

# CENTER FOR RETAILING: APPLIED RETAIL TRACK

Stockholm School of Economics

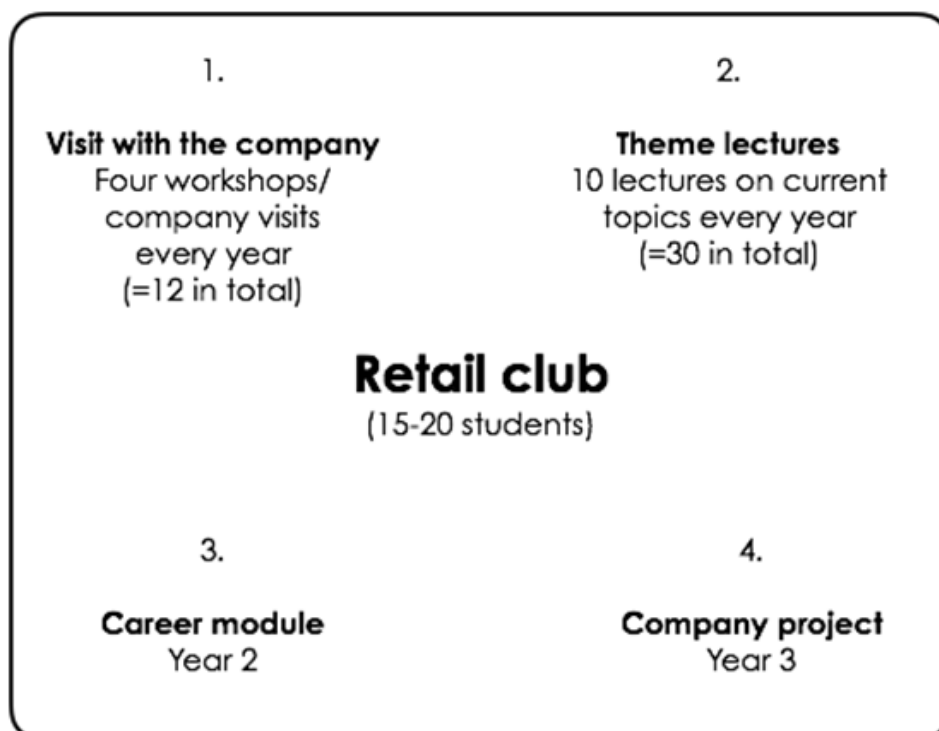
The Center for Retailing (CFR) at Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) provides education and conducts research in close collaboration with the Swedish retail industry. CFR runs a 3-year bachelor's degree program in Retail Management as part of Stockholm School of Economics' strategic focus on retail.

The Applied Retail Track (ART) is a 3-year course that runs in parallel with the students' other courses in the Retail Management Program. In ART, all activities take place in close collaboration with the partner companies. Each of the 10 participating companies hosts a retail club. This retail club comprises one or two company representatives, approximately 15 students (from all 3 years in the program), and one CFR faculty member.

The course links theory and practice, enabling students, faculty, and corporate partners to learn from each other. This happens mainly through workshops and company visits where students from all years participate, however there are additional activities such as a career module and a consultancy project which contribute to students' learning outcomes.

The four key activities are described in the following document.

An overview:



## 1. Workshop and Company Visit

In **workshops**, company representatives present a contemporary challenge to students, who then work in small groups to develop solutions. After working in groups, students present their solutions to the company representatives who review the idea and provide feedback. Afterward, the students have 24 hours to refine their suggestions and produce a written report for the company. The workshops take place at the company site.

In workshops, students learn about current issues and challenges and actively participate in solution-oriented discussions. The onsite experience boosts student engagement and provides a better understanding of what it would be like to work at the company in the future. This immersion helps students identify and evaluate different career paths. As students go through the program, they improve in their ability to apply theoretical concepts to the challenges they address. Moreover, in their discussions with company representatives, they get access to the tacit knowledge of experienced practitioners, helping to gather unique insight not contained in textbooks. For the company, the workshops help to provide a fresh perspective on a challenge or an issue they're facing.

On **company visits**, students go behind the scenes to learn more about key activities within the company. This means that student visit company offices, stores, or warehouses. These visits are hosted by company representatives who provide in depth analysis as to the role of the specific site visited and its function in the company. After a company visit, students individually reflect on what they have learned during the visit and how it connects to their coursework and their future career interests in a written report (1-2 pages).

During company visits, students learn about current issues and challenges in the industry, helping them identify and evaluate different career paths and the difficulties faced in these industries. Again, as students go through the program, they become better able to apply theoretical concepts to the specific context provided by the company visit. For the company, the visit is an opportunity to have students learn about important areas of their business that are not immediately apparent without this hands-on experience.

Company visits and Workshops are critical in allowing students learn from directly from actual practitioners, understand the role of institutional artifacts, and gain first-hand knowledge of ongoing activities at the retailer. To take advantage of the opportunity to address real problems that exist at retail partners, ART requires that at least two of the four on-site experiences in each ART year be workshops.

## 2. Theme Lecture

To complement the workshops and company visits, and to ensure that students also interact with representatives from all partner companies, ART offers company specific theme lectures. Each year, all 10 ART companies deliver a lecture on topic relevant to the current priorities of the company. The lectures are hosted at the CFR and are typically around 60 to 75 minutes long. Theme lectures are open to all students, but mandatory for the students who are members of the retail club company that hosts the lecture.

At theme lectures, students learn about current issues and challenges and obtain insights that can help them identify and evaluate different career paths and the challenges associated with each. These activities are important to foster a broad understanding of retail practices. For the company, the theme lecture is a possibility to emphasize interesting roles within their organizations as well as highlight core competences at the company.

### 3. Career Module

During Year 2, students focus more intently on their career paths by participating in a module on career planning and career training. The first part of this module takes place in the fall semester and involves working with specialists who help students to identify their unique strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. Company and faculty representatives do not participate in this module. In the spring semester, students also participate in a module on career training (2-3 hours) in collaboration with the company hosting their retail club. The module is decided by the company and the faculty representative. It is adapted to the needs of each company and the group of students in the retail club. It may include such activities as practicing interviews, CV screenings, or roundtable discussions with senior executives. For the company, this module is an opportunity to identify interesting potential candidates for future employment.

### 4. Consultancy Project

During the fall in Year 3, ART students complete a consultancy project where they independently conduct an empirical study to answer a question formulated by the retail club company. Projects are conducted in groups of three to four students. In these projects, practical implications are emphasized more heavily than would typically be the case in bachelor's degree theses. Students finish this project by providing a written report and verbal presentation of their findings to company representatives as well as Year 1 and 2 students in each retail club. For the company, the consultancy project helps illuminate an important and understudied question, while also making them aware of potential hires as these students approach graduation. The project for each ART year is defined by the company representative and the faculty member no later than March 31. The students use these projects to help decide on a retail clubs for the next year.

#### Other company events at CFR

**CFR Early Insights:** A breakfast seminar series where CFR's researchers talk about current research. The seminar series is a meeting point for CFR's faculty and partner company representatives.

**Study visit:** Every fall, the students in year 1 visit the retail partner companies. This is a unique opportunity for the company to talk about their business and create a broad understanding of the industry for the students. If the other partner companies wish to participate during the fall in year 1, they may do that through a guest lecture.

**Retaldagen:** Every year, a retail fair is arranged by and for students interested in a career in retail. Retaldagen is a possibility for companies to meet students from SSE's other programs. In 2020, the Retaldagen is on April 23.

# CENTER FOR RETAILING: RETAIL CLUBS

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## The Retail Clubs' organization: Roles

Every Retail Club comprises approximately 15-20 students across all 3 years in the program. During the first year, the primary focus is on acquiring new knowledge about the partner company and further strengthening their understanding of retailing. During the second year, students focus intently on career paths, gaining a better understanding of their potential career trajectory. During the third year, students are expected to apply theories and theoretical concepts in a consultancy project. At the beginning of each school year, students are assigned to a club—at random in Year 1, but based on student preferences in Years 2 and 3. Typically, students experience three different retail clubs during their 3 years in the program.

Each club has **one (or sometimes two/three) company representatives** responsible for the club. The company representative is responsible for ensuring that activities remain centered on key company issues and that students have access to key persons within the company. He or she also facilitates the activities needed for students in the club to pass the course (e.g., four workshops or company visits, one theme lecture, one career module, and one consultancy project per school year).

Each club has **one faculty member**. The faculty member is a researcher at SSE and is responsible to plan the club's activities with the company. Within each retail club, the faculty member ensures that activities are in line with learning objectives of the course and the retail management program and the follow up of the students' learning process.

Every year, a **Key Account Manager (KAM)** is elected among the students. The student KAM manages the operational side of the retail club, serving as a link between students, faculty, and the company in the execution of various activities.

## The Retail Clubs' organization: Timeframe

The Retail Clubs are planned according to the academic year. This means that the Retail Club year starts in August/September and ends in May/June the next year.

The planning of the activities are carried out in January – March every year, and a first draft of the activities is usually completed before March 31. The planning is executed by the faculty member in conjunction with the company.

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