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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF FASHION MERCHANDISING
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, BY TYPE, AVAILABLE
IN
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Education
Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by

Monique N. Jones

August 1990

APPROVAL PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Monique N. Jones under the direction of Dr. John Ritz in VTE 636, Problems in Education. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The economic survival of retail businesses depends on the sale of its goods to consumers. Retailers generated 8.2 billion dollars in 1988 in Hampton Roads. In 1989, retail sales grew about 5 percent in Hampton Roads and predictions for 1990 retail sales show moderate growth (Thompson, 1990, pg. 42).

To make people aware of a company's products, residents of South Hampton Roads rely on newspapers, mail advertising, and television for information about clothing; however, newspaper advertising is consulted more often than all other sources combined for shopping information. Newspapers also have the added advantage of preselling your customers ... when they come to your store, they are ready to buy.

According to the Virginia Employment Commission, 1988 statistics show that Hampton Roads employed about 115,000 people in retailing. Accordingly, retailers large and small are expanding their fashion departments which puts a greater demand on the production capacity of manufacturers. These developments all point to greater employment opportunities in the future. The Retail Merchants Association agrees, predicting that general merchandise sales will rebound from a slow start in 1990 and improve as the year goes on thus providing more opportunities for employees (Thompson, 1990, pg. 42).

America's greatness in producing a huge variety of merchandise

would be meaningless if that merchandise were not sold. Selling is what the retail business is all about. The growing focus on fashion has created a need for trained men and women in the fashion merchandising field. Part of the educational process, and vocational education courses in particular, is to prepare students for the real world. One way to do this is to outline the employment opportunities and acknowledge where they exist.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the number of fashion merchandising employment opportunities for students holding a baccalaureate degree in Virginia Beach, Virginia. To be relevant to career planning, this study will investigate present openings and projections for the next three years.

RESEARCH GOALS

To answer this research problem, the following questions needed to be answered.

1. What are the career opportunities available in the fashion merchandising field.
2. What are the fashion merchandising employment opportunities at the entry level for degree graduates in Virginia Beach, Virginia.
3. Within each type of employment opportunity, how many people were needed currently and projected for 1993.
4. Would the businesses surveyed accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Retailing dates back to 1870. The period from 1870 to 1880 saw the beginning of the rise of the great department and specialty stores that became the main sources of retail distribution for clothing manufacturers. During the 1880-1890 period, although the industry continued to grow, factory-made clothes were perceived as for the lower class. In 1920, with the beginning of modern ready-to-wear, a new institution came into being: the apparel chain store. Once modern ready-to-wear was developed, it did not take long for different types of retailers to recognize its profit potential. The modern department store's success is based on its ability to sell fashion apparel and related items and statistics show that fashion apparel sales are approximately 53 percent of its total yearly volume. Indeed, ready-to-wear has come a long way from the time it was considered an insignificant product for the lower class.

Generally, the larger the store, the greater are the executive and supervisory opportunities. In smaller shops, the owner and one or two workers may handle everything - planning, buying, receiving, pricing, advertising, displaying, wrapping, and selling. Whether a student chooses the larger store or the smaller store, the opportunities are abounding.

Providing the right training so that graduates can enter the work force will reduce the number of unemployed and help bolster the economy. It takes a great many kinds of skills and a wide

assortment of highly motivated people to keep America's retail world alive. And of course, this means that they offer a broad range of possibilities for anyone interested in retailing.

This study was envisioned as a method to provide the graduate with specific opportunities within the fashion merchandising field in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Job placement is a goal of vocational education and a study of this nature will identify the employment opportunities available to the fashion merchandising degree holders.

The results of this research can be made available to the fashion merchandising professors at Old Dominion University, Tidewater Community College, and post-secondary schools such as Commonwealth College. Early information about possible career opportunities will allow students to make intelligent choices when planning their two or four year schedules. This early planning may prevent the student from taking courses that will not be beneficially used when he/she enters the work force.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of the research was limited to Virginia Beach, Virginia, fashion merchandising employment opportunities. The fields covered in this research were restricted to the retailing end of the industry due to the fact that there are very few manufacturers in the Tidewater area. The fact that retail outlets are so numerous throughout Virginia Beach, Virginia, makes beginning career opportunities in this field more available than

in the wholesale and manufacturing areas. Employers were identified from the telephone company yellow pages and the Retail Merchants Association.

ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions were applied to this study:

1. Employers will be knowledgeable enough to provide accurate information about projected career opportunities.
2. The results will be used for the guidance of graduates and students in the fashion merchandising field.
3. The community will experience economic progress and not a recession.

PROCEDURES

A survey form was designed and presented to those companies identified as related to the fashion merchandising industry. An explanation for the survey form and asking their cooperation accompanied the form. The results were then tabulated and presented with tables and discussion.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms defined are for reader comprehension throughout the research study.

Merchandising - It is the selection and purchasing of merchandise from the manufacturer and the selling of that merchandise to the consumer.

Retailing - The business of buying for resale to the ultimate customer.

Executive Trainee - One who is hired for training as an

executive; works in various divisions of the store; receives on-the-job training.

Direct Mail - Use of the mail to make announcements, sell merchandise, sell services, sell the store, its divisions, its departments, its character, and its way of doing business.

Buying Office - Organization representing a group of non-competing stores, formed primarily for servicing stores and may be independent, store-owned, or own the stores.

Buyer - An (retail) executive who is responsible for the selection and purchasing of merchandise.

Fashion Coordinator - A person charged with the responsibility for keeping abreast of fashion trends and developments, and acting as a source of fashion information to others in his or her organization.

Fashion Merchandising Careers - Careers offering high rewards, challenging positions, and high financial returns such as a fashion buyer and a fashion coordinator.

Ready-to-Wear - Mass produced apparel.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter I introduced the fashion merchandising industry and stated that the problem was to determine the number of fashion merchandising employment opportunities for students holding a baccalaureate degree in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Additionally it stated the research goals, gave the background and significance of the study, stated the limitations and assumptions of the study, outlined the procedures, and defined some of the terms found in the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter there will be an overview of the literature on fashion merchandising career employment opportunities. It will also list the employment opportunities available to students with a baccalaureate degree in the fashion merchandising industry.

CAREER APPROACHES

Packard (1983, p. 206) suggests that there are many advantages to a career in retailing including numerous factors. Retailing is the means by which products are brought to customers and serves a most fundamental economic need. Retailing is unlike some careers or businesses that become obsolete by reason of new technology or economic changes. When new environmental factors occur, retailers change to accommodate them. The retailing need is all pervasive, so one can work for or establish a store wherever there are people. Retail organizations are constantly in search of young people and willing to train and remunerate them consistent with responsibility and their contributions to organizational profit. Large retail organizations offer continued job viability. Many, in fact, as policy offer job rotation for selected employees so that personnel may gain a widened understanding of the retail operation and sustain work enthusiasm. Since retailing is an institution in a perpetual state of change to newer conditions, people with

imagination have the opportunity to express their creativity. Retailing is a completely people-oriented institution and therefore never dull for someone who relates to people. There are constant interrelations with other personnel and the customers who are being served. There is some variation for those in the impersonal selling sectors, but even there one must be a people-watcher who understands current life styles.

According to Sidney Packard (1983, p. 208), who is currently a director of Fashion Education Consultants, there are three major career approaches: retail opportunities - administration and operations, fashion buying - merchandising, and small store ownership - entrepreneurship. Administration and operations provides excellent opportunities for job advancement, not inconceivably to the top layer of the hierarchy. There are far more types of positions in this area than in merchandising. Managerial personnel advantages include tenure, transferability of skills and knowledge, job advancement, and opportunities to understand the management end of retailing, including the cost and financing of the marketing effort.

Fashion buying/merchandising is a well paying job, probably one of the highest in the United States. It is a career that permits the individual to satisfy the desire for self-expression. It is a position where creativity and decision making are well rewarded. There are many advantages of a career in buying. Remuneration is an important advantage. The important aspect of the buyer's remuneration is that it is almost always directly in

proportion to the buyer's level of achievement. Advancement is another advantage to a career in buying. There is an opportunity to advance in rank, prestige, and pay. Transferability allows the ability of buyers to find employment which is never determined by geographical boundaries or restrictions. It is a common practice for buyers to find new positions through connections "in the market". Travel, self-expression, and an opportunity for personal growth are still more advantages to a career in buying. The buyer is the key person in the merchandising process and has one of the most important and responsible jobs in the business.

Small store ownership is the third major career approach. To put small store ownership into focus: the small, independent store represents about 88 percent of all retail units in the country, and about one-third of the total retail sales (Packard, 1983, p. 211). An independent owner is a generalist and must fill a variety of roles to meet the requirements of buying, receiving, marking, and selling of merchandise; financing the operation; and maintaining the store. If the business thrives, the owner can then give some of these duties to other employees; however, generally speaking, retail businesses have a low survival rate. Statistical records show that 95 percent of all small-store failures are due to two factors: lack of experience and undercapitalization (Packard, 1983, p. 211). However, it is said that if a business can get through the first two years, the chances for survival are better and the rewards are many. Small store ownership should not be attempted until the individual obtains solid experience in the

retail field. A thorough knowledge of all areas of retailing is an invaluable asset to any future store owner.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment opportunities for students holding a baccalaureate degree are numerous. An assistant buying job is the most important steppingstone to becoming a buyer. It is often the position given to college graduates who complete an executive training program. A two- or four-year college degree is essential for landing a place in such a training program. The store that hires you for its executive training program will groom you in all aspects of merchandising and develop your management skills. For the first weeks of a training program, trainees may visit all the store branches and learn as much as possible about the divisions within them. Trainees will be trained in selling procedures and will spend some time right on the selling floor. Once they are assigned to a particular department, the trainee will have a chance to meet the buyer and assistant buyer, and observe how they operate. Part of the training period will be spent in areas such as the operations division working side by side with employees in the receiving room or the shipping department; or in the control division, observing the billing process or the auditing team. Somewhere between six and twelve months of training and, depending upon how quickly jobs become available, the trainee may be ready for an assignment as an assistant buyer.

The assistant buyer position involves all-around exposure to

each phase of the buyer's responsibilities, including all management duties. It includes handling some of the department's budget, selecting and promoting merchandise, maintaining sales and inventory records, and supervising sales and stock employees. It also means spending a good deal of time in the sales area with salespeople, customers, and the merchandise. This position offers wonderful on-the-job training.

Another entry level position may be the assistant to the fashion coordinator. The duties are often clerical in nature. The assistant works closely with the fashion coordinator in putting on fashion shows, helping to write fashion bulletins, and in spending time out in the market observing trends and new looks.

Fashion merchandising offers the dedicated employee an opportunity for viability in career and life. The rewards are numerous and self-satisfying. But like every activity in life, one must be willing to pay the price. In this case the price is dedication, hard work and the willingness to learn. Anything that occurs in our society which has an impact on the people is reflected in the art of clothing. It sometimes does not catch on or last very long. The fashion business is one of the largest industries in the country. Most manufacturers and retailers make careful studies of what is currently in demand and, based on their findings, build a framework for the future.

SUMMARY

The fashion merchandising student needed to be aware of what employment opportunities are in his/her immediate area, if he/she is to provide themselves with an opportunity for wise occupational choices. In subsequent chapters an instrument to measure the fashion merchandising employment opportunities in Virginia Beach, Virginia, will be described and the resultant findings displayed and analyzed.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The problem of this study was to determine the number of fashion merchandising employment opportunities in Virginia Beach, Virginia. In order to gain the pertinent data, it was necessary to conduct a survey. In this chapter the methods and procedures for the study will be discussed. These include the population, procedure, administration of the instrument, data tabulation, and summary.

POPULATION

The population of this study consisted of owners/managers of business establishments related to the fashion merchandising industry in the Tidewater area as obtained from the yellow pages of the local area telephone directory, and the Retail Merchants Association directory. These included major department stores, boutiques, specialty stores, chain stores, and small stores. The total population for this study was 50 businesses. A stratified sample of each business category was taken to ensure validity in the research. Appendix A contains a listing of the fashion merchandising businesses surveyed.

PROCEDURES

A survey was developed and presented to the aforementioned businesses. This survey consisted of closed questions as to what

type of business did the respondent consider his/hers to be, how many persons, by type of job, were now employed and might be employed by 1993, and would the businesses accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SURVEY

The survey was designed to provide answers to the research goals (questions 2 - 4) stated in Chapter I. The survey was conducted using the interview technique to 50 business establishments related to the fashion merchandising industry in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Upon receiving the responses, the results were compiled through frequencies. The data was presented in the following chapters in the form of tables and discussion. The tables indicated the type of jobs, the number of jobs, and the projected need by 1993.

SUMMARY

In this chapter the methods and procedures for the research study were discussed. A survey was presented to owners/managers of business establishments related to the fashion merchandising industry in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The data received from these surveys was presented in the next chapter and analyzed in the chapter following that.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine the number of fashion merchandising employment opportunities, by type, available in Virginia Beach, Virginia. To be relevant to career planning this study investigated present openings with projections for the next three years. In this chapter data was presented with tables showing the survey statistics, the business categories, firms who would accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University, and the employment opportunities now and in 1993.

EXPLANATION OF TABLES

Table I illustrates the responses received versus the number of forms presented. Out of 50 survey forms presented to businesses, thirteen were uncooperative and refused to take part in the study.

TABLE I

<u>SURVEY STATISTICS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Survey Forms Presented	50
Firms Uncooperative	13
Percentage of Total	74%

Table II illustrates the totals by categories that the respondents felt best described their firm's business.

TABLE II

<u>BUSINESS CATEGORIES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Boutique	6
Department Store	5
Specialty Store	10
Chain Store	12
Small Store	5
Other; outlet	1

Table III illustrates, by job type, the number of degree graduates now employed by the businesses listed in Table II and the number of degree graduates these businesses hope to employ by 1993.

TABLE III

<u>EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES</u>	<u>NOW</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>POSSIBLE NEW JOBS</u>
Assistant Buyer	9	11	2
Sales Associate	325	470	145
Executive Trainee	19	32	13
Department Manager	58	67	9
Assistant Store Manager	47	63	16
Assistant to Fashion Coordinator	1	1	0

Table IV illustrates, the number of businesses who would accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University. A list of businesses who would accept cooperative education students can be found in Appendix C.

TABLE IV

	<u>TOTAL</u>
Firms who would accept	27
Firms who would not accept	1
Firms undecided	9

SUMMARY

In this chapter the findings of the research study were discussed. Table I illustrated the survey statistics, showing the number of respondents versus the number of forms presented. Table II illustrated the total number of each business category that the respondents felt best described their firm's major business. Table III illustrated the total number of employment opportunities, by type, available now and possibly by 1993. Table IV illustrated the number of businesses who would accept cooperative education students versus those businesses who would not accept cooperative education students.

In the following chapter the data received was summarized, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were given on how this data may be utilized.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarized the work done in the previous chapters. Conclusions were drawn in this chapter that answered the research goals found in Chapter I. Practical recommendations were given on how to implement the findings outlined in Chapter IV and possible future study.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine the number of fashion merchandising employment opportunities, by type, available in Virginia Beach, Virginia. To answer this research problem, the following questions needed to be answered:

1. What are the career opportunities available in the fashion merchandising field.
2. What are the fashion merchandising employment opportunities at the entry level for degree graduates in Virginia Beach, Virginia.
3. Within each type of employment opportunity, how many people were needed currently and projected for 1993.
4. Would the businesses surveyed accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University.

A review of the literature revealed several career approaches a graduate can pursue and employment opportunities available to them. A stratified sample of the each business was taken to ensure validity in my research. This proved to be quite difficult due to the uncooperative nature of many businesses. A survey of closed

questions asking their main business and the number of persons now employed and those that might be employed by 1993, by type of job, was presented to firms identified from the Retail Merchants Association Directory and the Yellow Pages Directory. The form was presented with an explanation for the form and asking their cooperation in the survey.

The findings from these surveys was presented in table form along with an explanation of each table. An explanation for survey statistics, business categories, employment opportunities now and 1993, and the number of businesses who would and would not accept cooperative education students were shown

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study the following conclusions were drawn:

1. There were at least 459 fashion merchandising employment opportunities available in Virginia Beach, Virginia.
2. By type of employment opportunities the following number of people were employed:

Assistant Buyer/Buyer's Clerical	9
Sales Associate	325
Executive Trainee	19
Department Manager	58
Assistant Store Manager	47
Assistant to Fashion Coordinator	1
3. The firms surveyed hoped to provide at least 185 new employment opportunities within the next three years.
4. Of the businesses surveyed, 27 welcome cooperative education students who meet their qualifications.

These findings indicate a particularly large need for sales associates, department managers, and assistant store managers. The projected forty percent increase in fashion merchandising employment opportunities over the next three years represents an optimistic outlook by members of the industry in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings of this study, it is recommended that a continued emphasis be placed on preparing students for careers in fashion merchandising. Many businesses promote from within thus it is highly recommended that students who are interested in careers in retailing should attain an entry level position early on so that when they obtain a degree they can be promoted to higher levels in retailing. Together with the experience and the education, the degree graduate will be able to reach their full potential in the field of retailing in the Virginia Beach, Virginia, area.

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APPENDIX A
BUSINESSES SURVEYED

A & N
760 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Added Dimensions
752 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

American Eagle Outfitter
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Bahama Shop
1564 Hilltop East
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Brooks Fashions
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Chess King
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Cage
3619 Pacific Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Dakota
1860 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

D.J.'s
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Elle Inc.
2270 Seashore Shoppes
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Ellen's Boutique
1860 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Fine's Men Shop
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

The Gap
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

GiGi
302-A Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Grass Roots Inc.
1554 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Hecht's
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Hit or Miss
Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

J.C. Penney
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

La Vogue
Hilltop North/Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Leggett
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Lerner's
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Lily's Fashions
1564 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Mansour Boutique
1860 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Maxine's Inc.
712 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Fredrick's of Hollywood
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

NYFO
1560 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Parklane Hosiery
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Russell & Holmes
706 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

S & K Famous Brands
706 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Smith & Welton
774 Hilltop North
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Stitches
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Talbots
1860 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Thalhimer's
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Victoria Secret
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

W.O.W. Workout Wear
1860 Laskin Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

Merry Go Round
701 Lynnhaven Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH SURVEY

RESEARCH SURVEY

STORE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

NAME: _____

POSITION: _____

Please indicate which category best describes your business:

_____ Boutique

_____ Chain Store

_____ Department Store

_____ Small Store

_____ Specialty Store

_____ Other; explain

Below is a list of entry-level fashion merchandising employment opportunities for degree graduates. Please list the number of full-time persons, in each of the following categories, currently employed and that might possibly be employed by 1993.

	NOW	1993
Assistant Buyer/Buyer's Clerical	_____	_____
Sales Associate	_____	_____
Executive Trainee	_____	_____
Department Manager	_____	_____
Assistant Store Manager	_____	_____
Assistant to Fashion Coordinator	_____	_____
Other; Explain _____		

Would you accept cooperative education students from Old Dominion University?

YES

NO

APPENDIX C

BUSINESSES WHO WOULD ACCEPT COOPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS

BUSINESSES WHO WOULD ACCEPT
COOPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS

A & N
Added Dimensions
American Eagle Outfitter
Bahama Shop
Brooks Fashions
Chess King
Dakota
DJ's
Fine's Men's Shop
Fredrick's of Hollywood
The Gap
Grassroots
Hecht's
Hit or Miss
J.C. Penney
Leggett
Lucia
Maxine's
Merry Go Round
Russell & Holmes
GiGi's
Stitches
Talbots
Thalhimer's
Victoria Secret
W.O.W. Workout Wear