

Center for Professional Selling

25

YEARS OF SALES EDUCATION

by Nincy Mathew



Celebrations are underway at Baylor's Center for Professional Selling. Twenty-five years have passed since Hankamer's School of Business opened the doors to the nation's first sales center in January 1985. Since then, the Center continues to be a pioneer in Professional Sales and is home to more than 800 graduates.

The Center will be commemorating the occasion with a week of events taking place Sept. 16-20, 2010.

Those attending will include Baylor faculty, the Center's Advisory Board, selected students and faculty from other schools.

As the Center celebrates its 25th anniversary, the *Journal of Professional Selling and Sales Management* (JPSSM) celebrates its 30th anniversary. A joint celebration will occur through a Baylor-sponsored research symposium involving over 50 American and international scholars who will develop articles for the special anniversary issue of JPSSM in June 2011.

Other events will include a meeting with University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) members, a talk on the future of sales and the C-suite, a celebration banquet featuring Coach Scott Drew, and a closing luncheon in partnership with the Ben Williams Distinguished Speaker Series, which will feature Baylor's President Ken Starr.

The Center for Professional Selling grew out of the desire for the Marketing department to set itself apart and the emerging demand from industry representatives.

"Our Center for Professional Selling offers Hankamer a unique advantage over most other schools," said Chris Pullig, department chair of Marketing. "We simply have a huge head start on other programs who are now imitating what we have done for years. The programs we offer are preparing our students to obtain great career placement and rapid advancement."

In the Center's beginning years, Stan Madden, Marjorie Cooper and Lawrence Chonko devoted themselves to putting together a committed Advisory Board and finding financial support for the program they wanted to begin. The Advisory Board now consists of members who hold senior level positions in their respective companies and organizations and provide an invaluable service in the areas of

curriculum review, professional development, student recruitment, and career placement.

From the beginning, the Center offered students unique resources such as a sales library and sales laboratory, which provided video playback capabilities for students to review their performances. In its first two years, Hankamer's Sales Center doubled the sales-related curricula offered by most universities, ensuring that students would receive the most up-to-date instruction in the field.

The Center also started a chapter of Pi Sigma Epsilon in 1986, an affiliate of sales and marketing executives, which was then responsible for selling display advertising in Baylor's student newspaper, *The Lariat*, almost doubling the size of each issue.

"This program gave our students selling experience in the real marketplace and resulted in revenue increases in *Lariat* advertising that the paper had never experienced before," said Marjorie Cooper, professor of Marketing.

However, the Center did fight obstacles along the way. Leaders at Baylor and leaders of similar centers at other universities struggled with creating an academic identity for the professional sales field.

"The first five years we were learning how to act like a center and eventually we began to function like a center," said Stan Madden, Ben H. Williams Professor of Marketing.

Many traditional academicians also viewed the sales discipline as less

academic and more of a trade profession, arguing that sales had no place at a top tier university.

Yet, the Center for Professional Selling at Baylor and similar centers launched at many other universities have made their point. Since 1985, 38 schools have now integrated selling into their business schools, either through centers, majors or classes offered.

"It is hard work to launch the first center in the nation," said Andrea Dixon, present executive director of the Center for Professional Selling. "People here were doing groundbreaking work."

According to national statistics, 75 percent of business graduates start their careers in sales; 90 percent of Baylor marketing students take at least one professional selling class.

Bill Weeks, one of the early leaders of the Center for Professional Selling, said the focus continues to be on student development and corporate relations, which creates a foundation for a changing curriculum.

Cooper said former and current faculty continue to work to ensure that the Center supports a curriculum focused on preparing students for successful sales careers, at the entry level and beyond.

"We should help our students develop a truly ethical and moral commitment to their conduct of business wherever they go with their careers," Cooper said.

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