

Nov 8th, 12:00 AM

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Lewis, Janice and Moretz, Colleen, "Teaching Fashion Design Senior Collections: A Three- Part Process from Design to Runway" (2016). *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 43.

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Teaching Fashion Design Senior Collections: A Three- Part Process from Design to Runway

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Key words: design, critic, senior, collection

Introduction. The culmination of most traditional fashion design programs is the development of a collection of garments by the seniors for their thesis project. We have developed a unique three-part process that continues over both semesters of the senior year. The concentration and outcome of this approach has routinely provided the students with the resources to produce quality garments that are featured in the annual fashion show. Senior faculty members act as a design team to provide oversight for the students as well as demonstrating to the seniors how a design team can function in the fashion industry. An industry professional is selected to work throughout the year as a critic for the guidance in the formation of the students' collection from the conception to the final garments. The outside critic meets with the students in the design studio at least three times over the course of the year. The initial critique is to make edits to the students' collections down to a final selection. The second visit occurs just before winter break to evaluate the toiles on models to check proportions and to provide fitting details for corrections. The final visit is held a few weeks prior to the show for the purpose of providing suggestions on additional modifications needed. Recommendations are also given on the accessorizing and the merchandising of their collection for the runway.

Purpose. The desired outcome of this approach is for the students to emulate real-world experiences by successfully following the design process from the conception and theme development to the visual communication, fit evaluations, and fabrication to complete a professionally executed, cohesive collection. One important aspect is for the students to set-up their individual calendars, which are comprised of a series of mandatory deadlines. Adhering to this calendar will lead to their continued success during the process. In addition, the students' ongoing engagement with the faculty design team and the outside critic, expose them to the practice of building collaborative working relationships.

Implementation and Outcomes. The senior collection development is a cooperative endeavor between the senior professors of the design, illustration, and studio courses.

- 1). The design professor begins the collection development process by directing the students in their research to establish their inspiration, concept, creating their customer profiles, and linking a color story and fabrication into a cohesive body of work.
- 2). The illustration professor works with the students to illustrate two10 "look" collections for their presentation to the industry critic. The critic guides the student to choose their final collection and edit the selected collection down to six "looks". The students then illustrate the six edited "looks" and create technical flats, line sheets and fit cards for each "look".
- 3). The studio professor facilitates the draping, pattern drafting, preliminary model fittings, and the construction of the toiles and final garments. It is important for the students to have accurate technical construction details in their flats to aid in this undertaking.

All senior students, design faculty, and critic participate in the three-part process.

1). The presentation and editing of the two 10 “look” collections down to their final six “look” collection that the students will produce for the annual fashion show. Students get constructive individual feedback in the selection of the garments that best represent their design aesthetics and skills to produce a successful outcome. Color stories and appropriate fabric selections are reviewed during this stage. Students are encouraged to design their own textiles or to utilize the Fab Lab to add laser cutting, 3D printing, or machine embroidery to their designs. They have time built into the schedule to have strike offs ready for the next stage.

2). The toiles are fitted on models and each student provides a fit card for each garment to record the needed fit corrections. At this time, their color stories and fabrics are reviewed and finalized. Students are now able to purchase their needed fabrics and notions. This step provides the students the confidence to move forward with the construction of their final garments.

3). At the final critique, students present their completed collection. (A final fitting with the appropriate model has taken place prior to this event). The students are able to make minor corrections at this point, but if their collection does not meet the predetermined expectations than they can be eliminated from the show.

The program is set up for the students to be successful. Students will seek out and take advantage of senior faculty as mentors. We have found that they are eager for feedback throughout the complete collection process. One wonderful result of this process is that the seniors feel as though they have gained a practical insight into the real world of fashion design.

Plan for Continuation. This process has been in place for several years. Students work well under these guidelines. As the fashion industry has evolved, we have updated expectations. As an example, their collections now need to include technical samples. Even though it takes a huge time commitment from the senior faculty members and the critic to coordinate everyone’s schedules, we have many of our alumnae who are willing to give back to the program as critics.

