

Nov 9th, 12:00 AM

# A Case of Interdisciplinary Course Project: Costuming in Historically based Film

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Bright, Megan Elizabeth and Nam, Jinhee, "A Case of Interdisciplinary Course Project: Costuming in Historically based Film" (2016).  
*International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 38.  
[http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/itaa\\_proceedings/2016/posters/38](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/itaa_proceedings/2016/posters/38)

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## A Case of Interdisciplinary Course Project: Costuming in Historically based Film

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Keywords: Interdisciplinary project, Historical costuming, Film costuming, Design process

**The purpose** of this abstract is to present a project between students in apparel design and telecommunications as an interdisciplinary collaboration and learning experience. The particular project between student film director and myself as a costume designer was set into motion by the need to fulfill our own respective independent study courses held in spring 2016.

**Background and unique characteristics of film costumes:** Costumes for the film industry have naturally unique characteristics. Three main roles have been emphasized for costume designers: storytellers, interpreters, and managers (Cole and Burke, 2005). When creating costumes for the sake of telling a story through clothing in given time frame, a costume designer must be resourceful, quick, and thorough. The resourcefulness required to be a costume designer can involve the use pre-existing garments and sewing patterns in real world. In this circumstance, costuming for film differs from regular fashion production in several ways. For example, the mastery of seam construction, and labeling are not the major considerations. Costuming for film differs from theatrical costuming as well. In theater, a rule of thumb is that if a costume looks good from 15 feet away, then it is acceptable. In film, costumes in general must be meticulously attractive in case the director of photography wants to use tight frames. The unique consideration for film costuming is how clothing will interact through the lens of a camera (Landis, 2003).

**Costuming process:** The entire design and production process was described based on three stage design process model: 1) Problem definition & research, 2) Creative Exploration, and 3) Implementation (Labat & Sokolowski, 1999) as follows. 1) Problem Definition & Research: In the early weeks of the spring 2016 semester, the student film director reached out with the request to create costumes for his script, set in 14th century France about Philip IV, which includes costumes for three main characters and three extras. The first phase of a design analysis is when the designer meets with the director to develop a design point of view by analyzing the script and meeting with the director (Cole & Burke, 2005). Before proposing the film idea to myself as a costume designer, the director already addressed some design problems by preparing research and sketches. For historically based productions, known as period films, the purpose of research is to gain elements of authenticity, credibility, and continuity. The time frame given for completing costumes for 3 characters and 3 extras was 4-6 weeks. 2) Creative Exploration:

Since the film director brought clear design concepts in advance, the main points of decision focused on suitable fabrics, pattern-making and construction methods. The goal was reproduce them to be historically authentic. The director relies on the technical expertise of the costume designer to execute concepts and ideas. To respond to the tight deadline, I took steps to reduce production time such as recruiting a fellow apparel design student to be a costume assistant for the duration of the production. Design decisions were made based on discussion and

brainstorming between the film director, myself, and the actors. *3) Implementation:* Multiple approaches were taken to increase the efficiency within the time frame. Some of the costumes were made from scratch starting from draping, and some of the costumes have been rented from a local costume shop in a civic theater. The film with the developed costume, still in process, will be presented at the time of presentation of this abstract.

**Learning outcomes:** This independent course was initially created to learn pattern development techniques with a focus on historical costuming. The opportunity to work on a film provided the perfect opportunity to gain real-life experience. Some of the film students have also commented that working with a costumer on their films was new and exciting. The learning outcomes while executing this collaborative project were abundant:

- Learning strategies for production time reduction: One of the biggest challenges was the tight time frame, a common element in the film industry today. The prep time for three characters and three extras was set to be 4-6 weeks for this project. An assistant seamstress was recruited from the fashion department to accommodate the execution of designs. Fulfilling the designs required a nice array of practices commonly used in the field, including altering pre-existing garments, reverse engineering, and of course developing costumes from scratch.
- Gaining practical and essential implication tips: Since film stock, lighting methods, and projection techniques are just a few of many aspects that affect the look of a costume on film (Cole and Burke, 2005) specific considerations were explored in this project. For example, in order to set the film in 14<sup>th</sup> century France, everything is to be shot in front of a green-screen and will undergo editing in post-production. Because of this, fabrics with hues of green or too much shine were omitted to avoid becoming distorted in front of the camera. Although this project merely scratch the tip of the iceberg for necessary considerations, these first learning experiences were absolutely critical.
- Interactive nature of costuming: I realized the importance of a strong level of communication between the director and costume designer. The film and costumes are produced simultaneously, gradually realizing a vision shared and sculpted by all collaborators involved. Like many elements, the design evolves.

The entire process has proven that the preparation and research phase is vitally important and takes almost as much time as the construction phase. This project facilitated valuable learning experiences. Invaluable skills in communication, time management, interpersonal relations and costuming have been refined in the duration of this project. Details of medieval fashion, and experiences with passionate storytellers have made a deep impression in my level of aspiration. Overall, this interdisciplinary project will leave a synergy between two departments and a creative historical narrative that will last long after the credits have rolled.

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