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# Evaluating Educational Practices for Positively Affecting Student Perceptions of a Sales Career

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## **Evaluating Educational Practices for Positively Impacting Student Perceptions of a Sales Career**

### **Abstract**

Despite demand for new graduates seeking a sales position, student reticence toward pursuing a sales career remains. While all students will not choose a sales career, diminishing the existence of sales-related misconceptions among the student population should establish sales as a viable career path for a larger number of students. We test six educational interventions in large Principle of Marketing classes from three different universities (n = 1,355) to help identify educational practices for reducing student reticence toward a career in sales. Our results show that while all six educational approaches raise students' perceptions and interest in a selling career, the utilization of experienced salespeople to present classroom materials and to discuss their sales career was the most effective. Classroom lecture and role-plays by university sales students had the second highest intent to pursue intervention scores. We offer recommendations for how to best present sales material to these large, lecture-based courses.

There is clear and pervasive evidence of a global shortage of professionally trained salespeople. This shortage is expected to grow dramatically through 2020 across a wide swath of business sectors (US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In response, universities have increased their offerings of sales courses and curricular options. As evidence, since 2003 the number of higher education institutions offering at least one sales course grew from 44 to 101, with 32 having some sort of sales major, minor, or degree concentration (DePaul University Center for Sales Leadership, 2012). Over this same time horizon the number of member schools in the University Sales Center Alliance increased from nine 37 universities (University Sales Center Alliance, 2014).

Despite this shortage, sales is still the most common first job for marketing students, employing 32% of new graduates. Additionally, sales is the second or third most common career entry point for graduates majoring in management, economics, general business, international business, finance, operations management, human resources, and management information systems (Georgetown University Study, 2010). Even with these promising career entry statistics, interest in pursuing a sales career is surprisingly low; especially for those just beginning their business coursework (Bush et al., 2014; Karakaya, Quigley, & Bingham, 2011). For many students, taking a sales position is more about needing to take a job upon graduation rather than wanting to pursue sales as a career (Cummins et al., 2013). As such, research is needed to better explain student reticence toward sales and how students can become better informed about whether or not sales is right for them (Bush et al., 2014; Peltier & Dixon, 2014). While sales will not be the chosen or right path for all students, the persistent misconceptions about sales as a career among the student population prematurely removes it from serious consideration.

From a broader perspective, students' negative perception of the sales role may hamper their academic investigation and understanding of sales as a part of the promotion mix. The role of different selling processes, sales management structures, and the strategic use of personal selling within the broader promotion mix is critical in a robust and complete marketing plan (Loe & Inks, 2014). If students' negative perceptions of a selling career prevent full exploration of the complimentary role sales can play in the broader marketing mix, educators have done a disservice to students and the business community by not addressing the bias head-on (Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2014).

Responding to recent calls for educational innovations that increase student intentions to pursue sales as a first job and/or career path, and to improve students' understanding of the role of sales within marketing (Knight, Mich, & Manion, 2014; Weeks et al., 2014), we test six educational interventions across three different universities in large Principles of Marketing classes. The comparison of these classroom interventions serves as a means of identifying effective educational approaches for reducing student reticence to a career in sales. While sales as a career path or entry job isn't for everyone (Agnihotri et al., 2014), it is important for marketing educators to present new business and marketing students with educational approaches that offer students the opportunity to overcome sales career myths, to enhance experiential opportunities, to expose them to the selling process, to make them better sales professionals, and to give them the needed information to decide for themselves (Bolander, Bonney, & Saturnino, 2014; Peltier et al., 2014; Young & Hawes, 2013). Based on leading introductory marketing text-books, improving the sales education component of the Principles of Marketing course will address a number of the course learning goals including: understanding

customer value, the processes of marketing, marketing ethics, and planning a strategic marketing mix (e.g. Armstrong & Kotler, 2013).

Our goal is to contribute to the marketing education literature by: 1) providing educators a time-effective means of communicating the role and value of sales within the broader marketing mix; 2) investigating competing methods for communicating career information to students within large-scale lecture-based courses; and 3) improving student outcomes by decreasing entrenched reticence to a viable career entry-point for business students.

### **Review of sales Career Reticence Literature**

#### *Key Dimensions*

Students' resistance to considering a sales career has been investigated in a number of contexts since first documented by scholars in the late 1950s (Ebey, 1957; Staunton, 1958). During the following half-century scholars have shown selling's perception problem to be robust—persisting across educational exposure (Bristow, et al., 2004; 2006; Bristow, Gulati, & Amyx, 2006; Swensen et al., 1993; Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 2009), race (DeVecchio & Honeycutt, 2002), generation (Bristow et al., 2011), and nationality (Karakaya, Quigley, & Bingham, 2011; Honeycutt et al., 1999; Barat & Spillan, 2009).

Across these studies and others, the primary goal has been to identify the factors that drive students into and away from sales careers. Alternately known as intent or reticence factors, the literature continues to search for the combination of job attributes and personal characteristics that coalesce to overcome selling's entrenched negative stereotypes among students. The majority of this research, especially of late, has focused on decreasing college and MBA students' sales reticence as college graduates are viewed as possessing the professional

skills and motivation to succeed in the increasingly challenging sales landscape (Weilbaker & Williams, 2006; Tomkovick et al., 1996; Leasher & Moberg, 2008; Murray & Robinson, 2001).

The result of this research stream is most easily understood as a series of factors contributing to entrenched reticence among the student population. For example, reticence has been found to be greater for students reporting lower levels of knowledge of the sales field and a lower perceived match between their skills and selling success (Peltier et al., 2014). The perception that salesperson practices are unethical has also been found to lower student intent to pursue a sales career (Castleberry, 2014; Fournier et al., 2014). Beliefs about typical salespeople and typical practices within sales teams, derived from media-propagated stereotypes or competitive eras when selling tended to be more competitive and aggressive, have also been proposed as contributing to student reticence toward selling (Swensen et al., 1993; Thompson, 1972). Based on these and other studies, the sales reticence literature may be condensed into four key dimensions: 1) student sales knowledge, 2) student perceptions and attitudes regarding the sales profession, 3) student perceptions and attitudes regarding salespeople, and 4) selling ethics. For a more comprehensive review of the existing literature see Honeycutt and Thelen (2003), Karakaya, Quigley and Bingham (2011), and Peltier et al. (2014).

As the Introduction to Marketing course within the college curriculum is perhaps the most common initial venue for students' structured exposure to these four dimensions, we propose two research questions aimed at improving instructor ability to decrease sales reticence and increase students' intent to pursue. With a goal of these goals in mind, our research questions are as follows.

RQ1: Do educational interventions increase student intent to pursue a sales career?

RQ2: Which of the interventions tested has the largest effect on intent to pursue?

### *Intent to Pursue Sales Career Scale*

Based on the aforementioned sales reticence dimensions (sales knowledge, perceptions and attitudes regarding the sales profession, salespeople, and selling ethics), Peltier et al. (2014) aggregated an array of items from the literature to develop a parsimonious scale for measuring student intent to pursue a sales career after graduation. The initial questionnaire utilized 46 questions regarding students' perceptions and attitudes about (1) the sales profession, (2) salespeople, (3) sales knowledge, and (4) sales ethics. The sales profession sub scale addresses the personal fulfillment and value of a sales job to the individual while the salesperson subscale asks about the perception of and respect given to salespeople by others. Sales knowledge refers to the individual's familiarity with sales practices and ability to perform these processes. Finally, sales ethics addresses the ethical practices and responsibilities of salespeople. For a complete listing of the items within the scale, please see the appendix.

The dependent measure aggregated responses from four intent to pursue a sales career items: (1) I am interested in pursuing a sales position when I graduate, (2) Obtaining a position in sales is a priority for me after graduation, (3) Obtaining a sales support position would interest me, and (4) At some time during my career, I will probably hold a position in sales. The questionnaire was administered in large-section Principles of Marketing classes at three universities, resulting in a sample of 752 students. A factor analysis reduced the initial set of 46 questions down to 23 items. Using multiple regression, all four dimensions were positively associated with student intent to pursue a sales career and had high levels of internal reliability (coefficient  $\alpha$  ranged from .82 to .90) and validity ( $R^2 = .44$ ). As hypothesized, intent to pursue was higher when students had more positive perceptions of the selling profession, salespeople, self-reported sales knowledge, and greater ethical views of salespeople and the selling field.

In this paper, we utilize the Intent to Pursue a Sales Career scale to test the efficacy of six educational interventions within large-scale Principles of Marketing courses. In the following section we discuss the value of staging this experimental intervention within a large-scale introductory marketing course as well as the rationale for including each intervention in our experimental design.

### **Teaching Innovations to Increase Intent to Pursue a Sales Career**

Because the Principles of Marketing course provides students with their first large-scale exposure to the marketing field, it serves as an ideal context for countering negative preconceptions about the sales discipline (Swanson & Wald, 2013) and creating an open field for discussing the merits and limitations of each aspect of the marketing mix. Research identifying effective educational innovations to motivate students' interest in and understanding of sales as they are beginning their business education programs thus has value for educators and students alike.

In an attempt to include a wide-array of interventions, we present six sales-related educational interventions within this study: (1) Lecture on Sales Careers, (2) Lecture on Sales Management/Selling Process, (3) Expert Panel Discussing Sales Careers and Sales Practices, (4) Recent Sales Alumni Returning After One Year on the Job, (5) Shorter Textbook-Based Lecture Plus Role-Play by Students on University Sales Team, and (6) Mini-Sales/Tradeshow Competition. Table 1 provides a brief review of these educational interventions, including learning goals. It should be noted that interventions 2 and 3 were tested by Peltier et al. (2014) during scale development and validation and are also utilized in this study with the expansion and integration of four additional interventions.

[Insert Table 1 About Here]



When designing the implementations, we reviewed the educational effectiveness literature to determine techniques that held promise in improving the aforementioned reticence dimensions relating to student sales knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes. While it is impossible to realistically include all promising techniques or information, those selected were deemed most likely to be successfully implemented by instructors. In specific accordance with an entry level marketing course, interventions requiring minimal instructor investment while offering potential educational improvement based on the educational literature were deemed most suited for inclusion (Swanson & Wald, 2013). Below is a description of each intervention (grouped by category) along with a brief description of its basis for inclusion.

### ***Lecture-Based Knowledge Delivery***

As noted, knowledge is one of the primary dimensions shown to influence reticence. From the authors' experience and through conversations with colleagues, large introductory marketing classes typically convey basic knowledge through lectures. Two different topical areas were thus included: (1) Knowledge about a Sales Career and what it entails, and (2) Knowledge of Sales Management Practices and The Selling Process. The *Sales Career Lecture* included types of sales jobs across industry, salesperson role and responsibilities, compensation range and averages, and advancement and progression. The *Sales Management Practices and the Selling Process Lecture* focused on the role and structure of sales management and the basic steps of the sales process from pre-approach through closing. These two interventions offered the same lecture format, but very different knowledge. Due to the prevalence and ease of implementing a revised lecture into an existing introductory course, the goal was to determine which content proved more impactful on reducing student reticence toward sales.

### ***Non-Traditional Lectures***

One goal during intervention selection was to get beyond the traditional lecture format described above, yet be cognizant of the pedagogical investment of instructors when changing classroom methods. As research has shown that students sitting through lectures experience “vigilance degradation,” or loss of concentration as early as 10 to 30 minutes into the lecture, it seemed prudent to see if other methods could improve student attention and learning (Young et al., 2009). Intuitively, it may seem the best way to avoid vigilance degradation would be to eliminate lectures and focus solely on cultivating student interaction and participation through such active learning methods such as role-plays, simulations, or group work. While these may be valid options, they are generally considered difficult to implement and administrate within a single class meeting with more than 100 students. Interestingly, research shows that student concentration can be maintained even without interactive participation techniques; and instead through planned variation in presentation of material (Young et al., 2009). With this in mind, methods of material delivery were varied based on the research within the realistic realm of the sales context. Three interventions were developed, each involving the inclusion of a different type of classroom guest and material presented: Expert Panel of Guest Speakers, Recent Alumni Guest Lectures, and Current Sales Team Students.

***Guest Speakers.*** Utilizing guest lectures is a common teaching practice. Two guest lecture interventions were used in this study: Expert Panel and Recent Sales Alumni Returning after One Year on the Job. The *Expert Panel* covered lecture materials from the book and responded to questions received by the instructor in advance of their classroom visit. The questions were based on the textbook reading assigned and offered a non-rehearsed, personal viewpoint on sales careers and sales practices. **Some examples include: what is an example of an ethical dilemma**

you faced as a salesperson/as a sales manager, what are the skills you look for in a salesperson, how have you been compensated in sales, what is the most beneficial career move you have made, what do you like about sales. Prior to the panel portion of the class, each expert was given time to introduce themselves, briefly discuss their path to sales, and their current sales role. This introduction was critical for establishing the panel members as experts in the field and to imbue credibility in their descriptions of their sales experience and their opinions about sales as a career. The panel consisted of 2 males and 1 female. Each had 10-20 years of varied sales experience and had also served as sales managers during their career.

The *Recent Sales Alumni* format was selected to determine whether classroom guests who were more similar to their audience in both age and sales experience were superior to expert salespeople and the other education interventions. These sales alumni had been working in a sales role for one year and had received solid evaluations over their first year in the field. Recent graduates can be considered peers of the students and this characteristic is shown to be an asset in improving academic achievement across population, context, and implementation (see Topping, 2001 for comprehensive reviews of the peer-to-peer educational literature). Like the *Expert Panelists*, the *Recent Sales Alumni* covered assigned textbook topics and responded to instructor questions. In addition, they also discussed how they became interested in a sales career.

***Lecture/Demonstration Hybrid.*** In addition to providing further variance in the presentation of information, lecture demonstration models are shown to induce small changes in student beliefs regardless of instructor knowledge, experience, and style; which made it an obvious method to include in our multi-instructor design (Jackson, Dukerich, & Hestenes, 2008). For this intervention, we abbreviated the textbook-based lecture component of the class and included a

demonstration of a sales encounter presented by members of the school's student sales team. This intervention was designed to be a hybrid approach that allowed instructors to keep the primary lecture component, but reinforce the material through a peer-to-peer active demonstration with minimal effort by the instructor.

***Competition.*** Active learning has been shown to improve student engagement and may enhance learning (Prince, 2004). Thus, even within a large introductory marketing course, we felt it important to include a highly interactive intervention. In sales courses, the primary method for increasing active learning is the student role-play. Role-plays are utilized extensively within the sales curriculum as they provide students with an opportunity to learn by doing and to test out both the sales knowledge and processes presented in the classroom. To further enhance and distinguish this intervention from the role-play demonstration conducted in intervention four, we included a competition component where the students' conducted sales encounters at a mock trade-show held during class. The students engaged directly with a judge (graduate student, instructor, or professional salesperson) who played the part of a potential buyer. Students had to demonstrate the sales process studied through interaction with their potential buyer using prepared product information. Students were graded by the judges based on execution of the sales process and their ability to engage and interest the potential buyer.

Each of the sales education interventions shown in Table 1 could be included as part of the Principles of Marketing course. However, given that this course covers a wide range of marketing topics, the challenge is always a limited amount of class time that can be allocated to any individual topic, including sales. As a consequence, the selection of the most effective educational interventions will allow educators to effectively cover the sales module of their Principles of Marketing class without having to increase the number of class days expended.

## Methodology

Each of the three participating universities performed two of the educational interventions. Although all of the educational interventions addressed each of the four student reticence dimensions in some way, their order of priority differed based on what was covered in the class period (see Table 1). For this study, each intervention was completed in a single 75 minute class period. Students were also instructed to read the sales chapter in their text book. Approximately one week prior to the sales class and one week after the in-class sales intervention, students completed the Peltier et al. (2014) Intent to Pursue Sales Career Scale through an online link with a 2 day window for completion. Students were given extra credit to participate, although identifiers were not linked to results. Response rates were between 85 and 90 percent across the three universities. In total, 1,355 students participated. The participating universities were all public, coed, AACSB-accredited institutions and information about their student populations can be found in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

## Results

As a starting point, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted comparing the summed intent to pursue a sales career score across the six educational interventions prior to exposure to the sales exposure formats. The ANOVA model revealed no significant differences, indicating a high level of a priori consistency across the three universities. The reliability of the intent to pursue scale, along with the reliabilities and intercorrelations of other scales to be used in analyses to follow are shown in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 About Here]

Our first research question asked if any of our educational interventions would increase student intent to pursue a sales career indicating at least a partial amelioration of engrained sales stereotypes and career misconceptions. Across the six educational interventions at the three universities, our results show that two interventions resulted in significant improvements on the intent to pursue measure pre-post student exposure. Thus, the study shows that the answer to RQ1 is yes; the classroom interventions can increase intent to pursue sales in the student population. Table 3 presents the pre-post means for the Summed Intent to Pursue Score for each intervention.

[Insert Table 4 About Here]

Due to classroom time and effort constraints, it is imperative to identify the most effective intervention. Our second research question asked which interventions have the largest potential to impact students' misconceptions and increase intent to pursue. As detailed in Table 3, the pre and post-intervention findings show that using an expert panel of sales professional to deliver course content and to share personal experiences from their sales careers had the most significant impact on student intent to pursue sales of the interventions tested. The brief lecture followed by a role-play conducted by the university sales team students also led to significantly higher intent to pursue scores. None of the other tested educational interventions resulted in significant improvements in student intent to pursue in this single-exposure setting.

While the primary goal of this study was to assess the impact of different educational interventions on student intent to pursue, we also investigated the impact of each intervention on the components of the intent to pursue measure. As detailed in this paper and by Peltier et al. (2014), student perceptions of four factors contribute to the intention to pursue a sales career. These factors are: sales ethics, the sales profession, sales knowledge, and the salesperson.

Utilizing the data collected, we explored the impact of each classroom intervention on the four components of intent to pursue sales. Our findings reinforce the superiority of two interventions: the expert panel and brief lecture accompanied by student sales role-play.

The expert panel significantly impacted student perceptions of all 4 factors' subscales impacting intent to pursue sales ( $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the expert panel offered the largest effect size impact on the sales ethics, sales profession, and salesperson subscales. The brief lecture accompanied by student sales role-play also showed a significant positive impact on the four intent to pursue subscales, but with a smaller effect size than the expert panel on all factors except sales knowledge ( $p < .001$  for sales ethics, sales knowledge, and salesperson;  $p < .07$  for sales profession).

[Insert Table 5 About Here]

When looking at the impact of the remaining four interventions, we find that three offer a significant positive impact on at least one component of intent to pursue. Each of the lectures (sales career lecture and lecture on sales management and selling process) improves student sales knowledge ( $p < .001$ ). The mini-sales competition intervention impacted two intent to pursue subscales: **perception of salesperson** ethics ( $p < .06$ ) and sales knowledge ( $p < .03$ ). The only intervention not positively impacting at least one intent to pursue subscale was the guest lecture appearance by recent sales alumni. This intervention actually lowered **student attitudes about the personal fulfillment and value of the sales field (sales profession ratings)** ( $p < .02$ ), likely because their positions are not yet viewed as lofty by students as they have yet to see advancement and position growth into advanced roles such as key account sales or territory management.

If comparing the impact of the interventions across subscales, we find that sales knowledge is the most consistently impacted. Sales knowledge is increased by five of the six interventions. Only the guest appearance by recent sales alumni failed to improve responses on the sales knowledge subscale. It appears the most difficult intent to pursue factor to impact based on study of these six interventions is student perceptions of the salesperson. Only the expert panel and brief lecture coupled with student role-play impacted the students' attitudes about others' view of, and respect for, salespeople (salesperson subscale).

[Insert Table 5 About Here]

Finally, we tested the impact of each subscale on intent to pursue sales. Table 6 details the impact of each subscale on the intent to pursue composite measure across all subjects including control variables. Consistent with Peltier et al. (2014), each of the four subscales identified in the literature and included in this study show a significant impact on intention to pursue a sales career. Sales profession and sales knowledge have the largest influence. For educators, this may provide a focal point for intervention planning; indicating the two areas where targeted curricular changes can have an outsize impact.

[Insert Table 6 About Here]

## **Discussion**

In this paper, we addressed the problem of student reticence toward sales in introductory marketing courses. Due to negative student preconceptions prior to academic exposure to sales, and a limited amount of class time available to counteract these preconceptions, it is essential to determine the most effective class-based interventions. Applying a model of effective teaching to the sales topic, we can say that effective teaching can help students to think critically about the role of sales in the marketing, develop an understanding of their own abilities and skills as it



relates to sales, and encourage the preparation of self-education regarding other aspects of sales (Cherif & Adams, 1993). With this goal in mind, we developed and tested six replicable educational options across three universities, each that also require students to read a chapter in their textbook about sales. The interventions required faculty, in some combination, to present a lecture, activity, or arrange guest speakers.

Across the six educational formats, the inclusion of a guest expert panel with strong sales experience focusing on (in order of importance): **the value and fulfillment from a sales career (sales profession scale component), ethical practices and responsibilities of salespeople (ethics scale component), societal perceptions of salespeople (salespeople scale component), and sales knowledge proved the most impactful.** This intervention decreased student reticence toward sales and was a clear winner in terms of increasing students' desire to pursue a sales career. This intervention's strong showing as compared to the other five innovations is important as it suggests that a focus on bringing attitudinal preconceptions **about the value of the sales profession, salespeople's value to society, and standard sales ethics** into the light and directly countering these beliefs is more beneficial than addressing sales knowledge alone. In terms of guest presenters, the results also show that experts were more persuasive than recent graduates or current sales students who are competing in sales-related extracurricular activities and sales competitions. However, current sales teams students were also effective in changing perceptions and intent to pursue, and thus might be included as a means of both improving intent to pursue and promoting sales team membership.

In the authors' opinion, the expert panel, in comparison to the recent graduate panel, made a greater impact on student outcomes due to the experts' depth of experience, confidence in their knowledge of the career, career progression variety, and ability to answer any posed

questions. Recent graduates were less able to speak to career progression and focused more on the transition from college to sales role rather than creating a picture of the larger sales career for students. When choosing expert panelists we suggest selection based on 1) willingness to speak from personal experience, 2) varied experience (sales type, B2B, B2C, field, management, etc.) across panelists, 3) honest approach to student questions. In our experience, guest speakers improve with classroom exposure, and a depth of experience is critical to student buy-in. In order to minimize the impact of guest speaker quality variability, we suggest a panel approach as utilized in this study. This allows for strong speakers to lead and minimizes the impact of a poor speaker selection.

While not all students who complete an introductory marketing course will take further sales courses, we believe this study shows it is more important to counter existing negative stereotypes than to address sales process content. There is ample analogical evidence at the three participating universities that students who have negative perceptions of sales will likely not take additional sales courses. In contrast, students whose negative preconceptions have been challenged may opt for additional sales training, where they can learn more detailed information about the sales process. Our data also supports the primary need to address student attitudes and perceptions of sales even at the expense of teaching students sales process knowledge at this early stage. As can be seen in Table 5, all the classroom interventions, save one, increased the sales process knowledge of students. Yet, few interventions consistently impacted the other subscales (perceptions of the sales profession, salespeople, and ethical standards). This is important as these non-sales knowledge subscales have a powerful impact on intent to pursue. The sales profession subscale, which measures student perception of the personal fulfillment available from a sales job and the value provided through performance of a sales job, has by far

the highest contribution to improving intent to pursue (see Table 6;  $\beta = .375$ ). With this in mind, classroom interventions that only impact sales knowledge should not be expected to have as strong an impact on intent to pursue as interventions designed to impact factors beyond knowledge.

While all interventions were found to be beneficial in terms of individual items, we found the most effective approach in terms of student outcomes and instructor effort to be the inclusion of a panel of expert speakers. Thus, in Table 7, we present recommendations for how to best utilize expert speakers on the topic of sales in a Principles of Marketing class based on the experience of the instructors within the study. These recommendations are based in part on three interrelated issues: only a limited number of classes are available in a Principles of Marketing class given other breadth priorities, expert salespeople are better at relaying experiences than teaching detailed content, and replication of textbook materials within the presentation.

[Insert Table 7 About Here]

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to assess the efficacy of many different educational interventions designed to reduce sales reticence and positively impact students' intent to pursue a sales career. Because the Principles of Marketing course is an ideal pipeline into a sales career for all types of majors, we encourage marketing scholars to investigate other potentially useful educational interventions and in various combinations. As an important extension, we also recommend research that seeks to identify effective educational interventions in other sales classes. For example, how might the efficacy of educational interventions differ for sales management, business to business marketing, advanced sales, and other sales classes? Along these same lines, because the Peltier et al. (2014) intent to pursue a

sales career scale has varied components, examination of how different classes may impact each of these career constructs is of interest.

This effort is not without limitations, which we hope will spur future research into this area. Each intervention was implemented at only one university and no attempt to measure the effectiveness of the interventions was made. A larger design where single interventions were implemented at multiple sites would aid in understanding each intervention's value and effectiveness. Additionally, including measures of student understanding of sales (sales process, careers, role within the promotion mix) could provide another means of assessing the educational outcomes of these interventions beyond intent to pursue.

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**Table 1**

**Description of Six Sales Educational Interventions Utilized**

| <b>EDUCATION INTERVENTION</b>  | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>  | <b>RANKING OF RETICENCE RELATED LEARNING GOALS</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Lecture-Based Knowledge Delivery</b>  |   |   |
| Lecture on sales career.   | Professor lead lecture on the benefits of a sales career, types of sales positions, skill sets required, opportunities, etc.                | <b>Improve</b> perceptions of a sales career, salespeople, knowledge, sales ethics        |
| Lecture on sales management and selling process.   | Professor lead lecture on how to manage a salesforce and the steps in the selling process.  | <b>Improve</b> perceptions of sales knowledge, sales careers, salespeople, sales ethics   |
| <b>Non-traditional Lectures</b>  |   |   |
| <i>Guest Speaker:</i> Expert panel discussing sales careers and sales practices.                 | Guest presentations by experienced salespeople on the topic of sales careers, ethics, and other items from the text.                        | <b>Improve</b> perceptions of a sales career, sales ethics, salespeople, sales knowledge  |
| <i>Guest Speaker:</i> Presentation by sales alumni returning after one year.                     | Guest presentation on the topic of their first year in sales. Asked to comment on transitions, training, ethics and other items from text.  | <b>Improve</b> perceptions of a sales career, salespeople, sales ethics, sales knowledge, |
| <i>Lecture-Demonstration Hybrid.</i> Short lecture and student role play by sales team students. | Professor led lecture on sales process followed by a demonstration role-play by students who participated in an academic sales competition. | <b>Improve</b> perceptions sales knowledge, salespeople, sales career, ethics             |
| <i>Competition.</i> Mini-sales competition structured as trade show.                             | Primer by sales professional followed by 5 minute student sales pitch to Ph.D. students.  | <b>Improve</b> perceptions of sales knowledge, salespeople, sales careers, sales ethics   |

Note: Sales chapter in text book was required reading for each intervention.

**Table 2**  
**University Information and Student Population Demographics**

| <b>Location &amp; Type</b> | <b>Average Student Age</b> | <b>Percentage Residential</b> | <b>School Type</b> | <b>Student Enrollment</b> | <b>Community Type</b> | <b>Selection</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Western National           | 22                         | 5%                            | Public; coed       | Large (20,000-25,000)     | Urban, large city     | Selective        |
| Central National           | 20                         | 39%                           | Public; coed       | Large (25,000-30,000)     | Urban, large city     | More Selective   |
| Midwestern Regional        | 21                         | 43%                           | Public; coed       | Medium (10,000-15,000)    | Suburban, large town  | Selective        |

Sources: U.S. News and World Report; University websites

**Table 3**  
**Scale Reliabilities**

| <b>Scale (Number of Items)</b> | <b>Coefficient <math>\alpha</math></b> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Sales Ethics (7)               | .88                                    |
| Sales Profession (6)           | .91                                    |
| Sales Knowledge (6)            | .91                                    |
| Salespeople (2)                | .81                                    |
| Intent to Pursue (4)           | .92                                    |

**Table 4**  
**Intent to Pursue**

| Intervention                                 | Pre Intervention<br>nM(SD) | Post Intervention<br>M(SD) | Effect Size<br>Cohen's d | P-value | Sample Size |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Expert Panel Presentation                    | 10.58(3.8)                 | 12.30(3.9)                 | 1.73                     | .001    | ?           |
| Sales Team Student Role Play & Brief Lecture | 10.56(3.9)                 | 11.68(4.0)                 | 1.12                     | .01     | ?           |
| Sales Career Lecture                         | 10.40(4.1)                 | 10.80(3.9)                 | .40                      | .46     | ?           |
| Lecture on Sales Management & Sales Process  | 10.38(3.8)                 | 10.57(4.0)                 | .19                      | .13     | ?           |
| Mini Sales Competition                       | 10.48(4.3)                 | 10.51(4.4)                 | .03                      | .91     | ?           |
| New Sales Alumni Presentation                | 10.80(4.3)                 | 10.74(4.4)                 | -.06                     | .85     | ?           |

**Table 5****Impact of Interventions on Sales Ethics Subscale**

| <b>Intervention</b>                             | <b>Pre Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Post Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Effect Size Cohen's d</b> | <b>P-value</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sales Career Lecture                            | 2.52 (.73)                    | 2.58 (.73)                     | .08                          | .26            |
| Lecture on Sales Management and Selling Process | 2.52 (.75)                    | 2.58 (.73)                     | .08                          | .32            |
| Mini-sales Competition                          | 2.65 (.61)                    | 2.78 (.68)                     | .20                          | .06            |
| New Sales Alumni Presentation                   | 2.78 (.71)                    | 2.81 (.71)                     | .04                          | .5             |
| Expert Panel Presentation                       | 2.70 (.63)                    | 3.12 (.77)                     | .60                          | .001           |
| Sales Team Student Role Play and Brief Lecture  | 2.53 (.69)                    | 2.79 (.80)                     | .35                          | .001           |

**Impact of Interventions on Sales Profession Subscale**

| <b>Intervention</b>                             | <b>Pre Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Post Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Effect Size Cohen's d</b> | <b>P-value</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sales Career Lecture                            | 3.53 (.83)                    | 3.48 (.88)                     | -.06                         | .45            |
| Lecture on Sales Management and Selling Process | 3.51 (.85)                    | 3.48 (.88)                     | -.03                         | .61            |
| Mini-sales Competition                          | 3.65 (.66)                    | 3.66 (.63)                     | .02                          | .78            |
| New Sales Alumni Presentation                   | 3.66 (.75)                    | 3.52 (.86)                     | -.17                         | .02            |
| Expert Panel Presentation                       | 3.61 (.68)                    | 3.85 (.66)                     | .36                          | .001           |
| Sales Team Student Role Play and Brief Lecture  | 3.52 (.80)                    | 3.62 (.79)                     | .13                          | .07            |

**Impact of Interventions on Sales Knowledge Subscale**

| <b>Intervention</b>                             | <b>Pre Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Post Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Effect Size Cohen's d</b> | <b>P-value</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sales Career Lecture                            | 3.52 (.85)                    | 3.73 (.82)                     | .25                          | .001           |
| Lecture on Sales Management and Selling Process | 3.51 (.86)                    | 3.73 (.83)                     | .26                          | .001           |
| Mini-sales Competition                          | 3.24 (.72)                    | 3.41 (.73)                     | .24                          | .03            |
| New Sales Alumni Presentation                   | 3.26 (.76)                    | 3.32 (.77)                     | .08                          | .22            |
| Expert Panel Presentation                       | 3.35 (.72)                    | 3.56 (.64)                     | .31                          | .001           |
| Sales Team Student Role Play and Brief Lecture  | 3.24 (.79)                    | 3.47 (.74)                     | .31                          | .001           |

**Impact of Interventions on Salespeople Subscale**

| <b>Intervention</b>                             | <b>Pre Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Post Intervention M(SD)</b> | <b>Effect Size Cohen's d</b> | <b>P-value</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Sales Career Lecture                            | 2.73 (.87)                    | 2.75 (.91)                     | .02                          | .73            |
| Lecture on Sales Management and Selling Process | 2.72 (.88)                    | 2.76 (.91)                     | .05                          | .32            |
| Mini-sales Competition                          | 2.86 (.77)                    | 2.95 (.79)                     | .12                          | .29            |
| New Sales Alumni Presentation                   | 2.89 (.81)                    | 2.88 (.87)                     | -.01                         | .90            |
| Expert Panel Presentation                       | 2.91 (.78)                    | 3.21 (.86)                     | .37                          | .001           |
| Sales Team Student Role Play and Brief Lecture  | 2.66 (.89)                    | 2.89 (.82)                     | .27                          | .001           |

**Table 6****Subscale Impact on Intent to Pursue Sales**

| <b>Subscale</b>                                    | <b>Std Beta</b> | <b>T Value</b> | <b>Significance</b> |
|--|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Sales Profession                                   | .375            | 24.090         | .000                |
| Sales Knowledge                                    | .218            | 15.391         | .000                |
| Major (Marketing Major/Minor =1)                   | .185            | 13.894         | .000                |
| Salespeople  | .174            | 11.520         | .000                |
| Ethics   | .042            | 3.116          | .000                |
| Gender (M=0, F=1)                                  | -.038           | -2.751         | .01                 |
| Year in School?                                    | -.013           | -1.022         | .307                |
| <i>R Square = .437, F(6,746)= 325, p &lt; .001</i> |                 |                |                     |

**Table 7**  
**Recommendations for the Effective Use of Expert Salespeople to Cover Course Content**

| <b>COURSE MANAGEMENT</b>                                | <b>RECOMMENDATION</b>  |
|---|--|
| <i>Textbook Coverage</i>                                | <p>Most popular introductory marketing textbooks cover personal selling and sales management in a single chapter. Common topical coverage in these textbooks include: (1) selling careers, (2) sales roles and sales jobs, (3) the selling process, (4) sales management, and (5) selling ethics.</p> <p>Results from the six interventions tested suggest that all of the innovations were equally effective in terms of conveying enhanced basic knowledge of sales and sales management issues. We thus encourage instructors to focus on the issues that sales experts best impact—(1) perceptions of sales as a career, (2) the importance of having strong selling ethics, and (3) perceptions of salespeople.</p>   |
| <i>Number of Class Periods used for Sales Education</i> | <p>Because the experts delivered course content, the intervention used in this study only required the use of one class period. However, two class periods might be appropriate for universities with large sales programs and/or a sales center/institute given the priority these schools give to sales education. Of course, any instructor could use more than one class period.</p>   |
| <i>Class Preparation</i>                                | <p>As noted, in a one class only exposure environment it is important that the sales experts help deliver course content. With this in mind, prepping the class in advance and having the sales experts use your lecture materials (i.e., Powerpoint, videos, etc.) during their presentations has clear benefits: (1) important textbook content is delivered, (2) professionals are not always strong in creating class presentations, (3) the instructor has some control over content.</p> <p>For this intervention three experts participated, each with a specific topic: (1) sales career issues (i.e., roles, jobs, skills needed, compensation), (2) sales management, and (3) selling ethics. Each were assigned a section of the Powerpoint slides one week in advance and were asked to think about how to present this material in terms of their personal experiences.</p> |
| <i>Specific Topics</i>                                  | <p>In addition to what was addressed earlier, specific topics that have been found to be of great value for increasing perceptions of a sales career and intent to pursue that should be included are: (1) importance of selling ethics and the consequences of ethic failures, (2) Why they got into sales, why they like sales, and positives about a sales career, (3) skills needed, (4) how to prepare while in college, (5) what a sales career can offer.</p>   |
| <i>Panel Format</i>                                     | <p>Normally about 20 minutes remain after each presenter has addressed his or her material. This time is then used for Q&amp;A. Students are also encouraged to bring their resumes to class and to follow-up with the sales experts after class and later via email or LinkedIn (speakers ask for and receive many LinkedIn requests).</p>  |



## Appendix

### Sub Scale Items

|   |
|---|
| <b>SALES ETHICS</b>   |
| Stretch the truth to make a sale  |
| Take advantage of uneducated buyers                                     |
| Misrepresent guarantees and/or warranties                               |
| Make something up when they do not know the answer to a question        |
| Inflate the benefits of the products they sell                          |
| Sell products that people do not need                                   |
| Are more unethical than those in other business fields                  |
| <b>SALES PROFESSION</b>   |
| Gives a sense of accomplishment   |
| Is doing something worthwhile on the job                                |
| Is personally satisfying  |
| Is interesting  |
| Is exciting   |
| Is valuable   |
| <b>SALES KNOWLEDGE</b>  |
| I understand sales concepts and how to apply them                       |
| I understand the sales process  |
| I know how to structure a sales presentation                            |
| I understand what a sales career is all about                           |
| I understand what a salesperson does on a daily basis                   |
| I am confident in my ability to apply sales techniques                  |
| <b>SALESPEOPLE</b>  |
| Are perceived favorably by others                                       |
| Are respected by others   |
| <b>INTENT TO PURSUE</b>   |
| I am interested in pursuing a sales position when I graduate            |
| Obtaining a position in sales is a priority for me after graduation     |
| Obtaining a sales support position would interest me                    |
| At some time during my career, I will probably hold a position in sales |