

**Topic: Industry Experience and Internships**

**Advisor: Lynda Campbell**

**Chapter: Classroom on the Mall, Vienna, Virginia**

**The subject of this issue's column is how teachers can bridge the gulf between the classroom and the workplace not only for their students, but for themselves as well. Whether you call it an internship or an externship, the idea is simple: teachers who have experience in the industry they teach about can inject an extra dimension of relevance and personal example into their classrooms.**



Why should you care about taking the time to add marketing job experience to your set of teaching tools? The estimated 80 percent of teachers who do not have job experience outside the world of the school will have a harder time understanding how their subject is related to the industry they teach

about. This makes explaining the relevance of classroom information to students more difficult. Teacher coordinators with industry experience are also more likely to communicate better with industry mentors and to build their programs around industry needs.

We spoke with Lynda Campbell, the DECA chapter advisor for the Classroom on the Mall at Tyson's Corner in McLean, Virginia. Lynda's college degree was in business administration with a minor in fashion merchandising. She was set for a career in retail fashion. But at her family's insistence,

she attended night school for the teaching degree while working as a buyer at Godchaux's in Baton Rouge. After 15 years in the fashion business and 12 years of teaching, she now looks back on that



decision as one of the best she could have made. She became assistant manager of a boutique, then a sales rep in the Dallas Apparel Mart and finally ready-to-wear manager and general merchandise manager for a Dayton Hudson store.

Lynda's experience working with the stores in Tysons Corner has been infused with her firsthand knowledge of the retail industry. She describes it as knowing how to establish a synergy between her students' needs and those of the merchants in the mall. When she needs to approach a store, she is aware of which person to talk with. And when the mall unexpectedly needed to use her classroom space for their gift wrap service last December, Lynda, knowing that businesses could be flexible during the holiday season, offered mall vendors a free intern for the month. Her students fanned out into various establishments where she met them daily to oversee their projects and make sure that both the stores and the students were benefiting from the arrangement. This unusual circumstance allowed her to pay back the mall merchants for their support while enriching her students' learning.

Lynda finds that most curriculum areas in her fashion merchandising program can be

illustrated from her time in industry. She can speak with authority about situations where product was not delivered on time, sometimes because of border issues with international vendors. She knows about the problem of inventory shrinkage because at Dayton Hudson she had to establish a business plan to keep inventory shrinkage below two percent.

Two additional advantages stand out for Lynda. Since she started her career as a buyer, she knows how to mentor students who want to enter this popular field. Second, she genuinely loves retail, and can't help but relay to her classes her excitement and enthusiasm for the field.

For those of you who are interested in obtaining industry experience or updating your experience, several routes are available.

- A few established programs place classroom teachers into "externships." Check the Web site for the Business Economics Education Foundation in Minnesota ([www.beef-mn.org/workplace.htm](http://www.beef-mn.org/workplace.htm)). In Oregon, teachers interested in industry experience can look into the Business Education Compact ([www.becpdx.org](http://www.becpdx.org)). Some programs designed for rural teachers operate in the Midwest (Kansas State Univ. [www2.educ.ksu.edu/Organizations/Centers/CRESS/CRESSMenu.html](http://www2.educ.ksu.edu/Organizations/Centers/CRESS/CRESSMenu.html); Ks. Dept. of Ed, 785-296-3958; Institute for Regional and Rural Studies in Education, Edmond, Ok., 405-341-1385; Vocational Instructor Practicum, 130 S. Lafayette, Suite 200,

Macomb, IL 61455; National Rural Education Association in Colorado, [www.colostate.edu/Orgs/NREA](http://www.colostate.edu/Orgs/NREA); Kindred Public School, Kindred, North Dakota 701-428-3177). Check also Wisconsin's Teacher Learning in the Workplace and Community program at [www.cew.wisc.edu/cew/ncrve/tlwc.htm](http://www.cew.wisc.edu/cew/ncrve/tlwc.htm).

- Some school districts will help their teachers find appropriate work placements. Diane Pruner, Instructional Coordinator for Marketing in the Fairfax County Schools of Virginia, reports that her district's Career Exploration Coordinators are working with the Chamber of Commerce to help place teachers. Find out what your local school district may offer.
- Or design your own on-the-job industry experience. For maximum benefit, be sure to research established programs for advice. Then design a project that will be structured to give optimal feedback into your classroom teaching. Examples from some of the Web sites listed here will help.