

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Society-Ready Graduates

Preparing for Careers in Retailing and Consumer Sciences

Issue

Demand exceeds supply for graduates who can fill jobs in the expanding field of retailing. According to the National Retail Federation's Retail Industry Indicators, retail added 3.3 million new jobs between 1988 and 1998. Projections are for 3 million new retail jobs by 2008 for a grand total of 25.4 million jobs throughout the industry. One in five American workers is employed in retail—with register sales exceeding \$3 trillion last year. To meet this need many employers recruit through Career Centers to identify candidates for both internships and career placement. According to the 2003 NACE Job Outlook Survey, experiential education programs are the number one tool used for recruiting graduates.

What has been done?

The University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences offers a program of undergraduate and graduate study in Retailing and Consumer Sciences. The rigorous, comprehensive curriculum offers courses in global retailing, services retailing, e-commerce, supply-chain management and leadership development. Eligible students complete structured internships in a variety of retail formats worldwide. These have included department stores,

discount retailing and specialty retailers. In addition, the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) team is an extracurricular activity where students are given the chance to develop leadership, mentoring, teamwork and communication skills, by learning, teaching and practicing the fundamentals of free enterprise. The Southwest Retail Center that is affiliated with the Retailing and Consumer Sciences Division facilitates the connection between academic instruction and experiential learning.

Impact

Between 50 -60 percent of the retailing program's graduates are placed in retail jobs upon graduation. Positions include merchandise analyst, assistant buyer, merchandiser, buyer, store manager, and HR recruiter. With industry forecasts predicting a 15.7 percent decrease in expected hiring in the West, this program is making a difference. About 89 percent of the students completing an internship through the program said the experience was instrumental in developing their career expertise.

These internships have in many cases led to direct employment after graduation at the sponsoring firm. Thus even though hiring is down, this

program continues to offer students the curriculum, programs and connections that continue to provide opportunities for employment. For example, students competing internships in 2001 reported that Southwest Retail Center events provided 61 percent of them with internship opportunities. About 89 percent of the students completing internships through this program said this experience was helpful in developing their career goals. Fifty-eight percent of these interns were in paid internship positions and 48 percent were in corporate positions. These internships lead to offers of direct employment for 31 percent of the participating students. Students report the most exciting part of their internship was:

"Networking with so many people at all levels. Also, working in three different areas—a department, human resources, and in a buying office."

"Working in retail for the first time, seeing how much respect they had for my views."

"Going to headquarters in Troy, Michigan and getting to meet different directors."

"Designing logos for a T-shirt; I also enjoyed working with a buyer."

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