Using a Program-based Store for Retail and Entrepreneurship Education: Integration of a Retail Learning Lab as a Capstone Experience

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Introduction: The retail industry is undergoing a large-scale transformation. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and contrary to popular press describing a retail apocalypse, retail sales and jobs have actually increased over the past decade. For example, over the past three years, for every company closing stores, five retailers were opening new outlets (Mathews, 2019). Prior to the pandemic, retailers were challenged to keep up with technological changes, omni-channel strategies, and a competitive market environment. These factors are now compounded and retailers must simultaneously meet a number of criteria to be positioned for market success, including a strong value proposition, clear brand image, and offerings that are relevant to consumers. From an experiential standpoint, retailers must also have a great customer service model, differentiated product offerings, and a unique in-store and online experience that feels cohesive and authentic to consumers across multiple channels (Watts, 2019; Yrjola, Saarijarvi, & Nummela, 2018). To meet these demands of the retail industry, graduates entering the workforce must be more innovative, entrepreneurial, and ready to apply outside-of-the-box thinking in this new era of retailing.

Significance and Purpose. As apparel and retailing scholars and educators, we are called to develop and deliver timely content that will prepare students for professional roles in the apparel retail industry. However, the gap between industry and academia continues to be of concern, due to lack of real-world industry learning resources (e.g., access to software/technology, financial data, merchandise reports, etc.) for students (Wang & Cole, 2018). One way educators can lessen this gap, is to offer industry-relevant capstone courses. Capstone courses provide students with the opportunity to apply prior knowledge to “real-world” applications, aiding in the development of essential communication and critical thinking skills (Gresch & Rawls, 2017). The purpose of this paper is to provide insight regarding a novel program-based learning lab designed to enhance retail and entrepreneurship education through six innovative learning modules and a capstone course. Newly created retailing and entrepreneurship content will span modules in six classes, serving as components of a larger-scale curriculum plan. A new program-based retail space will serve as a real-world learning lab and provide a foundation for the apparel retailing and entrepreneurship capstone course.

Methods. Phase 1) Current Course Enhancement. The first step was to develop new content in six existing apparel-retail-entrepreneurship related courses, building on resources and opportunities available in the new retail store. This retail space will allow for the development of transferrable, high demand skills, and provide students with industry relevant learning

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experiences. Course enhancements include the introduction of a flipped classroom approach for new course content and team projects; technology-enriched assignments focused on small business sustainability in the changing retail environment; and development of new content and assignments for retail learning experiences. This will include the use of Point-of-Sale (POS) and cloud-based data to drive merchandise buying and planning decisions. Seminars will also be offered on topics such as achieving small business competitiveness through the use of retail specific technology; development of data analytics project where students will analyze data collected from the new retail store's POS system, and creation of dynamic visual summaries using data analysis and visualization software. Students will then make suggestions regarding the store's omni-channel strategies. Once the enhancements to these six courses have been implemented, faculty will engage in a curriculum mapping exercise that will allow for a more cohesive synthesis for the development of the capstone course.

Phase 2) Development of Capstone Course using Bloom's Taxonomy. The aforementioned curricular enhancements and related pedagogy in six existing courses provide foundational knowledge for an innovative, interdisciplinary capstone course. The capstone course will broadly engage students through team based learning, critical analysis, and problem solving related to pressing retail industry issues. Lead faculty for the six courses will collectively establish student learning outcomes using the revised Bloom's Taxonomy Model (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) in *Figure 1*. Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) involves the development of intellectual skills and outlines a hierarchy of cognitive learning from lower to higher order thinking.

Figure 1. Revised Bloom's Taxonomy: The Cognitive Process Dimension

Lower Order Thinking Higher Order Thinking	Category	Sample Learning Outcomes/Objectives for Capstone Course ("Students will be able to...")
	Remember	Identify the buyers' responsibilities, behaviors and challenges involved in forecasting and developing a product line.
	Understand	Explain the fundamentals of planning, selection, negotiating, cost control, and promotion of retail merchandise assortments.
	Apply	Apply a systematic approach to branding and promotional decision making in retail, fashion, and hospitality business organizations.
	Analyze	Analyze the cost/benefit of business decisions for entrepreneurs and the interrelatedness of economic, business, and personal issues.
	Evaluate	Evaluate the performance of retailing and merchandising strategies in a financial scope.
	Create	Create unique themed experiential marketing events for the retail space.

Discussion & Conclusions. Research supports that capstone course design: a) involves high levels of student engagement (Rash & Weld, 2013) and b) a high-impact practice beneficial to

students and employers alike (Kuh, 2008; Gresch & Rawls, 2017). Therefore, in light of the current retail environment, it is timely to leverage resources such as a retail learning lab and develop an all-encompassing, apparel-retail-entrepreneurship related capstone experience to expose students to real-world retail challenges. Leveraging institutional resources, such as the new program-based retail store on campus, will allow us to provide real-world learning experiences for students, and help them to develop and refine highly desired employment skills (i.e., critical thinking, communication, leadership, attention-to-detail, team building, time management, etc.; Crittenden & Crittenden, 2006). Furthermore, this capstone course will allow students to experience organizational dynamics that they will likely face on the job (Schwering, 2015). A main goal for educators is to prepare students for their future careers and equip them with the knowledge and skillsets that make them competitive in the job market. This goal is supported by the retail and entrepreneurship learning experiences elaborated in this research.

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