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# Building Bookstore Displays: A Collaboration Between University Fashion Students and Campus Bookstore to Develop Merchandising, Management, and Leadership Skills Through the Development of Visual Displays

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## **Building Bookstore Displays: A Collaboration Between University Fashion Students and Campus Bookstore to Develop Merchandising, Management, and Leadership Skills Through the Development of Visual Displays**

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**Keywords: visual, display, merchandising**

### **Introduction**

Today's socially-connected environment requires adding creative approaches to teaching methods that will maintain interest, thus producing improved learning outcomes. The rise of technology over the past 20 years has changed the way that we communicate and interact, and more importantly the way skills are developed. The process of experiential learning is an approach that attempts to achieve that goal by providing students the experience via course curriculum. The concept is based on the idea that 70% of learning stems from experience, 20% is acquired through others, and only 10 % is the result of structured courses and programs. Consequently, experiential learning accounts for about 90% of overall learning (Jennings and Wargnier, 2010). This experiential learning *Building a Bookstore Project*, provided undergraduate fashion merchandising majors with valuable experience in visual merchandising combined with organizational and planning strategies, and ultimately, gaining valuable skills such as management and leadership that will be used in future career ventures.

### **Project Design and Implementation**

The instructor contacted the university bookstore to discuss a potential partnership between a fashion promotion class and the university bookstore. Through a partnership with the Fashion Promotion class, the students could help with the fashion merchandising and promotion in the bookstore. As a result, students were assigned a three-part *Building Bookstore Displays Project*. For each segment, a project worksheet was given to the student teams with objectives. Before beginning the project, the students and instructor visited the store together and received an orientation that included a tour and discussion of student expectations during the project.

#### ***Segment #1 Display Proposal***

The first segment of the project required each team to create a proposal that outlined a plan for developing displays for four large exterior store windows that face campus with high foot traffic. Proposals described the merchandise, props, lighting, and signage that would be utilized in addition to a timeline and budget. Obviously, students could only display merchandise available for sale in the store, but other items needed could be purchased by the instructor, if necessary. Proposals also included a 20" x 30" presentation board that visually communicated the window concepts. At a pre-arranged time, all proposals were presented to the course instructor and the store director for approval and submitted to the instructor for evaluation.

***Segment #2 Display Execution***

After proposal approval, each team executed the project based on a schedule. Because each set of windows was showcased in the store for exactly two weeks, each team was assigned a specific date for installation. Several weeks prior, each team worked to obtain, make, or have the instructor purchase items needed for the windows. In addition, the teams created printed signage to enhance the displays. On the assigned date, each team arrived at the store, removed existing window displays, and executed their concepts. During actual installation, each team also shot video that included detailed instructions about concepts and execution of each step of design and installation. The instructor provided verbal feedback to each team during execution and suggested changes, if needed. Throughout the installation, the store manager and at least one staff member watched and listened to team members describe concepts developed and methods used in order to gain valuable training from the students; store personnel also asked questions and took notes during the installations. Upon completion, the store manager provided verbal feedback about the window displays to students and submitted a written evaluation to instructor.

***Segment #3 Presentation and Analysis***

The final segment of the project was focused on the dissemination of information. The week after each project was executed, the respective team made a presentation to the class that included an overview of the entire process, and what was learned, and the video made during installation. Afterward, the instructor and student peers provided comments to team members and discussion was encouraged.

**Effectiveness and Continuation of the Activity**

The *Building Bookstore Displays Project* outcome exceeded the expectations of the initial plan, and the coordination of segments throughout the semester to complete one project that clearly made a positive visual change in the store windows, proved to be successful based on instructor analysis, store manager comments, and the sustained interest of the students. The students felt that the project was a great opportunity for them to put their visual merchandising skills into practice while working with a retail store to learn strategies to work together better in a team environment. This project will be used for future classes, and may be applied to other retail stores, if possible, to allow future students to utilize their merchandising knowledge while developing management and leadership skills.

**References**

Jennings, C., & Wagnier, J. (2010). Experiential learning – a way to develop agile minds in the knowledge economy? *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 24, 3, 14-16.