Through a series of real-world programs, the Center for Retailing Excellence exposes students to retail experiences outside the classroom and helps them see a variety of career paths:

**ADVERTISING AGENCY MEETINGS**
The Center arranged for a select group of students to attend Wal-Mart's advertising agency meetings throughout the fall and spring semesters. This unique opportunity allowed the students to observe the factors and considerations when developing an advertising campaign, in particular, the expression of company philosophy and values.

**“BIG PICTURE” APPAREL TRENDS**
The Center sponsored 20 students at Wal-Mart's fall “Big Picture” meeting. Students attended half-day sessions, during which vendors proposed their fall 2004 apparel line to buyers. Vendors explained the competitive research and trend shopping that went into their proposed fashion lines. The buyers invited students to give their input on selections. The students were also invited to attend the “Vision” meeting where samples of the chosen apparel were displayed for further negotiations.

**SUPPLIER MEETINGS**
The Center sponsored students at the spring 2004 Wal-Mart supplier meeting where they observed the interaction between its buyers and suppliers. Exposure to the research, trend shopping, financial analysis, and responsibilities of both buyers and suppliers provided insights into careers the students had not previously considered.

**GRADS-TO-BUYERS**
“Grads-to-Buyers” is a three-part program that introduces students to the processes and culture of Wal-Mart. While the main focus is to develop potential buyers, it also enables participants to determine a career path through exposure to the many divisions in the corporate offices. The “Grads-to-Buyers” program includes:

**Job-Shadowing** The Center and the Apparel Studies Program, School of Human Environmental Sciences, collaborated with Wal-Mart People Division to sponsor 19 students for the “Grads-to-Buyers” job-shadowing program for a week last September. The students, with a faculty recommendation, had opportunities to shadow managers in merchandising in the apparel division, food division, product development, marketing and replenishment. Students participated in a half-day orientation, a day of job shadowing in their area of interest, and the weekly Wal-Mart management Saturday morning meeting.
Pre-Internship Program  Three Walton College students participated in the Wal-Mart Pre-Internship Program during the 2004 spring break. The objective was to cultivate potential buyers for Wal-Mart. Faculty recommended the students. They received an overview of the merchandising division and other areas that support merchandising. Students were introduced to the Wal-Mart culture and given in-store training and an overview of merchandising, logistics, global procurement and RetailLink. They toured the distribution center and test labs.

Speakers Relate First-Hand Experiences  In September, the Center hosted Deanah Baker, handbag, wallet, and backpack buyer for Wal-Mart. She stressed the entrepreneurial spirit given to Wal-Mart buyers. She described how Wal-Mart gives each store manager the freedom to conduct business according to customer demographics, yet all associates function as a team from the store level up to the corporate office.

Becky Harmon, buyer in the Wal-Mart ladies’ undergarments department, spoke to students this spring to introduce them to the responsibilities, challenges and rewards of a buyer. She explained some of the buyer’s challenges, including product selection, understanding the customers, and knowing what appeals to them.

CAREER INFORMATION DAYS  General Mills, in conjunction with the Center, Minority Affairs and the Career Development Center, hosted sophomore Information Days at the college in March. Ken Bertha, General Mills recruiting, training and development manager, along with three business planning associates and two business management associates, discussed with a large group of students the consumer foods industry, careers with their company and internship opportunities. Students attended sessions the following day on resume writing, interviewing skills, and considerations when choosing a company for employment. They also were able to spend a day job-shadowing at General Mills.

THE RETAIL RUSH  Student opportunities to learn more about their particular fields of interest

Career fairs offer students the chance to learn where opportunities exist for jobs in their fields of interest, in addition to opening the doors to summer internships. They learn about beginning salaries and the benefits offered by employers. Recruiters have indicated that the Center for Retailing Excellence Retail Rush is a valuable program to gain access to business majors in the Walton College as well as other students at the University of Arkansas. Retail Rush was held simultaneously with the Supply Chain Career Fair, allowing students access to recruiters from additional companies.

FALL AND SPRING RETAIL RUSH  The Center for Retailing Excellence hosted the “Retail Rush” career fair for students in the fall where almost 200 students talked with 14 recruiters. In the spring, the most successful Retail Rush to date attracted more than 375 students and 22 companies, including five companies who had not previously recruited at the University of Arkansas. The following companies participated in the fall and/or spring Retail Rush:

Belk, Inc.  Kohl’s
Bridgestone/Firestone  Nestlé Purina PetCare
The Buckle, Inc.  Newell Rubbermaid
Carlton-Bates Company  Nice-Pak Products, Inc.
Crossmark  Office Depot, Inc.
Dillard’s, Inc.  Sears, Roebuck and Co.
Enterprise Rent-A-Car Company  Target Corporation
General Mills, Inc.  The Sherwin-Williams Company
HEB Grocery Company  Saatchi & Saatchi X
Information Resources, Inc.  Unilever
J.C. Penney Company, Inc.  Walgreen Co.
Kaplan Inc.  Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.
Kimberly-Clark Corporation

A representative from Unilever talks with students about career opportunities.
Three leading consumer sales and marketing software companies have donated software to the Center for use by students and faculty. AC Nielsen U.S., a VNU company, donated Homescan® consumer panel tools and information in 2002. Spectra, another division of VNU, donated tools to enable faculty and students to gain first-hand experience with industry-standard marketing research tools. In addition, Information Resources Inc. provided its industry leading category management suite of products.

The Center hosted a luncheon program for students, titled “Professional Women Speak Out” in November. Jessy Massey, BA ’00, product development manager at Wal-Mart, researches fabrics and clothing styles to help determine what the company will offer its customers. Kelly Boyle, director of operations at General Mills, Inc., has been with the company for fourteen years. Throughout her career, she has been involved in supervising, marketing, and purchasing. Sarah Barnett, BSBA ’03, is a marketing specialist at General Electric Capital Corporation. She works in the Bentonville facility, but has also traveled to Canada to develop international marketing programs. Each speaker explained what their job entails and encouraged students to ask questions.

The Center hosted George Stasick, BSBA ’71, director of JCPenney.com, in its guest lecture series. He addressed over 200 students on October 23. Stasick discussed how his group profiles the JCPenney.com customer through extensive research conducted by the company. He demonstrated the JCPenney.com Web site, pointing to the specific features. Stasick was selected as entrepreneur of the year in 2001 by the Walton College for his work at the forefront of J.C. Penney’s Internet commerce initiative.

More than 450 members of the retailing industry attended the “Emerging Trends in Retailing” symposium in October, hosted by the Center for Retailing Excellence and its executive board of directors. Keynote speakers included top executives from some of Arkansas’ most successful companies.

Andy Murray, CEO, ThompsonMurray (now Saatchi & Saatchi X), discussed “shopperistics,” a process that can be mapped like the traditional supply chain logistics. Trigger points in the process include discovery of need, passion about brands, moment of delight, and moment of decision.

Harry Balzer, Vice President, NPD Group, sponsored by The J.M. Smucker Company, presented on changes in eating and shopping habits in America. He discussed the major trends in food: convenience, eating at home with takeout food, demand for fresher restaurant food, and America’s obsession with obesity.

Thomas M. Coughlin, Executive Vice President and Vice Chairman, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., discussed Wal-Mart’s ability to maintain low prices and explained the changes accompanying the introduction of RFID (radio frequency identification).

H. Lee Scott, Jr., President and CEO of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., related Wal-Mart’s success and worldwide growth to the company’s awareness of the need for interpersonal communication with the customer. “Our ability to stay humble will also determine our success,” he said.

Breakout sessions were presented by Rollin Ford, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (Trends in Logistics); Matt Waller, Walton College (Demand Forecasting); Tig Gilliam, IBM (Audio ID); Anne Sandberg, Predict Success (Employees/Associates); Joe Farnan and DeWayne Newton, E.&J. Gallo Winery (Information Management); and David Shankar, Information Resources, Inc. (Understanding the Drug Store Consumer).

Mobley concluded, “Not only was this a great learning and networking experience for Wal-Mart vendors, it provided real-world exposure for our students.” The Walton College S.I.F.E., S.A.K.E., and MBA programs, Student Advisors and American Marketing Association attended and assisted with the conference.