

Wholesale & Retail LEADERSHIP CHAIR

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 24 October 2016

ON-CAMPUS SHOPS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN GIVING STUDENTS WORK EXPERIENCE

Lack of work experience is a major factor in the employability of many recent graduates in South Africa, and institutions of higher learning have responded by making work-integrated learning a component of their curricula. However, it remains a challenge finding suitable opportunities for real-life experience that will produce work-ready graduates. One way of addressing this is through campus-based retail stores, that is to say, real operating businesses on campuses used for workplace experience.

In a recent research project at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the Wholesale & Retail Leadership Chair looked into how on-campus retail stores could help students to bridge the gap between practical work experience and the theoretical knowledge of academia, and investigated four possible models to determine the most effective and fastest way to establish and manage such stores. The models for an on-campus retail shop that emerged during the study were: A mini-mall with shelves allocated to different retailers responsible for their own mini-stores; one store consisting of a coffee shop and different departments; a mini-mall with independent stores; and a single independent retail store. Students would participate at different levels according to their year of study: First-years as general workers, second-years as student supervisors and third-years as student managers. They would have the benefit of getting exposure to a wide range of aspects of a business and getting training from retailers on their products, systems and how to build a brand.

Work-integrated learning at on-campus retail stores would teach job skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking and business savvy. The learning should be integrated with the curriculum and a logbook would be used to guide students and staff to record their workplace experience. The retail store should be managed by a board comprised of representatives from the university, students and retailers. The store manager, ideally a retired retail branch manager, should have the ability to understand the curriculum and the work required from the students, and should also mentor the students and sign off their logbooks.

It is hoped that this study will encourage debate among stakeholders and inspire further research, and serve as a work-integrated learning model for other academic institutions to set up retail stores on their campuses to promote work-integrated learning and ensure that the graduates they produce meet the needs of the retail sector and the South African economy.

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