

## **Beyond the Blackboard: Stories of an Innovative Curriculum Outside the Classroom**

By

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Creating learning experiences to bridge the classroom and the world of sales is an important ingredient in the success of collegiate sales education programs. At our Sales Centre we include it as one of our core competencies, “innovative learning inside and outside the classroom”. This article describes some of the dynamic aspects of a curriculum outside the classroom. It covers an array of learning opportunities -- from professional education events to corporate visits to real sales internships – that accelerate our understanding of the realities of the sales world.

**Professional Education Events.** These events expose students to the more practical side of sales skills. Experienced professionals like Jack Pickard, former CEO of FedEx Custom Critical, Howard Stevens, CEO of HR Chally, and Kim Ward, Senior Consultant at Learning Outsource Group present topics of particular interest to our college students. Receptions prior to advisory board meetings allow candidates to mingle and network with sales professionals, alumni and staff. While there, students are expected to “meet, greet and not eat.” Informal /social occasions like these built around a content function give a foundation to what we call “1% Learnings”. They are the frosting on the cake so to speak, the little touches that can be the critical difference in how a candidate creates an impression while seeking an internship, a job or to close a sale. These more social aspects of professional education events encourage students to actually process what they heard or saw with presenters and other professionals. In addition, seminars offering “finishing school” skills cover timely topics such as business etiquette and dress, honing interviewing techniques, sales technology updates and transitioning into the corporate world after graduation. Students are mentored in these programs by alumni, staff and sale leaders who ensure they have the basic competencies to create a good impression, be it in the boardroom or the lunch table.

**Corporate Visits.** These visits are another way for candidates to gain grass roots sales experience. These “visits” are real experiences with real consequences. The sale is either made or not made and the performance of the students can impact the outcome. At corporate visits a team of Sales Certificate Candidates conduct an hour long sales presentation to “sell” the benefits of partnering with the Sales Centre to potential Corporate Partners. "A corporate visit allows us an opportunity unlike anything you could ever learn in a classroom. Where else can students discuss business and sales with senior level executives, deliver a real-world one hour sales presentation, and close a sale. I am confident that the knowledge and presentation skills I have honed through corporate visits will prove to be invaluable in my future career”, says Sales Certificate Candidate and senior Robert Redd.

**Sales Internship.** The required sales internship provides a capstone to apply what has been learned so far and build on it. Candidates must complete a 300-hour sales internship and submit a portfolio for faculty review documenting their experiences. In addition to weekly readings and critical analysis of their internship experiences, students take a sales assessment based on the book “*Discovering Your Sales Strengths*” by Benton Smith and Tony Rutigliano. Senior Amy Rotella, Candidate Advisory Council Chair found this resource a key to her successful experience in her internship with EMC... “this book taught me about what I could do better as a sales professional. It gave me an advantage, introducing me to new sales techniques and helping me to understand what works for me, about my personal strengths and weaknesses and how to apply what I learned throughout my career!”

The emphasis on “outside the classroom” curriculum is based on the belief that there is exceptional value gained by bridging the classroom and real sales world. The success of undergraduate collegiate sales education programs’ alumni has soundly confirmed this belief.