

## UT stresses role playing as it teaches how to sell

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In an increasingly competitive job market, firsthand experience is an asset for recent college graduates.

At the University of Toledo, a professional sales program trains students to hit the ground running after graduation through immersion in the industry.

Toledo is one of only a few universities in the country with a specific program in its business college for sales. The instruction includes a lot of role playing and not a lot of book learning.

The students attend competitions and conferences for experience as well as a number of recruiting events and other gatherings to mingle with top business professionals.

"The more experience you can get before you head out into the real world and the more practice you can get, the more prepared you will be when you head out and make that sales call," said Steve McKinney, who is to graduate from UT next month.

Earlier this month Mr. McKinney and two other students won first place at a "sales challenge" at the National Russ Berrie Institute for Professional Sales, which is based at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ. Mr. McKinney placed first in the speed selling competition, which measures how likely it is that a company would hire the student. The award was icing on the cake: he already has a job lined up with 3M, a diverse manufacturing company.

The professional sales school got started in 2000 with a seven-course sequence focusing on professional sales.

Ed Schmidt, a 1934 graduate of UT's business college and a successful car dealer, endowed the program in January, 2002, when it became the Edward H. Schmidt School of Professional Sales.

A business advisory board was established in 2004 to provide up-to-date sales education and interaction between students and area businesses.

Corporate partnerships also have been set up to fund the program's competitions and conference trips.

"Recruiters found it's much easier to recruit a sales student who wants to sell rather than convince an accounting major or a marketing major that they should be in sales," said Richard Buehrer, director of the school.

What started with a 12-student enrollment has grown to about 300 students.

In the program, they learn how to recognize a client's needs and find the best way to help them, Mr. Buehrer said.

The students learn from the perspective of a sales representative, a purchaser, and, for some students, a sales manager. Most instruction is without textbooks because they are outdated by the time they're published, Mr. Buehrer said.

Students are prepared to build relationships with clients, so that they learn to think strategically for the customers and not just about making the sale, he said.

"They understand that role that they play, and firms are happy to hire them because they know the student has those kinds of skills," Mr. Buehrer said.