

**SHOULD BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS AND SALES-RELATED CURRICULUM BE GIVEN
MORE ATTENTION IN UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING PROGRAMS?**

Ellen Novar, Wilmington College

Susan Caple and Janis Dietz, University of La Verne

John Riddick, Hanover College

Chris Kondo, California State University, Fullerton

Panelist #1 Ellen Novar: The impetus for this panel was a result of conversations and supportive feedback from attendees of last year's presentation of, "The Disappearing Undergraduate B2B Marketing Course" by Kelsey Stief and Ellen Novar. Both attendees and paper reviewers commented that the topic was "top of mind". Others were in strong agreement with the premise of the paper, i.e., knowledge of the B2B marketing sector along with accumulation of sales skills directly benefits most students upon graduation because most students obtain employment at B2B firms, often in a customer-facing capacity such as sales. This suggests that to prepare our students for these positions more discussion of the topic is required. In addition, many of the questions posed in the paper are yet to be sufficiently addressed. For example, has the B2B Marketing course ever been offered at institutions that do not currently offer it? Why have schools abandoned B2B Marketing courses? Was there a lack of student interest? Was there a lack of faculty interest? Is there a lack of space available in the curriculum? The purpose of this panel discussion is to solicit answers to these questions from both panelists and attendees, with an aim to determine if a disconnect exists between our curriculum and student/employer needs.

Panelist #2 Janis Dietz: I don't believe schools have abandoned B2B Marketing and Sales courses. Instead, the curriculum has been squeezed by the addition of more advanced social marketing and research courses. At The University of La Verne, we don't have enough students to offer more than two electives each semester and the sales course itself is not a requirement. There is no lack of student/faculty interest. Our students know that this is an important area and we do a lot in the basic marketing course as it related to B2B sales. In colleges where faculty members have industry background in B2B sales, this issue naturally is important. If the department is made up of mostly academic trained faculty, the experience is not there to add the richness required. With fewer and fewer headquarter calls due to strategic roll-up in the grocery, home center, funeral home and

other industries, the specific nuances in dealing with these headquarters requires special training, a fact that few schools have the resources to offer.

Panelist #3 Susan Caple: The University of La Verne has offered a Professional Selling Course. I would imagine it was abandoned because of lack of interest. We have a small undergrad population and we have a marketing concentration, not a major. Recently, our undergrad population has grown significantly and the offering of this course should be reconsidered. Space in the curriculum should not be a factor. In our case, it could be offered as an elective in the concentration. I want to relate a couple of personal experiences: First, we are presenting a paper at this year's MEA that identifies employers' needs for college grads who are "business-ready". The skills required are basic sales skills (questioning techniques, verifying, clarifying, recommending, closing) and focused presentation skills. These skills are taught in a B2B marketing curriculum. However, it is imperative that professors teaching these course have real-world experience. Second, I have taught the Professional Selling class at California State University Fullerton and the University of Minnesota. Several former students have expressed how important the skills they learned in that class were in their business careers. They were able to directly apply these learned skills to their business environments, even if they did not go into sales. Finally, at the University of La Verne, I am teaching in an integrated business curriculum that combines Marketing, Finance, and Management with a practicum to comprise one course. During the semester, students develop a business plan, present to a bank to ask for a loan, and develop and sell a product during the semester. It was so fortunate that most of the professors involved have B2B experience as we could teach them presentation skills (to the bank), negotiating skills (with the producer of the product), and basic sales skills to sell the product. They also made many high-level presentations on campus – to our President, for example. It was an eye-opener! Comments from the students after the class were that they had never been so prepared for presentations and felt confident in dealing with various communication issues in business.

Panelist #4 Christopher Kondo: At the Mihaylo College of Business and Economics, California State University Fullerton, we found that the majority of the companies that were hiring our marketing students were B2B and were, in fact, recruiting for positions in sales. Though our popular Professional Selling course had been offered for many years, we felt there was an opportunity to do more to prepare our students for sales roles. In response, we established The Sales Leadership Center. Now in its fourth year of operations, our mission is to "Ignite Sales Careers." Toward that end we offer sales career programs, sales skills workshops, jobs and internships, sales competitions, and a scholarship program intended to encourage students with an interest in sales. The response has been extremely positive in terms of student involvement and corporate support. We have ten corporate sponsors who provide advice, speakers, role-play cases, and financial support. Some of

the companies are B2B including ADP (payroll services) and TEK systems (information technology services). Others are consumer products companies but the sales roles they are recruiting for have a B2B focus. For example, Liberty Mutual provides individual insurance products but much of their sales strategy is centered on corporate alliances. Similarly, Nestle's sales representatives call on grocery stores and other retail outlets. Our participation in sales competitions and the University Sales Center Alliance has provided many additional opportunities. Students improve their sales skills through role-plays and gain excellent exposure to career opportunities. Also, our center has met new corporate sponsors through these activities. And as importantly, we have learned about other potential strategies for enhancing our offerings. For example, California State University Chico offers a "concentration" in sales and we are considering a similar program. And while we offer role-plays and exercises in our classes, the Metropolitan State College of Denver has partnered with local sports teams and provides the opportunity for students to actually sell tickets to corporate clients.

Panelist #5 John C. Riddick, Jr.: Administered by the Center for Business Preparation (CBP), the Business Scholars Program is Hanover College's business curriculum, but it differs from a traditional business major in two important ways. First, Business Scholars are required to complete Hanover College's liberal arts degree requirements to ensure they have the strong writing and verbal communication skills and the well-rounded education best developed in such a program of study. Each Scholar also completes the course requirements necessary for her/his chosen major. Secondly, on the assumption that business serves a very practical purpose, the Program has more "hands-on" skill-building elements and fewer course requirements than the typical business major. In addition to fundamental business coursework (economics, statistics, management, financial decision making, and two electives in such areas as accounting, investments, finance, sales and marketing), Scholars must complete a paid, project-based internship and a student-led team consulting project involving one of our local businesses. Scholars also participate in a number of skill-building workshops such as business etiquette, resume writing and interviewing techniques and skills. Numerous networking events are also an important part of the Business Scholars Program. Since the Program's founding in 2005, we have found that the majority of Business Scholars with a strong career interest in marketing are recruited into entry-level B2B sales roles. In addition, our Program has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Business Scholars interested in studying professional selling and completing a sales-oriented internship. Many of our internship hosts have allowed Scholars to work in line sales positions, allowing them to experience firsthand the key elements of a career in professional selling. Since the Program's mission is strongly oriented towards career preparation, we have incorporated "live cases" into our sales and marketing course offerings. These live cases go beyond traditional role plays and sales simulations to offer the Scholar practical work experience. We have also honed many of our workshops and executive networking sessions to address B2B sales careers.