

Building salespeople, one at a time

People sell their abilities in the work force every day. Kim Anderson, an agricultural economist and professor at Oklahoma State University, is helping students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources exercise and perfect the techniques used to close the deal.

The OSU Department of Agricultural Economics realized the need to form a sales and marketing class in fall 2000. The department received a “thumbs-up” from school officials to create a 3000-level sales class for spring 2001.

Agricultural Sales and Marketing (AGEC 3323) has quickly become one of the most popular classes for students throughout CASNR.

“When the department decided to offer a class like this, I was excited,” Anderson said. “A high percentage of the students from CASNR take sales positions after graduation, and I wanted to teach a class that would give our students a leg up when they enter the workforce.”

The class curriculum relies heavily upon experiential learning with sales professionals. Besides traditional lecture, the students are required to complete two projects during the semester: “Sashay With A Salesperson” and “Ready Set Sell.”

Anderson said the projects allow the student to learn things that they could not possibly learn in a traditional classroom atmosphere.

“I learned people skills and communication techniques

that I would have never learned in the classroom,” said Terry Lockhart, agricultural economics senior. “I took the class the first semester it was offered. Now I am a sales representative for Stillwater Equipment Company, and students come and shadow me. It is interesting to see both sides of how the class works. I learn something each time.”

The first half of the class focuses on the “Sashay With A Salesperson” project. Students are responsible for finding a sales professional to shadow for a day while the professional goes about his or her daily business. During this time, the students ask the salesperson questions and gather information that will be used to write a report for a final grade.

“Letting the students choose their own salesperson allows them to go to an area in agricultural sales they may be interested in,” Anderson said. “The idea is to let students create a network of contacts they can use later in life.”

Students agree that who you know can help when it’s time to enter the business world.

“I was able to make a contact in the industry who I can network with in the future,” said Brian Bacon, agricultural business senior. “I felt the lecture material we were tested on in class was truly beneficial after I witnessed it in action on real sales calls with real people.”

During the last half of the semester, students focus on the “Ready Set Sell” project. This project lets students use what they have learned to build and deliver an actual sales presentation to professionals in related professional fields.

“This was my favorite part of the class,” said Bacon. “I got to actually use what I had learned. It gave me real-world, professional experience.”

Anderson credits the success of the class to the businesses and companies that are eager to participate in the projects. The professionals who take the time to participate in the student



Terry Lockhart (left) of Stillwater Equipment Co. talks to Adam McClung during the “Sashay With A Salesperson” project. Students learn the importance of having a working knowledge of products, which helps to answer any questions consumers may have about the products they are selling. (Photo by Kyle Ellis)

shadowing project and listen to the sales presentations show the agricultural industry's support for OSU and CASNR, said Anderson.

The class is also a great recruiting tool for the college, said Anderson. All majors can take the class as long as they have taken the prerequisites. Many times the class has more students from other departments and colleges on campus than agricultural economics majors. Since the class started, enrollment has increased by 20 students every semester. The spring 2002 enrollment was more than 120 students.

"In some cases, the class is more beneficial to other agriculture majors," Anderson said. "They are students who will probably be sales representatives in the future. In our college a majority of animal science, agronomy and agricultural business majors go into the field of sales. These are the students the class is aimed at."

The development of the curriculum for the class came from David Downy, professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University. He spent 25 years working with people in sales and researching the techniques they used to be successful. The research and curriculum was attractive to Anderson and the other faculty members in the department. Anderson has taken the curriculum and made it his own. Each semester he tries to bring in new ideas to improve the class.

"After taking Dr. Anderson's sales class, OSU students



Kim Anderson now gets to devote all of his classroom time to the agricultural sales and marketing class, due to its overwhelming popularity with students throughout CASNR. (Photo by Kyle Ellis)

are certainly some of the most valuable products on the market," said Lockhart.

Through this class students gain experience to take to employers and have the knowledge and insight to make the sale, satisfy the customer's needs and close the deal.

◆ *By Kyle Ellis, Purcell, Okla.*