



Proposal Mississippi State University School of Human Sciences Retail Merchandising and Cotton Product Development Research Center

The School of Human Sciences' Retail Merchandising and Cotton Product Development Research Center launched in Fall 2014 to establish and build connections between the apparel and retail industry and Mississippi State University. Currently, the Fashion Design and Merchandising (FDM) concentration has 120 undergraduate students and four faculty members. As part of the School of Human Sciences, within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, FDM is one of the fastest growing majors and is positioning itself to become a premier collegiate program in the southeast for retail, merchandising, apparel design and textiles. In fact, it is the only four-year merchandising and design program in Mississippi, and one of only a few product development programs in the United States.

Mission Statement

The new RMCPDRC Center will promote mutually beneficial educational, research and service partnerships between Mississippi State University and national and regional corporate organizations in these fields. At the core of the new Center will be three main goals, in line with the university mission: education, research and service. A three-year evaluation based on the following goals will serve to assess the Center's progress and provide a basis for future strategic planning and initiatives with industry organizations in the retail, merchandising, apparel design and textile fields, with a focus on cotton research and promotion.

Objectives

Educational Objective – *To serve the needs of industry partners to develop and train a qualified, effective and productive workforce.*

- Recruit top quality undergraduates to MSU, where they will work closely with faculty to develop a unique program of study, acquiring the necessary skills to pursue successful careers with RMCPDRC Center partners.
- Work closely identifying graduating students strengths and weaknesses based on the needs of RMCPDRC Center partners to modify and improve current curriculum, continually providing top quality internship opportunities.

- Sponsor lectures, seminars and workshops led by executives from RMCPDRC Center partners to expose undergraduates to current and relevant industry trends and information.
- Host sponsored events such as the *Fashion Design and Merchandising Scholarship Dinner* and the *Senior Showcase* to recognize students for their academic and leadership accomplishments.
- Coordinate networking and/or professional development opportunities between undergraduate and RMCPDRC Center Partners through sponsored activities such as field trips, on-the-job experiences, and/or case study analysis.

Research Objective – *To promote continued research in the products, processes and practices of RMCPDRC Center partners. The RMCPDRC Center will provide seed money, matching funds, and/or undergraduate student support for research projects of interest to the academic, retail, and product development community with a focus on cotton promotion.*

- Fund Undergraduate research projects related to cotton marketing and promotion.
- Provide research outreach opportunities with peer universities to expand the outreach and impact of domestic cotton production and promotion.
- Domestic sourcing and manufacturing utilizing regionally sourced cotton.
- Use of social media in connecting retailers with young adult target markets.
- Strategies for the development and evaluation of the creative design process.
- Strategies for retailers engaged in cross-cultural merchandising and design.
- Use of 3D modeling technologies for communication in product development.
- Implement case study assignments into current curriculum and courses.
- Work with partners to develop new curriculum and courses based on industry trends and needs of partners.

Service Objective – *To develop community outreach and service learning, focused on the apparel and retail fields, between RMCPDRC Center partners, undergraduate students, and area populations, throughout Mississippi.*

- Partner with the Center for Advancement of Service Learning and Excellence to develop courses and curriculum with a service-learning component related to RMCPDRC Center partner needs.
- Partner with MSU Extension services to increase apparel retail and product development career awareness in rural areas, while providing professional development and training through county extension agents.
- Partner with Mississippi Department of Education to provide training and career prep for interested high school students through Technology and Career Center Courses developed in conjunction with National Retail Federation curriculums and certifications.
- Aide regional small-businesses or non-profit organizations on development of digital visual merchandising plans, computerized financial analyses and buying plans, and developing and maintaining a social media presence.

Center Membership

Members will be recruited from regional and national apparel retail brands and companies, non-profit organizations, government-related agencies, and support

6/3/2015

systems partners of apparel retail merchandisers and product developers. There will not be restrictions on the type of company interested in membership and participation is based solely on financial commitment to the new Center.

The RMCPDRC Center Partner membership fee is \$3,000 per academic year. A two-year commitment is required and is renewable once at the introductory rate for *Founding Partners* (join within first two years). Divisions of firms are also eligible for membership in the Center and are subject to the same membership costs and benefits as other members.

Member Benefits

Partners receive the following RMCPDRC Center Benefits:

- 1) A recognition package, including public relations and media promotions, upon initial support and continuing recognition as a *Partner*, including a company web link on the RMCPDRC Center's website.
- 2) Visibility and promotion to MSU's outstanding student body, as an employer of choice.
- 3) Assistance from RMCPDRC Center, in partnership with the Career Center in setting up on-campus recruiting events and interviews.
- 4) Advanced opportunities to network and meet with undergraduates prior to career fair.
- 5) Assistance in setting up career fair presence and recruitment opportunities on-campus with a 50% reduction in career fair fees.
- 6) Invitations to present seminars on campus in classes or as part of RMCPDRC Center sponsored special events.
- 7) Priority seating and recognition at RMCPDRC Center sponsored events.
- 8) Advance copies of Center research results, publications and Annual Reports.
- 9) Participation in Annual Review of the RMCPDRC Center

Center Organization and Infrastructure

Campus Affiliations

The School of Human Sciences at Mississippi State University will act as the host department for the Retail Merchandising & Cotton Product Development Research Center (RMCPDRC). Interested parties affiliated with MSU include: School of Human Sciences, MSU Extension Services, and MSU 4-H. Additional parties have been identified and included based upon recommendations from administration, including the College of Engineering, College of Business, and the MSU Entrepreneurship Center. Disciplines across MSU campus, as well as industry partners outside the university, will serve to provide additional expertise and feedback on Center activities, as determined by the RMCPDRC Director, FDM Faculty and the Director of the School of Human Sciences. For additional information, please contact:

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