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UTD wants to help retail and restaurant companies with their technology needs

University of Texas at Dallas' STEM students are being offered to tackle problems as part of a new center in the Naveen Jindal School of Management.





The University of Texas at Dallas wants to be a resource for Dallas-Fort Worth area retail and restaurant companies. It has created the Center for Retail Innovation and Strategy Excellence.



By Maria Halkias

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The University of Texas at Dallas is trying to cultivate a stronger relationship with Dallas-Fort Worth area retail and restaurant companies by offering both resources and ready graduates.

UTD's Naveen Jindal School of Management has created the Center for Retail Innovation and Strategy Excellence focused on "the STEM side of retailing, such as computer science, machine learning and data analytics," said Charles Haseman, the project's director.

"Our students have all worked a cash register before they got to UTD and thought they didn't want to go back," he said, but now they're learning about the back-office needs of these companies. "The technology side of retailing has been a huge element of success and more recently a big reason for how companies are getting through COVID-19."

The center is offering companies groups of four to five students who would work with a professor to tackle a specific problem. The center is also able to provide ongoing research through its faculty because many of them have extensive retail experiences at companies like Amazon, Neiman Marcus and Fossil. The center also plans to hold conferences and career fairs, Haseman said.

A long list of retail and restaurant companies are headquartered here, he said, and many other companies have put large technology operations in Dallas-Fort



“A lot of UTD alums are working at these companies, and now we can formally connect with them to leverage our experience,” Haseman said.

UTD is one of four schools in the state that is considered a Texas Tier One university, a designation awarded to emerging research universities by the state. UTD received the designation in 2018. The University of Texas at Arlington just received the designation this year, and Texas Tech and the University of Houston have been Texas Tier One schools since 2012.

Other Texas universities also have retailing programs, but “there’s room for all of us,” Haseman said, and each school has a unique focus. The Texas A&M Center for Retailing Studies was established in 1987 and was the first to be part of a business school.

The University of North Texas in Denton began offering a new bachelor of science degree in retailing in 2016 and **expanded it two years later.** UNT established its Global Digital Retailing Research Center in 2013 devoted to studying and answering questions about e-commerce.

UNT’s digital retailing students are working in e-commerce retail and for large digital agencies that manage search engine marketing budgets, consumer experience and usability, creative design and social media management, she said.

“Since inception, we’ve graduated 468 students with the degree,” said Linda Mihalick, director of UNT’s retailing center. “We have a 100% placement rate within six months of graduation. Every company, whether it is traditional retail, start-ups, hospitality, real estate, automotive — you name it — they need students well-versed in the continually changing digital landscape.”

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