



Greetings!

The team at Walmart is very excited to sponsor the Collegiate Challenge, co-sponsored by the **Council for Retail and Sales, located at DeSales University College of Business**. This team-based competition is tasked to solve a real business opportunity for our company.

The top team will be awarded \$1,200 to be divided by team members, a trophy, and their names on the CRS Big Trophy which will be housed at DeSales University. The second-place team will be awarded \$400 to be divided by the team.

The competition culminates in a regional competition to be held on October 28, 2026, at the DeSales University campus. Each school or branch may submit up to 2 teams. Last year some of the colleges ran a local competition and then sent their top team(s) to the final competition. This is a great class or club (e.g., Enactus, Business Clubs, Lunchbox) project! The competition will be judged on the written executive summary and the presentation.

Details of the Challenge are in the following pages. We believe presenting students with real business problems and having them develop solutions to those problems will help them bridge the gap between academics and the business world. Thanks for participating!

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2026 Collegiate Challenge

Powered By



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Important Dates

Case Information Released	By the end of August 2026
Friday Sep 18, 2026	Intent to Participate Form is Due Online – thecrs.org 10 teams max accepted in order of registration
Wednesday Sept 16, 2026 7 – 8 p.m.	Tentative date. Information/Q&A session – Online Teams meeting with Walmart Personnel and students. Advisors welcome.
Saturday Oct 17, 2026	Executive Summary due by 5:00 pm. Send to Elaine Thode, CRS Program Director, elaine.thode@desales.edu . No late entries will be accepted.
Tuesday Oct 27, 2026	Pitch presentation due by 5 p.m. Send to Elaine Thode, CRS Program Director, elaine.thode@desales.edu – no changes after this deadline.
Wednesday Oct 28, 2026	Team presentations to panel of judges at DeSales University. Bring presentation on thumb drive as backup.

Direct questions about the competition to: Elaine Thode, CRS Program Director, elaine.thode@desales.edu

Introduction

You've heard of the Shark Tank television show. We're taking that concept and applying it to a collegiate competition in retailing and sales! When you enter the **CRS Collegiate Challenge, Powered by Walmart**, you gain both practical and theoretical experience in the development of recommendations for a major corporate client. This challenge allows you the ability to bring your lifelong learning skills to a competition that will help to build a great base for your personal career in business. The focus of the competition will be on helping Walmart develop ideas on how to manage customer expectations and build brand loyalty. The competition will be held Oct 28, 2026, at DeSales University in Center Valley, PA. The Collegiate Challenge will surface ideas and creative solutions that will directly impact the company.



Case Information

Walmart Background / Overview

Walmart is one of the biggest retailers in the world, with the company and its subsidiaries employing approximately 2.1 million associates worldwide. Each week, approximately 280 million customers and members visit their more than 10,900 stores and numerous eCommerce websites in 19 countries.

Walmart is a people-led, tech-powered omnichannel retailer dedicated to helping people save money and live better. According to President and Chief Executive Officer, John Furner:

“Walmart is leading the next chapter of retail. We are at a pivotal moment, not just for our company, but for the industry, as artificial intelligence fundamentally reshapes how customers shop and how associates work. We are harnessing its power to enhance our business, guided by our foundational values of service, excellence, respect, and integrity. In this new era, our purpose positions us to set the standard – making it a perfect time to be an omnichannel retailer dedicated to helping people save money and live better.”
(Walmart 2026 Annual Report, pg 2)

As President Furner makes clear, their mission statement is simple: We save people money so they can live better. He provides some key statistics in his annual letter to shareholders which show the growth from 2025 to 2026:

	Grew to	Grew by
Total Revenues	\$715.9 B	5.1%
Global eCommerce	\$150.4 B	24%

Operating cash flow for the same period reached \$41.6B with \$15.6B returned to shareholders.

Case Focus and Opportunity

Retail is entering a new era where artificial intelligence, automation, and connected experiences are transforming how customers shop and how retailers operate. Consumers increasingly expect personalized recommendations, a frictionless shopping experience, flexible fulfillment options, and seamless movement between digital and physical channels. At the same time, retailers must improve efficiency, empower associates, and continue delivering exceptional value in a highly competitive environment.



As one of the world's largest retailers, Walmart has been at the forefront of innovation and is uniquely positioned to redefine the future of retail by combining its store network, digital capabilities, and emerging technologies into an integrated customer experience.

Your challenge is to think beyond incremental improvements and develop a practical, scalable strategy that helps Walmart design the next generation of its shopping experience.

Challenge

How should Walmart design the next generation of the shopping experience?

Your recommendations should address one or more of the following strategic priorities:

- **Leveraging Artificial Intelligence**
 - How can AI improve personalization, shopping convenience, and customer engagement?
 - How can AI enhance decision-making and productivity for Walmart associates?
 - What new AI-enabled capabilities should Walmart prioritize over the next three to five years?
- **Strengthening Digital and In-Store Integration**
 - How can Walmart create a seamless omnichannel shopping journey?
 - How can customers move effortlessly between mobile, online, curbside pickup, delivery, and in-store shopping?
 - What new technologies or experiences would strengthen Walmart's competitive advantage?

Questions to Consider

As you develop your recommendations, consider the following:

1. Which customer needs or pain points should Walmart prioritize over the next three to five years?
2. How can AI, automation, and digital technologies create value for both customers and associates?
3. Which recommendations provide the greatest balance of customer impact, operational feasibility, and financial return?
4. What implementation challenges should Walmart anticipate?



5. How should Walmart measure success? What key performance indicators (KPIs) would demonstrate that the strategy is working?
6. How can Walmart continue to differentiate itself from competitors while reinforcing its promise of everyday value?

While not required, teams are encouraged to visit a Walmart store and explore Walmart's digital platforms to better understand the current customer experience.

Assignment / Deliverables

Assignment: Approach this as if your team is a part of a consulting company.

Develop a strategic business plan in response to the question above, integrating actionable ideas and recommendations.

Teams should explore all relevant aspects, conducting research to determine the necessary budget for their proposed plan. Each team will present their strategy to a panel of Walmart judges, outlining their recommendations, implementation steps, projected timeline, and associated financial implications for Walmart. Rationale for each recommendation should be clearly articulated.

Required Deliverables:

1. **Expanded Executive Summary:** 5–8 pages (do not exceed 8 pages, including cover page & references)
2. **Final Presentation:** Up to 15 minutes

All proposed ideas should be:

- **Innovative:** Demonstrate creative thinking while solving meaningful customer and business challenges.
- **Actionable:** Capable of being implemented by the Walmart team within a short timeframe and justified by the investment of time, capital, and resources required for scale.
- **Replicable:** Designed for scalability across multiple Walmart locations to ensure consistency and impact.
- **Customer-centered:** Deliver measurable improvements to customers and associates.
- **Technology focused:** Illustrate leveraging technologies to ensure competitive advantage.



On Oct 28, teams will have up to 15 minutes (maximum) to present to a panel of judges from Walmart, followed immediately by a 10-minute question and answer session with the judges. The winners will be announced that day.

Useful Sites

How to Write a Case Study: <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-a-case-study-analysis-466329>

How to Write Executive Summaries:
<https://www.uakron.edu/cba/docs/communications/WritingExecutiveSummaries.pdf>

Rules

Section I: Competition Overview

The challenge may be incorporated into a class project, a club project or, if there is enough interest among students, a group of students may get together and compete.

Event Date & Location October 28, 2026. DeSales University 2755 Station Ave., Center Valley, PA (Additional venue details will be shared as deadlines approach.)

Team Composition

- Each college/university may submit up to *two teams*.
- Multi-campus institutions (e.g., Penn State) may register *two teams per campus*.
- Teams must include *3–4 undergraduate students* graduating in 2026 or later.
- Presentation Requirements (if a team member can't make it to the competition):
 - Teams of 3: *At least 2 presenters must be present*
 - Teams of 4: *At least 3 presenters must be present*
- Each team must have a *faculty advisor*, who must attend the competition in person. Exceptions due to illness or emergency are subject to organizer discretion.

Section II: Registration & Participation

Eligibility Requirements

- Students must be enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year accredited institution.
- All submitted work must be original and created by the student team.



- All participants agree that submitted ideas become the property of Walmart and that *no compensation* will be provided.

Registration Deadline Intent to Participate form due by *September 18, 2026*, Submit via:
[Council for Retail and Sales website](#)

Expenses & Meals

- Teams are responsible for travel, lodging, and materials.
- Light breakfast and lunch will be provided at no charge.

Section III: Written Submission – Executive Summary

Requirements

- Length: **5–8 pages, including cover page and references.**
- Due: *Saturday, October 17, 2026, by 5:00 p.m.*
- Submit via email to: *elaine.thode@desales.edu*
- APA style referencing required

Cover Page Must Include

- Institution name
- Walmart-compliant logo
- Team name and members
- Faculty advisor's name and contact information

Use of Generative AI

- Generative AI may be used for background research, but it is prohibited for idea generation or final deliverables. Disclosure of AI use is required.
- Citing Generative AI: [How to Cite AI Generated Content - Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) - Research Guides at Purdue University Libraries](#)

Suggested Content Structure

- Introduction
- Situation/SWOT Analysis
- SMART Objectives
- Recommendations and Implementation
- Budget
- Evaluation Plan
- Conclusion
- Works Cited (APA format)



- Each team should generate secondary data to substantiate all material found within their executive summary. APA (American Psychological Association) style should be used for referencing purposes. Primary research is accepted and encouraged.

Section IV: Presentation Guidelines

Format & Timing

- 15-minute (maximum) in-person presentation
 - Two-minute warning given
 - Strict cutoff times enforced
- 10-minute Q&A with judges will immediately follow the presentation
- Faculty advisors may attend Q&A but may not participate

Technical Details

- Presentation file due: *Tuesday, October 27, 2026, by 5:00 p.m.*
- Email to: elaine.thode@desales.edu
- No changes permitted after submission
- Bring a backup to competition on a thumb drive

Onsite Equipment Provided

- Computer with PowerPoint
- Internet access
- Remote control
- Projector and screen
- Teams must operate all electronic equipment themselves

Presentation Standards

- Students may show and/or hand the judges items (such as paper handouts)
- Giveaways (e.g., food, gifts) are not permitted
- No corrections to written submissions may be added during presentation
- Latecomers will not be admitted once a presentation begins

Section V: Communication Protocol

- Advisors may collect and submit student questions throughout the semester
- Submissions may be sent to elaine.thode@desales.edu who will forward to a Walmart representative who will answer as time permits.
- General answers provided to requesting faculty advisor



Awards

Awards are determined by the combined score of the expanded executive summary and presentation.

Award	Description
1st place	The team will receive a trophy, award certificate, plus the following: \$1,200 total to be divided equally among team members The team members' names will also be added to the Big Trophy, housed at DeSales University. This trophy contains team member's names and sponsors from previous competitions.
2nd Place	The team will receive a trophy, award certificate and \$400 total to be divided equally among team members.
3rd Place	Certificate for each team member
Other awards	There may be other awards presented by the judges if outstanding performance is indicated. This will be up to the judges' discretion. For example, awards MAY be given for "Best Presenter," or for other achievements that exceed the minimum expectations.

Scoring

1. Scoring sheets for both the expanded executive summary and presentation will be used to choose winners. These score sheets should help the teams develop their expanded executive summary content and are included below.
2. Judges' decisions are final.
3. The penalty for all violations is disqualification. Whether or not a disqualification is warranted is up to Walmart representatives.

Judges

There will be three to five judges. The judges for the challenge will be individuals who are experts in their areas. There will be judges from the sponsoring company (Walmart) and if needed, faculty and/or practitioners.



Tentative Score Sheets

CRS Collegiate Challenge - Expanded Executive Summary

	Must Improve	Should Improve	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Score
Situation/Strategy						
Current Situation	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Competitive Analysis	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
SWOT	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
Objectives	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
Ideas						
Recommendations	0-19	20-23	24-27	28-31	32-35	
Innovativeness of Ideas	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
Evaluation and Control	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Other						
Introduction	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Conclusion	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Documentation of sources	0-1	2	3	4	5	
	TOTAL					

CRS Collegiate Challenge – Presentation

	Must Improve	Should Improve	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	SCORE
Opening – Attention getting, led into topic	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Current Situation/Competitive Analysis/SWOT	0-17	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-30	
Recommendations	0-19	20-23	24-27	28-31	32-35	
Conclusion – Effective	0-1	2	3	4	5	
Overall Delivery, gestures, energy level, voice	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
Visual Aids	0-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	
Appearance – dressed for a professional presentation	0-1	2	3	4	5	

Contact Information

Questions or concerns should be directed to: Elaine Thode, CRS Program Director,
elaine.thode@desales.edu **Note: Any contact must be initiated by the faculty advisor.**