



**INDUSTRY-BASED COMPETENCIES
FOR ENTRY-LEVEL RETAIL MANAGEMENT POSITIONS:
A NATIONAL DELPHI STUDY**

Kerri M. Keech

West Virginia Univ., Morgantown, WV 26506

Shelley S. Harp

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409

Successful retail organizations are placing increased emphasis on recruiting, developing and retaining executive talent to gain and maintain a competitive edge in a complex, competitive and rapidly changing marketplace. Merchandising undergraduate curricula should reflect these changes to ensure that graduates have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

The purposes of this study were to identify entry-level retail management competencies, to assign each competency to a category of learning, and to assess the level of importance assigned to each competency by executive recruiters from a cross section of retail organizations. An exploratory study of differences among recruiters, merchandising educators and marketing educators regarding competencies also was conducted.

The Delphi method of group consensus was used in this study to identify knowledge, attitude, and skill competencies (KAS competencies) desired by retail recruiters. The expert panel consisted of 25 executive recruiters from a cross-section of retail organizations throughout the United States. KAS competencies were identified, consisting of 24 knowledge competencies, 26 attitude competencies, and 26 skill competencies. Levels of hierarchy were established within the KAS competencies by the mean importance ratings for the store division and the merchandising division. The participants in the educator study included 24 academicians from 4-year institutions of higher education. A self-administered mail questionnaire was developed to obtain information regarding educators' opinions with respect to agreement and importance levels of the KAS competencies developed by the expert panel.

Findings indicated that significant differences existed among recruiters, merchandising educators, and marketing educators with respect to specific competency categories. These results suggest the importance of competency identification in effectively matching collegiate merchandising curricula to marketplace needs.