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University of Florida Students Appreciate the Challenge
by Cecilia Schulz

Retailers know better than anyone that the quality of their stores is based on the quality of their people. This summer, companies chose some of the best future retailers from the University of Florida to participate in the 1999 Retail Management Internship Program and challenged them with more positions to encourage learning and promote creativity. For example, in addition to learning how to manage stores or departments, students were trained to teach hundreds of associates how to launch company wide programs. Some traveled with district managers to remodel or open stores. Others were trained to interview sales candidates. Generally, students reported the experience as being tough, but felt they had gained the most knowledge when pushed to perform and expected to show results like their management counterparts.

The students at the University of Florida are top-notch. They are hungry to learn and are motivated by retailers who rise to the occasion and challenge them with additional experiences in areas such as human resources, interior design, finance and buying.

Working in the World of Walgreens
by Pamela Silavutiset

I had a great experience working with the Walgreens company. During the summer, I learned customer service, merchandising, advertising and worked in the pharmacy! Walgreens has their own internship training program that coordinated with the Center for Retailing’s internship. Together, they gave great exposure to retail management.

Walgreens has an array of departments in the store. Some include cosmetics, one-hour photo and pharmacy. After being introduced to all of them, I was able to work in them. I definitely like the feeling of knowing about each section and after working in them, I had a broader view of Walgreens.

Surprisingly, I was not kept in one store throughout the summer. I had the opportunity to work in the Clearwater Beach location and even work on my own as a manager at a third location! Those experiences gave me a better chance to make comparisons between the three stores and their markets. It was interesting to observe the differences in layout, merchandise, sales and clientele. After that experience, I spent a day with the district trainer to learn her role at Walgreens.

I feel that I have learned a great deal about retail through this experience. It has been fun and very interesting.

Pamela Silavutiset in St. Petersburg, Florida.
The internship program at Electronics Boutique is an extensive program that teaches you how to run a million-dollar store and allows you the opportunity to visit and learn the corporate operations. Electronics Boutique is the leading specialty retailer in computer software, video games, and accessories.

The in store portion of the internship yielded numerous responsibilities including merchandising, marketing, customer service, point of sale purchases, and loss prevention. Starting in the store I learned basic store operations and progressed to running the store by myself. The management responsibilities included scheduling, sales goals, daily paperwork, training employees, and evaluating ways to improve store sales. While in the store I had a unique experience when a water pipe burst and flooded the store. I had to assist in insurance issues and keep the store operational and customer-friendly during the clean up. I also traveled with different district managers and with the regional vice president. With the regional VP, I gave input on plans for the Sega Dreamcast, projected sales for the new system, and tracked sales of new releases.

The corporate office portion of the internship was unique and educational. Upon arrival, we met with the top executives where we sat in on negotiations for a mall lease. Shortly after, they put us to work with buyers learning the process of getting the product from the vendors to the stores. We gave our input on new products which helped the buyers determine how many to buy. We sat in on many vendor negotiations and daily company meetings. As an IS major, I was able to visit with the EBWorld.com group and see the web development process. The internship at Electronics Boutique was a very valuable experience and gave me many options upon graduation.
Price Management at Corporate Sears  
by Pablo de la Llama

As everyone is getting back to school, summer activities are the talk of the town, and I am no exception. In fact, I can’t stop talking about the amazing summer internship I had with Sears at their corporate headquarters, outside of Chicago. It was a professional summer camp, except great mentors replace counselors, and I was in meetings, instead of swimming. My summer internship was challenging and exciting. I learned a lot, met dynamic people and had a lot of fun.

I have spent twelve weeks in the Price Management department focusing on price integrity. Price integrity, surprisingly a relatively new concept, is making sure that the price in the ad, the price on the sign in the store, and the price that comes up on the register off the tag are all the same. Simple, I think not. It is a great challenge when you include, price changes, promotions, clearance pricing, etc. Not to mention the state regulators who are keeping a close eye on the result. What made the experience more interesting was the fact that because of the nature of the department I was exposed to almost all of Sears’ thirteen businesses, Marketing, Information Technology, and even the team of executives that oversee all the Full Line Stores.

When not at work, Sears provided great accommodations and a car to share with another intern. Also, Sears paid for us to go to a Cubs game, and a variety of other social events. Talk about a complete package, and the best part, I didn’t pay summer camp fees, they paid ME!

PriceManagement at Corporate Sears  
by Pablo de la Llama

The Home Depot has everything – and I’m not talking about the more than forty thousand products it has on the shelves. I am talking about everything that makes an internship incredible! During my twelve-week internship, I experienced responsibility, decentralization, empowerment, entrepreneurial spirit, decision-making, giving presentations, teaching classes, managing people, teamwork, and watching a variety of associates move to other parts of the country with promotions!

I was involved in several projects throughout the summer, but one in particular was extraordinary. I was responsible for The Home Improvement Loan Program, which was being tested in various stores throughout the company. I attended classes for three days to learn and understand the ins and outs of the loan process. Then, I distributed signs, pamphlets and applications in the store to create awareness of the program to the customers. I also taught classes to two hundred associates so they could execute the loan process themselves. A month later, our store rated number two in the southeast region, and number twelve in the country for the number of loans our store had completed! From this project, not only did I receive a sense of accomplishment, but I also learned a useful lesson. I learned that involving people with a program will lead to those same people using the program to serve the customer. With such a fast growing company, infinite opportunities in a variety of career paths, and an outstanding retail management internship program, it is easy to see that an internship at The Home Depot is a priceless experience that would benefit anyone.
We are approaching the new millennium and retail is a multi-billion dollar business. Consumers have so many choices to make compared to ten or even twenty years ago. There are specialty stores like Gap and the Limited, and even discount stores like K-Mart and Wal-Mart that have cut into department stores piece of the pie. As more Americans purchase computers they have more access to shopping via the Internet too. Fast approaching is the ease and convenience of using the Internet, having the option of not leaving your home to shop. Therefore, companies around the nation are focusing on customer service. They are trying to keep customers happy while they shop. JCPenney is a forerunner in the pursuit to provide superb customer service. In the past few months they have revised their positioning statement to accommodate their changing customer. JCPenney's promise of satisfaction is to “serve the public, as nearly as we can, to its complete satisfaction. If for any reason, you are not completely satisfied with a purchase, you can return it to any JCPenney store.” Every time a customer makes a purchase at a JCPenney store they will receive our Customer Satisfaction envelope with their receipt. Customer complaints of cramped isles, confusing layout and unresponsive salespeople have sparked this evaluation of customer needs.

To make sure my specific store was up to par when it came to customer service, I gave out customer service surveys focusing on being acknowledged in a specific department, product knowledge, accuracy of register transaction, efficient service, and last but not least, a bright smile. In addition to the survey, a department meeting was held to relay our ideas and needs of the customers to the employees in the Men's department. In turn we have had satisfied and happy customers who willingly tell their friends of the great service they received at JCPenney, where they love our style.

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Chris worked as a management trainee in two Dillard's stores.

As a management intern with Dillard's, I was given the opportunity to experience the day to day operations of a successful and competitive retail store. I did more than learn how a department store operates, my participation was active, and I was part of the store team. The Pensacola, Florida Dillard's consists of two separate department stores within one mall. I worked throughout both stores and was welcomed by all of my co-workers as a management trainee. I was rotated among various departments to become knowledgeable and comfortable with all facets of the business. I assisted the area sales managers with markdowns, clearance, scheduling, inventory, damages, visual presentation on the floor and the closing of the store. I was frequently an on-the-floor manager who took calls and made judgements dealing with customer returns and routine problems. During the internship program, I was given sufficient responsibility to make me feel that I personally contributing to the goals of the company. My experience at Dillard's surpassed all of my expectations, and the benefits of the management training that I received were valuable.

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Olusola helped to improve service in the Men's Department, JCPenney, Pembroke Pines, FL.

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Team Player at Dillard's

by Christopher Tehranian

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Chris worked as a management trainee in two Dillard's stores.
If your idea of a retail management internship is one of monotonous days spent within four walls of a store doing meaningless tasks while being underpaid, then you obviously have not heard about the opportunities available for an intern with Office Depot!

I’ll admit that I was skeptical when I accepted this internship. I thought I would be limited to doing insignificant jobs, but I was mistaken. Office Depot provided me with practical work experience in a store setting, along with the chance to do independent work applications where I was encouraged to be as creative as I liked.

The first half of my twelve-week internship with Office Depot consisted of learning the basic departments that make up a store and working with the department managers. I received hands-on training in receiving, the front end, the copy and print center, and I learned consultative sales for furniture and business technology. I shadowed the operations manager for a week and got to experience another store’s remodeling. For the remaining six weeks, I worked with my store manager, Chad Blankenship, and district manager, Larry Woldanski. My focus was Office Depot’s Back-To-School promotional campaign where I developed and implemented a Back-To-School audit program for my district of sixteen stores. I traveled as far north as Gainesville and as far south as Naples within three weeks. It proved to be a whirlwind of new and exciting learning experiences. I was even coined as the “Back-To-School Czar” by my peers and was responsible for completing any follow-up on Back-To-School issues for the district. To top it all off, I put a thirty-five page presentation together and had a thirty minute time slot to recap and present my findings at the quarterly store managers meeting! It turned out to be a jam packed summer of work and fun with Office Depot and I am excited to consider full time employment with them upon graduation.

As I first walked through the doors of the Grapevine Group I had no idea that I would learn so much in just ten short weeks. My experience offered an alternative to the in-store retail internship. The Grapevine Group is a human resources consulting and recruiting firm located in Atlanta. They provide an array of human resources services worldwide to a variety of businesses including major retailers, pharmaceutical companies, service organizations, and information technology companies.

At the Grapevine Group I never felt as if I was just an intern; I was a part of the team. I was empowered with meaningful assignments and responsibilities, all of which contributed to the growth and success of the company. I administered interview and screening processes for international pharmaceutical companies. I created and distributed effective marketing letters to potential clients. I handled an employment information line for a major retailer, receiving calls from across the Southeast.

I had the opportunity to attend the annual SHRM (Society for Human Resources Management) national conference, which brought together over 10,000 people from all aspects of the human resources industry. I was actively involved in the implementation of the Back-To-School audit program for my district.
Have you ever heard the saying “only 50% of what you learn in college comes from the classroom”? My summer internship at Beall's proved this statement to be true. Beall's gave me a real world experience and challenges that my professors could never match.

As a third year business major with no experience, I was fortunate to have been chosen with five other UF students as a Beall's intern. Keeping up with the demands of this ever-growing company was no piece of cake. Not only did I witness the daily operations and changes within the company, but the Beall's group made me part of their team. I participated in management meetings. I helped make store evaluations that positively affected the company's image. I worked with a visual merchandiser and helped to change and update summer displays that eventually had an effect on sales by attracting more customers! I also visited vendor shows and had the opportunity to voice my opinions and suggestions.

At Beall's, excellent customer service is their number one priority. I worked with management and with associates every day learning how to assist customers. Through this interaction, I learned how to offer great service in a professional and positive manner.

It is easy to say that Beall's has given me a new outlook on retail, a wealth of knowledge on management and better self-confidence.

Tamika ran the show while her supervisor was away.

Sales Increased Under My Management at Rich's! 
by Tamika Johnson

Interning with Rich's in Atlanta, Georgia this summer proved to be a very valuable experience. Within the two months of my internship, I learned about tracking and assessing sales, determining sales volume, to dealing with and making quick decisions about customer and employee problems, using all resources correctly to achieve company goals and much, much more. My supervisor felt confident enough to leave me with his department on his days off. Best of all, I was always included in all management meetings with the staff always encouraging my input.

The most rewarding experience of all was being given my own department. I was put in charge of frames and stationery. This happened to be a department that was not projecting the sales that the store wanted, but under my management, the sales of that department increased! I also got an opportunity to meet and speak with a lot of important people such as the southeest division merchandising manager, Gail Nutt. In our meeting she spoke to me about my department and gave me pointers on how I could further improve my area.

An internship in retail not only gives a student valuable experience, but it gives a person the opportunity to develop contacts with incredible powerhouses in the retail world. 

I am a junior majoring in Interior Design through the College of Architecture; my internship experience with City Furniture was a little different than usual but very valuable. My daily responsibilities included organizing merchandise in collections by focusing on the visual display of furniture, how the furniture is placed and replenishing the stock. I also had the opportunity to travel to all of the eleven City Furniture showrooms from Dade County to Palm Beach County. My overall experience of City Furniture was very rewarding and I learned not only about the display of furniture but the retail industry.
Burdines Dispelled Retail Myths

Nicole Panettieri

I went in as a scared 19-year-old and came out feeling like a responsible adult.

From my internship, not only did I gain vital skills in becoming a future manager, but I also gained responsibility and confidence. Burdines helped me overlook the stereotype of retail and experience the fun and exciting side. Now I enjoy retail, I love the challenge of a new day and I embrace the responsibility.

I never thought retail was for me. I did not want to fold clothes or work long hours; I believed the retail myth!! When I heard about the retail internship program at Burdines, I thought it would be a good summer job and great work experience. But in fact, my internship changed my whole perspective of the retail business and my place in it. I went in as a scared 19-year-old and came out feeling like a responsible adult.

My internship was in the cosmetic and fragrance department at Burdines. I was young and not familiar with the workings of a large department store. The people I would be managing were older and knew more than me. The other managers were grounded and had more experience. However, I looked at these obstacles as a challenge and as a learning experience. Working with my supervisor, I learned important management skills. For example, I learned how to gain respect from the associates, despite my age and communicate effectively with them.

The intern position at Burdines is considered management status with the same responsibilities and duties; I even got to wear the red flower. I assisted in event planning, such as Lancôme French Bread and Father’s Day, and was able to share my ideas and the success. I was also given many projects to do on my own. Upper management trusted me to handle important tasks such as resolving stock issues.

Grapevine, from page 5

of an innovative “open-book management” program which is based on the book The Great Game of Business, by Jack Stack. I was even responsible for leading a company wide meeting where we discussed parts of the book.

My internship at the Grapevine Group has notably provided me with applicable business knowledge, but also a taste of the “real world.” I have experienced living in a big city, commuting to work, and being part of a real working environment. In just ten short weeks I gained the knowledge and confidence that I need to succeed upon graduation.

Grapevine, from page 5

Great Human Resource Experience at City Furniture

by Beth Ahern

In addition to the recruiting side of human resources, I was given the opportunity to work with worker’s compensation. Due to the physical demand of the many positions at City Furniture this became a large portion of my learning experience. I was involved in filling out the first notice of injury, sending our associates to the correct doctors and following up on their progress.

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This summer, five UF students experienced a 12-week retail management internship at the 13th Street Wal-Mart Stores (#538) in Gainesville. Our mentor was UF Alumni, Ray Korsh, and Co-Manager Don Atchley. Ray provided guidance and support during our internship experience and immediately made us feel like part of the Wal-Mart Family.

Our internship consisted of a scheduled training exercise in different areas of the store for each week. By working in different departments, we were able to learn the responsibilities of the associates and the importance of their work to the store. We also participated in management meetings, where we had the opportunity to express our concerns and ideas. Many of our ideas turned into special projects.

Each intern was able to choose an area of responsibility in which to specialize and improve. Jennifer supervised the fitting room and corrected inventory counts in the clothing department. Francisco worked closely with the department manager in hardware and managed the paint center. In the absence of a department manager in the snack bar, Robert assisted the assistant manager of the department and helped interview prospective applicants. Frank worked with the assistant manager of the food, stationary, and housewares department and kept the area stocked and corrected inventory counts. I helped at the service desk and with front-end cashiers, as well as, the store’s bi-weekly newsletter. As a team we organized and implemented the Back-to-School Program. This included ordering and displaying our key selling items for school and setting up an information table for students.

A highlight of our internship was a trip to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center, in Brooksville, Florida. The facility was amazing and unlike anything we expected. The Center is almost two million square feet and employs over 1,000 associates. We became more informed about how merchandise is sorted and sent to Wal-Mart stores. Other highlights of our internship was to brainstorm with our district manager about the associate turnover problem in our store. Our solution to decreasing turnover was to organize the front end cashiers into teams to stir up competition and store spirit. Management appreciated our inputs and welcomed our ideas.

We had the opportunity to experience and learn more about the store and its departments by helping out during their inventory. During inventory, we worked to perfect the store’s item counts, learned the store’s layout, and got to know the associates working in these areas. This was an important learning experience that all interns should go through to learn more about how a store operates.

Our Wal-Mart experience was an “eye opener” to the retail business. In our internship, we learned many skills, and experienced different situations that result in operating a successful store. Wal-Mart has a very impressive history and culture, which keeps them at the top of the field. I am proud to have had the experience of working for the #1 retail company in the world.