



Merchandising Program Student Handbook

Updated June 2024

The IDEA Merchandising program is no longer accepting new students. Current students should work with their advisors to complete their master’s degree or graduate certificate.

Master’s Degree and Certificate Options

The IDEA Merchandising Program is designed to give you a competitive advantage in today’s retail environment. Our technology-rich program ensures you will improve business strategies through profit maximization, cost-cutting, customer satisfaction, and selling approaches measured through the triple bottom line. Our curriculum provides in-demand skills to advance your career in the apparel or retail industry.

Degree and certificate titles vary by university.

Participating University	Master’s Degree	Graduate Certificate
Kansas State University	Master of Science in Fashion Studies	<i>KSU does not offer this certificate</i>
North Dakota State University	Master of Science in Merchandising	Graduate Certificate in Merchandising
Oklahoma State University	Master of Science in Design, Housing and Merchandising (option in Retail Merchandising Leadership)	Graduate Certificate in Retail Merchandising Leadership (pending a vote from the OBOR to be renamed Graduate Certificate in Fashion Merchandising)
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Master of Science in Textiles, Merchandising and Fashion Design	<i>UNL does not offer this certificate</i>

Today’s socially conscious customers rely on real-time reviews and social feedback of products and services to make decisions. You will learn the skills needed to offer the right products to the right customers at the right time.

Skills you will learn or build upon in this program:

- Learn data analytic techniques to determine potential impact on organizations and better understand consumer behavior.
- Develop effective business strategies and customer-focused product development strategies.
- Create flexible promotional campaigns to increase brand equity and loyalty.
- Navigate the ethical dilemmas of consumer privacy.
- Balance the interests of businesses, consumers, and society to support a sustainable future.
- Evaluate cost controls for distributing products within micro and mass markets.
- Understand trade regulations and cultural concerns unique to each country.
- Evaluate the evolving standards of corporate social responsibility.
- Develop a personal leadership philosophy for professional advancement.



This program will prepare you to work in:

- Buying and planning
- Corporate social responsibility management
- Entrepreneurial management
- Market research
- Merchandising
- Product development
- Promotions management
- Retail management
- Sales management
- Social media marketing
- Sourcing
- Supply chain management
- Visual communication management

Program Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and understand theories, principles, practices, and terminology related to the merchandising industry.
2. Students will demonstrate competency in communicating effectively using oral and written techniques, to include the use of technology, in the gathering and professional presentation of information.
3. Students will be able to apply their knowledge of leadership, planning, and controlling to business activities and merchandising organizations.
4. Students will analyze and evaluate the triple bottom-line (economic, social, environmental) impact of sustainable merchandising industry activities and processes.
5. Students will demonstrate strong research, analytical and strategic decision-making skills.

Admissions Requirements

Requirements vary slightly across institutions. To qualify for this program, students must:

- Be admitted to the master's degree program or graduate certificate program at a participating university.
- Complete the necessary coursework.
- Meet the master's degree requirements or graduate certificate requirements of their admitting/degree granting university.

Course Enrollment

- Consult your academic adviser when selecting or dropping courses. [Course descriptions](#) may also be found on the IDEA website.
- Should a challenge in a course emerge, contact your academic advisor and instructor. A Zoom meeting may be scheduled between the academic adviser, student, and instructor to discuss potential solutions.

Master's Degree Requirements

The master's degree in merchandising is a 36-credit hour post-baccalaureate program of study.

- The 10 core courses (30 credits) listed in the [IDEA Course Planner](#) are required for the master's degree.
- Six (6) additional credits are taken to meet the unique requirements of the student's home university. The six additional credits should be discussed with the academic advisor and home university in advance of enrollment.



Graduate Certificate Requirements

The graduate certificate in merchandising is a 12-credit hour post-baccalaureate program of study. The three courses (9 credits) listed in the [IDEA Course Planner](#) are required for the master's certificate. One course (3 credits) is taken as an elective. The elective course is determined based on the student's interest and adviser's approval. Students should consult with their academic adviser when selecting or dropping courses.

How is Graduate School Different than Undergraduate Studies?

Graduate faculty expect that you will engage with faculty and students which demonstrates your professionalism and collegiality. Examples of engagement include asking questions, sharing information, supporting one another, and demonstrating scholarly curiosity. You must be committed to your education in a more self-directed manner than you might have experienced during your undergraduate studies.

We recommend that you communicate with your academic advisor on a regular basis such as a minimum of two times per semester. A good rule of thumb is contacting your advisor at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester to discuss your academic progress. You should also create your plan of study as early as possible in your program to help you manage successful completion of your degree requirements.

Please ensure that you complete and submit all assignments by the due date. It is critical that you complete all assignments in an ethical manner and in alignment with your university's academic integrity policies. Do not share proprietary information from your firm to satisfy an assignment's requirements without first having received permission to share the information from your employer. Maintain a culture of confidentiality within your classes with peers and your instructor based on the assignments and discussions that you participate in during the program.

Improving your skills in written communication is a critical skill that you will develop during the program, please ensure that you adhere to assignment formatting requirements in alignment with the 7th edition of the American Psychological Association Style Manual. Graduate academic writing is typically more technically oriented than undergraduate writing. The Merchandising program, offered through IDEA, is targeted to benefit mid-career industry professionals that are seeking advancement in their careers. Typical stakeholders you will communicate with throughout the program may include managers of varying levels within the organization, vendors, members of professional organizations, faculty, and peers. The ability to develop written communications that are appropriate for diverse audiences is critical and the Merchandising program will help you craft targeted written communications for a business or academic audience as appropriate.

In the event that a course assignment requires collaboration such as a team-based project, it is important to remember that IDEA serves students globally and developing strategies to manage teamwork are suggested. For example, your peers might live in different time zones. A great tool for accomplishing team projects is a contract which contains contact information, student roles, project goals, member expectations, assigned tasks and the approach that the team will use to manage conflicts which may develop among the team members.

Communication with your instructor is also a vital consideration to ensure your success. If you are unclear about an assignment, we recommend you contact your instructor for clarification and perhaps even scheduling a meeting at a convenient time if necessary. Email communications are the preferred method of communication in the Merchandising program and most clarifications can be achieved by emailing your instructor. Emails sent during normal business hours Monday – Friday to an instructor should be responded to within 24 hours. Please wait 24 hours prior to sending an instructor a follow-up email.

Familiarize yourself with this student manual and resources that are available at your home university. You may also contact instructors for guidance about resources to support your coursework at the host university in a class



in which you are currently enrolled as well. Examples of these resources typically include library resources which may not be shared among the IDEA universities, but could support your assignment research. You also should understand how the Internal Review Board process works at your home university in the event that you will complete a thesis or research based creative component as a requirement of your program. We also recommend that you familiarize yourself with your home or host university's writing center where trained professionals can help you work on improving graduate level writing. In the event that you require accessibility services please advise your advisor and instructor prior to starting a course and they will assist you in contacting your home university's accessibility office. Home or host universities may also offer services to support statistical analysis related to your assignments and we recommend that you explore these services as needed. As you near the end of your Master's program it is recommended that you utilize your home university's Career Services office to support identifying job opportunities after your degree is completed.

The Merchandising faculty and IDEA Campus Coordinators are highly invested in helping you achieve success in this program. Please ensure that you reach out with any questions you have during your program.

Networking in the Industry

Mentorship

Quality mentoring greatly enhances students' chances for success. In addition to faculty mentors, actively seek out an industry mentor. Look for someone with a position that interests you. Stay up-to-date on what's happening in the apparel and retail industry near you and note names of those with a high level of involvement. Don't hesitate to contact them. You might be surprised at their willingness to help aspiring young professionals. They may be flattered when you tell them you respect their accomplishments and ideas. Call or email to request a half hour of their time. Send a thank you note after your first meeting. If you do follow-up meetings, they may be able to help you define and achieve your career goals.

LinkedIn

Creating a LinkedIn profile early in your program is a great way to stay connected with faculty, peers, and alumni of the merchandising program. You can also share compelling coursework you created throughout the merchandising program using LinkedIn's slide sharing app. Prospective employers use academic slide presentations to predict your visual and oral communication potential as a leader.

LinkedIn differs from conventional resumes because it provides you with an online presence and way to market yourself using the power of the Internet. Recruiters are increasingly using LinkedIn to review online resumes to recruit employees. Prospective employers will be able to find you through searches based on your profile. These searches may target industry specific information in your resume such as your transferable merchandising skills, geographic location, job experience, and educational training. You might be surprised at the clout of your home institution when recruiters seek employees!

In addition, your LinkedIn profile will help you strategically find people at companies of interest. Members of your LinkedIn network can endorse your critical skills that will drive recruiters to your profile and improve your marketability. The ultimate goal of a great LinkedIn profile is to build a network of industry professionals and academic peers to help improve your visibility and career potential in the merchandising industry.

LinkedIn also offers group memberships supporting your career aspirations such as the Merchandising Career Network-IDEA where you can share diverse content (e.g. articles, presentations, papers, and discussions by communicating with faculty, current students, and alumni). Other groups of interest to help you remain current with industry issues include: Retail Industry Professionals Group, ALLRETAIL retail executive network, and Innovation Enterprise Big Data, Analytics, Strategy, Finance, Innovation among many others.



Make a point to begin creating or reviewing your LinkedIn profile today. You don't have to create the perfect profile in a single day. Just like your resume, it pays to review and edit your LinkedIn profile often. Likewise, building your network takes time and that is why we advise creating a LinkedIn profile early in your program.

Netiquette

The definition of netiquette is the informal code of behavior for communicating on the Internet (Online Etymology, n.d.). You will routinely provide written responses to discussion questions throughout your online master's program. These responses will be read by both your merchandising peers and instructor.

Some basic rules of netiquette include checking the course website periodically throughout each week to stay engaged with your peers. Do not post responses in all capital letters, which is perceived by many as yelling or shouting. Post your opinions in an objective and non-threatening manner when you disagree with peer feedback.

It is good netiquette to include the name of the person you are responding to prior to typing the response (e.g. Hi Sue:). Keep in mind that your peers and instructor may have different viewpoints and it is important to try to understand others' diverse perspectives. Engaging in good netiquette helps to support an inclusive and high performing community of learners.

As you construct a written response to a discussion question, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your response answer the question?
- What is main point of your argument?
- Is your argument logical, well written, and clear to others?
- Have you drawn upon class readings to support the response to the question?
- Are there examples from your personal or business experience that strengthen the argument?
- Have you properly cited sources and provided references in American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition Style Manual format?

Prior to posting a written response to a discussion question, there are several key points that you should consider:

- Proofread your response by checking for spelling and grammatical errors.
- Complete responses by the due date.
- Plan your responses prior to posting.
- Stay focused on the current discussion topic and avoid off-topic conversations in the discussion board.
- Extend course discussions by providing substantive feedback to your peers.
- Before providing discussion feedback to peers, review the other peer responses to avoid duplication.

Substantive Feedback

The goal of substantive feedback is to provide additional information supporting the discussion question. Substantive feedback should always be constructive and positive in nature. It is a great idea to seek feedback from the instructor at the beginning of the semester about the quality of your discussion responses along with suggestions to improve, if necessary.

Substantive feedback:

- Includes meaningful information offered to your peers and instructor that demonstrate the current course concepts.
- Shares insights from course readings, additional research from online and written sources, or is based on your personal and business experiences.
- Does not include statements like, "Good job" or "I agree with your points totally".



Library and Writing Resources

University Writing Centers

Each university's writing center is a resource for graduate student writers who desire to improve their writing skills by providing one-on-one consulting, workshops, and resources.

- [Kansas State University Writing Center](#)
- [North Dakota State University Writing Center](#)
- [Oklahoma State University Writing Center](#)
- [University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center](#)

APA Formatting and Citations

- [Access APA Tutorials and Instructional Webinars](#)
- [APA Style Blog](#)
- [APA Formatting and Style Guide](#)

For more information about APA formatting, please refer to Appendix A.

Additional Library and Website Resources

When completing graduate coursework, it is expected that each written statement be supported by credible information. The Internet has a countless number of resources representing a wide range of topics, some of which can provide useful content. Please check with your instructor or reference your syllabus for library resources that are available or will be used in your classes to support assignments.



References

netiquette. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved October 2, 2017 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/netiquette>

