

Class sells students on customer service

Professor hopes to expand sales course to new program

by *Grayson Steinberg*

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Farzana Hussain is in the hot seat, interviewing for a sales executive position with a \$50 million Phoenix company.

The tension rises as the professor asks her what qualifies her for the job. She is sitting on a stool, surrounded by classmates. After two more questions, she goes back to her seat and the class applauds.

Hussain, a communications senior, was participating in a mock interview as part of COM 394 Advanced Communications Sales Strategies. This new course, which is only open to communications majors, had its first run this semester.

The class focuses on teaching students everything from the history of sales to customer service and networking skills.

"We're trying to expose people to the art and science of sales," said Jim Kaiser, the course's professor and CEO of Tempe-based J-Curve Technologies.

The class is a combination of lectures and role-playing, Kaiser said.

The course was successful this semester and will return again in the spring, said Bud Goodall, director of the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication.

The class can especially help communication majors because about 70 percent of the school's graduates go into sales, Goodall said.

But sales courses aren't new to the marketing curriculum in the W.P. Carey School of Business, said Michael Mokwa, chairman of the marketing department.

"We strongly believe that sales is a significant component of the overall marketing process," Mokwa said.

Kaiser, an ASU graduate, said his course is different because it teaches sales as a subject separate from marketing.

Sales courses are helpful because many people go into the field without the necessary training, he said.

"You wouldn't send someone to build a bridge without an engineering degree or class," Kaiser said.

The lack of prior sales background and the perception salespeople will do anything to make their quota gives the profession a bad image, he added.

Sending more qualified, ethical employees into the field through this course could help boost



Ryan A. Ruiz / THE STATE PRESS

Instructor Jim Kaiser smiles during interaction with students in his COM 394 Advanced Communications Sales Strategies class. The class, a pilot program this semester, will be continue in the spring due to its success.

the reputation, he said.

Kaiser said he wants to eventually expand his course into an entire sales program because all of the concepts he wants to teach can't be covered in one class.

These programs are becoming more popular nationwide because the profession is now considered more legitimate, said Richard Buehrer, director of the Edward H. Schmidt School of Professional Sales at the University of Toledo in Ohio.

"The concept was anybody could sell," Buehrer said. "Those days are ending. Sales people have to be sophisticated."

At least three universities, including the University of Toledo, have accredited sales programs, Buehrer said.

The communications school at ASU is looking into using Kaiser's class, along with existing courses in organizational communication, to create a new sales certificate program, Goodall said.

But a whole new major is out of the question, he added.

"We have neither the resources nor the expertise among faculty to develop it," he said.

Kaiser said he is also looking outside of ASU to find a place where he can start a program. Potential candidates include Grand Canyon University and the Maricopa County Community Colleges.

Several students in the class said they had already reaped benefits from taking the course.

Corey Moos, a communications senior who works in sales for Cox Communications, has enjoyed a fatter wallet.

The class has helped him make more money by learning to sell according to each customer's individual needs, he said.

"It's helped me identify with customers more easily," Moos said.

Hussain, the communications senior, decided she would like to go into sales after taking the course.

"Everyone's always told me I'd be really good at doing sales, but I never thought I had the proper tools," she said.