) developing superior communication skills in individuals ($t = 4.011$, $p = .00$), (b) preparing individuals to prospect for new clients ($t = 4.17$, $p = .00$), teaching individuals how to effectively qualify new prospects ($t = 4.16$, $p = .00$), making

effective sales presentations ($t = 4.25$, $p = .00$), dealing with client objections ($t = 4.23$, $p = .00$), and closing a sale ($t = 4.19$, $p = .00$), (c) better preparing an individual for a successful career in sales ($t = 4.15$, $p = .00$), (d) fostering in individuals a better appreciation of the importance of providing after sales service ($t = 4.31$, $p = .00$), (e) improving individuals' listening skills ($t = 3.98$, $p = .00$), (f) helping individuals better recognize the importance of customer needs in professional selling ($t = 4.44$, $p = .00$), and (f) preparing individuals to better deal with ethical dilemmas in selling situations ($t = 3.96$, $p = .00$).

Table 4 presents the results of independent samples t-tests conducted to evaluate the third research question that was of interest in this study. Similar in tone to the second research question, this question sought to explore whether sales educators and sales managers differed in their perceptions as regards the contributions that sales management courses taught in universities and colleges made in developing sales manage-

TABLE 4

Results of t-tests evaluating potential differences between sales educators and sales managers with regard to the contribution of sales management courses

Survey Question: If all entry level sales managers (no previous sales management experience) are compared, those sales managers who completed at least one sales management course in college are likely to ...I	Sales Educator n = 93	Sales Manager n = 168	Difference	t-value
	Mean	Mean		
... be better at developing sales forecasts	3.92	3.46	.46	3.693*
... be better prepared to develop equitable sales quotas	4.01	3.27	.74	6.378*
... be better prepared to make the transition into sales management	4.20	3.57	.63	5.564*
... be better prepared to make appropriate hiring decisions	3.91	2.94	.97	7.889*
... be better at analyzing sales force performance	4.10	3.32	.78	6.795*
... be better prepared to determine territory allocations	3.95	3.07	.87	7.088*
... be better prepared to make salesforce compensation decisions	4.01	3.10	.91	7.520*
... be better prepared to handle ethical dilemmas involving salespeople	4.00	3.29	.71	5.916*

NOTE: (*) indicates that the t statistic is significant at $p = .00$ (2-tailed)

ment skills in students. As indicated by the average response scores of the sampled sales managers and sales educators to the eight statements listed in Table 4, both these groups on average agreed that sales management courses at universities did indeed build sales management skills in students. Preliminary descriptive analysis revealed that between 40% and 63% of responding sales managers tended to agree with the statements listed in Table 4, whereas an overwhelming majority of sales educators (85% - 90%) agreed with such statements.

For all the eight items listed in Table 4, t-values indicated that the responding sales educators and sales managers differed in their perceptions. Specifically, sales educators believed to a greater extent than did sales managers that, as compared to other individuals, students who took sales management courses currently offered in universities were better equipped to (a) develop sales

forecasts ($t = 3.693, p = .00$), (b) allocate equitable sales quotas ($t = 6.378, p = .00$), (c) make a transition into sales management ($t = 5.564, p = .00$), (d) make appropriate hiring decisions ($t = 7.889, p = .00$), (e) analyze sales force performance ($t = 6.795, p = .00$), (f) determine territory allocations ($t = 7.088, p = .00$), (g) make sales force compensation decisions ($t = 7.520, p = .00$), and (h) handle ethical dilemmas involving salespeople ($t = 5.916, p = .00$). Descriptive analysis also suggested that the perceptual differences between sales educators and sales managers were greater in case of sales management courses than they were in case of professional selling courses.

The last research question this study sought to answer related closely to the previous two questions evaluated above. Specifically, the fourth research question was formulated to evaluate the extent to which sales educators and sales manag-

TABLE 5

Results of t-tests evaluating potential differences between sales educators and sales managers with regard to impact of sales related courses on students' preparation for a sales related career

Items	Sales Educator n = 93	Sales Manager n = 168	Difference	t-value
	Mean	Mean		
It is important for entry level salespeople (no prior sales experience) to have completed a professional selling course while in college	4.00	3.51	.49	3.300*
It is important for entry level salespeople to have completed a sales management course while in college	3.44	3.08	.36	2.342**
It is important for entry level salespeople to have a business degree from a well respected college or university	3.27	2.71	.56	3.633*
Sales courses at universities prepare graduates adequately for a professional selling career	3.30	2.45	.85	6.307*
Sales management courses at universities prepare graduates adequately for a sales management career	2.96	2.55	.41	2.956*
After completing a professional selling course, a graduate is better prepared for a career in sales	4.52	3.66	.86	7.506*
After completing a sales management course, a graduate is better prepared for a career in sales management	4.24	3.43	.80	6.754*

NOTE: (*) indicates that the t statistic is significant at $p = .00$ (2-tailed); (**) indicates that the t statistic is significant at $p = .02$ (2-tailed)

ers perceived that sales related courses taught currently at universities were important, relevant, and adequately prepared students to enter sales related careers. A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the seven statements that addressed this research question (see Table 5). For this set of statements, like the previously examined items, sales educators and sales managers differed in their perceptions. Specifically, the responding sales educators believed to a greater extent than did sales managers that it was important for entry level salespeople to have completed professional selling ($t = 3.300$, $p = .00$) and sales management courses ($t = 2.342$, $p = .00$). Further, sales educators, as compared to sales managers, thought that it was more important for an entry level salesperson to have a business degree ($t = 3.633$, $p = .00$). In addition, sales educators felt to a greater extent than did sales managers that sales courses and sales management courses prepared graduates adequately for professional selling ($t = 6.307$, $p = .00$) and sales management careers ($t = 2.956$, $p = .00$). Finally, sales educators agreed to a greater extent than did sales manager that after completing professional selling and sales management courses, a graduate was better prepared for a career in sales and sales management respectively (t-values were 7.506 and 6.754 for these two statements, see Table 5).

Descriptive analysis of the responses of sales educators and sales managers to this set of seven items yielded some interesting insights. As is evident from mean response scores of sales educators and sales managers to these items in Table 5, both these groups agreed in general that professional selling and sales management courses were relevant for entry level salespeople, and that completion of these courses better prepared a graduate for sales and sales management careers. However, these two groups had different opinions regarding the adequacy of sales and sales management courses currently being offered at universities. While 50% of sales educators believed that sales courses adequately prepared students for sales careers (mean score =

3.30), only 17% of sales managers held this belief (mean = 2.45). Further, approximately 37% of sales educators felt that sales management courses being offered in universities adequately prepared students for a career in sales management (mean score = 2.96) whereas only 24% of sales managers agreed with this statement (mean score = 2.55).

The potential implications of the findings reported against the four research questions that were evaluated in the above paragraphs are discussed next.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Of the four teaching formats that were evaluated in this study, both sales managers and sales educators who responded to the survey instruments largely preferred a university curriculum that incorporated at least one or more courses in professional selling and at least one or more courses in sales management. This agreement indicates that marketers of sales education (i.e., the academicians) as well as the final consumers of this education (i.e., the sales managers) have similar views regarding which of the included formats best meets the needs of students seeking a career in sales. A direct implication that flows from this finding is that universities with curriculums that incorporate any of the other formats mentioned in this study would be more responsive to market needs if they revisited their curriculums and considered the possibility of offering both professional selling and sales management courses to students majoring in marketing. An extension of this implication is the proposition that more universities should investigate the feasibility of offering relevant and comprehensive sales programs, similar to those provided by sales centers that have been formed at some universities. Given the importance of sales and sales management to a marketing student's career, it may be worthwhile for universities to add more sales related courses to their curriculum, and thereby, better meet the needs of hiring organizations that are looking for entry-level salespeople (and sales managers) as well as students that want a

sales related career.

Although there was general agreement regarding the most preferred format, sales educators viewed the abovementioned format more favorably (76.3%) than did sales managers (53.3%). This difference is especially relevant in light of the finding that approximately 10% of the responding sales managers felt that none of the teaching formats currently adopted by most universities met the needs of students seeking a career in sales and/or sales management. These two findings taken together, when generalized across the populations of sales educators and sales managers, reveal that from the perspective of sales managers, the current curriculums at most universities may not be adequate when it comes to delivering sales related courses.

So what should an adequate curriculum comprise? The potential answer to this question becomes complicated, given that in addition to general skills taught at universities, entry-level salespeople need and develop industry-specific and firm-specific sales related skills only after they join a sales organization through in-house and on-the-job training. However, as suppliers of sales related education, some of the steps we can take include (a) a more adequately assessment of the needs of organizations that hire graduates for sales positions, (a) development of more practical and comprehensive approaches to impart sales related skills through offering sales related courses and seminars that require students opportunities to practice and hone the skills they learn, (c) establishment of partnerships with firms so that sales education can be more “real life”, and (d) an investigation of the feasibility of offering sales related elective courses that are industry-specific in some circumstances.

Findings that addressed the second and third research questions revealed that although sales educators and sales managers largely agreed that professional selling and sales management courses contributed to the development of selling and sales management related skills and

knowledge, sales educators had more favorable opinions regarding the usefulness of such courses currently being taught at universities and colleges. The good news for academicians delivering sales related education is that the final consumers (i.e., the sales managers) perceive that such education adds value. However, the difference in perceptions between sales educators and sales managers reveals that the final consumers of professional sales education do not perceive the product (i.e., sales and sales management knowledge and skills) to provide the same value as do the marketers of this education. Some possible reasons for this divergence in perceptions between these two groups are: (1) sales educators have a biased view of the value they provide, (2) sales managers have a biased view of the value they receive, or (3) both groups are somewhat biased but in opposite directions. Drawing on the adage that “the customer is always right”, it seems reasonable to imply that sales educators need to make an in-depth assessment of the value they currently provide through sales related education and attempt to do a better job to increase this value. Such an objective might be achieved via additional research, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and survey research to gain additional insights and understanding of the skills, knowledge and training sales managers look for in the sales forces of today and tomorrow.

Findings pertaining to the last research question underscore and further refine some of the implications resulting from the evaluation of the first three research questions. Although both sales educators and sales managers generally agree as to the importance and value of sales related education, the marketers of sales education are more favorably disposed than are final consumers. More remarkable is the implication that despite having favorable opinions regarding the usefulness of sales related education, some sales educators and most sales managers believe that currently dispensed sales education may not adequately meet the needs of students seeking sales

related careers. This opinion may be based, to an extent, on the fact that work experiences provide much needed exposure and training to entry level salespeople and sales managers, and education delivered in universities cannot duplicate such exposure. Notwithstanding this fact, this finding sends an important message to sales educators, i.e., there may be wisdom in revisiting the content and delivery of sales related education so that a better and more comprehensive product is offered to the market. Those universities that have established sales centers and are providing in-depth sales training and education may be ahead of the curve in terms of meeting the current needs of the market.

While sales practitioners and academicians appear to differ on a number of pedagogical issues, the recent growth of sales centers at universities may be the best opportunity to bridge the gap between educators and sales managers. Sales centers are designed to immerse students into the field of selling by providing a more in depth and practical learning environment. For example, sales centers offer multiple courses in selling and sales management and are designed to foster long term relationships with enriched practical learning experiences between students and salespeople through shadowing, mentoring and other programs. As such programs continue to take root, then so will the likelihood of an ideological convergence between how and what sales students learn, and what sales practitioners want from students. In sum, the success of university sales centers may be measured not only by the preparedness of those students trained through sales centers, but also by the lessening of perceived gaps between sales academicians and sales practitioners who hire those students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study and the implications drawn from those findings shed light on some important issues concerning the structure, content, and delivery of sales related education in universities. However, because the response rates for the sampled sales educators and sales

managers were relatively low, the above-noted findings should be generalized with caution. A replication of this study with a better response rate will increase the generalizability of its findings. Further, although this study sought the opinions of sales educators and sales managers, it did not evaluate the perceptions of students, an important consumer group that directly “consumes” sales related education. A study that incorporates the views of students and compares them to the views of sales educators and sales managers is likely to yield useful additional insights.

This study was an initial investigation into the perceptions of sales managers and sales educators regarding current common offerings in sales related education. Further research is needed to identify avenues for improving professional selling and sales management education to make it more relevant and adequate. A specific field of inquiry in this regard would pertain to obtaining feedback from important stakeholders (e.g., sales organizations) regarding their priorities and requirements for entry level salespeople and sales managers through an in-depth evaluation of requisite professional selling and sales management skills and knowledge for those entry level employees. Such a study would facilitate better structured and more comprehensive sales related courses.

CONCLUSION

This study compared the perceptions of sales educators and sales managers with regard to the salience, validity, and usefulness of sales related courses being currently taught at most universities by seeking to answer four related research questions. These comparisons between sales educators as marketers of a product (sales and sales management knowledge and skills residing in students) and sales managers as final consumers who hire these students yielded some constructive insights and indicated several areas where improvements may be in order. Further research on this topic should help educators better structure and deliver sales related curriculums

in colleges and universities and improve sales related education to more appropriately and adequately address the needs of employers.

REFERENCES

- Amin, Sammy G., Abdalla F. Hayajneh, and Hudson Nwakanma. 1995. College students' views of sales jobs as a career: An empirical investigation. *American Business Review* 13 (2): 54-60.
- Anonymous. 2005. America's 500 largest sales forces. *Selling Power Magazine* (October): 58-60.
- Armstrong, S. J., and T.S. Overton. 1977. Estimating non-response bias in mail surveys. *Journal of Marketing Research* 14 (August): 396-402.
- Bailey, Jeffrey J. and Byron Dangerfield. 2000. Applying the distinction between market-oriented and customer-led strategic perspectives to business school strategy. *Journal of Education for Business* 75 (3): 183-.
- Bellenger, Danny N., Kenneth L. Bernhardt, and Wilbur Wayman. 1974. Student attitudes toward selling as a career: Implications for marketing education. In *1974 American Marketing Association Proceedings*, edited by R. Curhan. 580-84. Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- Bellizzi, Joseph A., and Robert E. Hite. 1985. Expectations of prospective salespeople with regard to professional selling positions. In *Proceedings of the 1985 Southwestern Marketing Association Conference*, edited by J. Crawford and B. Garland, 153-58. Southwestern Marketing Association.
- Bristow, Dennis N. 1998. Do you see what I see? The marketing lens model in an academic setting. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 8(4): 1-16.
- _____, and Douglas Amyx. 1999. Consumer primacy on campus: A look at the perceptions of Navajo and Anglo consumers. *Journal of Non-Profit and Public Sector Marketing* 7(2): 31-51.
- _____, _____ 1998. Do you see what I see? A cross-cultural investigation of consumer perceptions of the educational product. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* 10(3): 3-20.
- _____, and Jo Ann Asquith 1999. What's in a name? An intra-cultural investigation of Hispanic and Anglo consumer preferences and importance of brand name. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 8(3): 185-203.
- _____, Rajesh Gulati, Douglas Amyx, and Jennifer Slack. (forthcoming). Do you see what I see? An empirical look at professional selling from a student perspective. *Journal of Business for Higher Education*.
- _____, _____, and _____. (forthcoming). Do you see what I see? An empirical look at professional selling from a student perspective: A replication and extension. *Marketing Management Journal*.
- Dalrymple, Douglas J., William L. Cron, and Thomas E. DeCarlo 2001. *Sales Management*. John Wiley and Sons, New York, NY.
- Dauner, Jack R. and Eugene Johnson. 1979. Attitudes of college students toward selling: An exploratory study. *Proceedings Southern Marketing Association*, 161-164. Southern Marketing Association.
- DelVecchio, Susan. 2000. An investigation of African-American perceptions of sales jobs. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* 20 (1): 43-52.
- Greek, Dinah. 1997. Delusion in good supply. *Professional Engineering* 10, 19: 1.
- Donoho, Casey L., Michael J. Swenson, and Garry R. Taylor. 1995. Journal writing in the personal selling curriculum. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 5-16.
- Dubinsky, Alan J. 1981. Perceptions of the sales job: How students compare with industrial salespeople. *Academy of Marketing Science* 9 (4): 352-67.
- Futrell, Charles M. 2002. *Fundamentals of Selling: Customers for Life*. Irwin McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.
- Harmon, Harry A. 1999. An examination of students' perceptions of a situationally described career in personal selling. *Journal of Professional Services Marketing* 19 (1): 119-136.

- Heckman, James. 1998. Internet, sales focus to affect higher ed. *Marketing News* (December 7): 9.
- Ingram, Tom and Buddy LaForge. 1992. Agenda for improving personal selling and sales management research. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 12 (fall): 7-8.
- Lagace, Rosemary R., and Timothy A. Longfellow. 1989. The impact of classroom style on student attitudes toward sales careers: A comparative approach. *Journal of Marketing Education* 11 (summer): 72-77.
- Lamont, Lawrence M. and Ken Friedman. 1997. Meeting the challenges of undergraduate marketing education. *Journal of Marketing Education* 19 (fall): 17-30.
- Lollar, James G. and Thomas W. Leigh. 1995. An experiential exercise for enlightening sales students about the screening and selection process for sales jobs. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 35-50.
- Lysonski, Steven, and Srinivas Durvasula. 1998. A cross-national investigation of student attitudes toward personal selling: implications for marketing education. *Journal of Marketing Education* 20 (August): 161-173.
- Macintosh, Gerrard. 1995. Using negotiations to teach relational selling and group dynamics. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 63-72.
- Marshall, Greg W. and Ronald E. Michaels. 2001. Research in selling and sales management in the next millennium: An agenda from the AMA faculty consortium. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 21 (winter): 15-17.
- McNeilly, Kevin M. and Frances J. Ranney. 1995. Improving writing skills in sales management courses: The use of memo-writing exercises. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 17-24.
- and Frances J. Ranney. 1998. Combining writing and electronic media in sales management courses. *Journal of Marketing Education* 20 (fall): 226-235.
- Milner, Laura M. 1995. Telemarketing for the business school as a sales course project. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 73-80.
- Muehling, Darrel D., and William A. Weeks. 1988. Women's perceptions of personal selling: Some positive results. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* 8 (May): 11-20.
- Pharr, Steven and Linda Morris. 1997. The fourth-generation marketing curriculum: Meeting AACSB guidelines. *Journal of Marketing Education* 19 (fall): 31-43.
- Ryals, Lynette J. and Beth Rogers. 2006. Holding up the mirror: The impact of strategic procurement practices on account management. *Business Horizons* 49, 1 (January-February): 41-50.
- Swenson, Michael J., William Swinyard, Frederick Langrehr, and Scott Smith. 1993. The appeal of personal selling as a career: A decade later. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* 13 (1): 51-64.
- Tanner Jr., John F. and Stephen B. Castleberry. 1995. Professional selling and relationship marketing: Moving from transactional role-playing to partnering. *Journal of Marketing Education* 17 (fall): 51-62.
- Turnbull, Peter, David Ford and Malcolm Cunningham. 1996. The Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing 11 (3/4): 44-62.
- Weilbaker, Dan C. (2001), "Why a Career in Sales," in *Careers in Professional Selling*. Center for Professional Selling, Hankamer School of Business, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, pp. 4-5.
- Weitz, Barton A., Stephen B. Castleberry, and John F. Tanner, Jr. 2002. *Selling: Building Relationships*. Irwin-McGraw Hill, New York, NY.

Rajesh Gulati is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the G.R. Herberger College of Business at St. Cloud State University. He completed his MBA in Marketing in 1986. He received his Ph.D. in Marketing from University of North Texas in 1999. rgulati@stcloudstate.edu

Dennis N. Bristow is a Distinguished Professor of Marketing and the Associate Dean, G.R. Herberger College of Business, at St. Cloud State University. He received his B.S. degree in Psychology in 1989, and M.A. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology in 1991. He received his Ph.D. in Business Administration and Marketing from Oklahoma State University in 1995. He works in the areas of consumer behavior, cross-cultural marketing, and personal marketing. dbristow@stcloudstate.edu

Douglas A. Amyx is an Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Management and Marketing, at Louisiana Tech University. He received his B.B.A. degree in Marketing in 1986, and M.B.A. in Marketing in 1990. He received his Ph.D. in Business Administration and Marketing from Oklahoma State University in 1995. His work is in the areas of consumer behavior, cross-cultural marketing, and health care marketing. damyx@cab.tech.edu