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Using technology to integrate writing into the fashion and apparel merchandising curriculum

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Due to the inadequate writing ability of incoming college freshman (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004), students can experience writing anxiety when preparing formal written assignments (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011). Therefore, post-secondary educators of all subjects have realized that writing experiences can no longer be confined to the English classroom. For students pursuing a fashion and apparel merchandising degree, writing proficiency is important for multiple reasons including promotional activities and technical writing. Promotional activities, such as writing for magazines, blogs, journals and social media has become more important in multiple career paths. Technical writing is also important “behind the scenes” in the fashion industry where students need to learn to have professional written exchanges with other industry professionals including vendors, employees, and stockholders among others (Whitehead, 2015).

The college student population has begun to transition from the Millennial Generation to Generation Z. Millennials are defined differently in various sources, but generally refer to those born between 1980 and 1990, while Generation Z is defined those born between 1995 and 2010, who are 7-22 years old in 2017 (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Generation Z has grown up with technology more than any other generation and learns best with logic-based and experiential learning approaches; they want real-world experiences and skills that they can apply in the future (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). As students continue to change, educational strategies will need to change to accommodate their needs. This study evaluated the success of using technology to include informal writing activities in fashion and apparel merchandising classes at a Midwestern University.

## **Method**

Writing activities were purposefully added to four classes within a fashion and apparel merchandising program during the 2016-2017 school year. Different types of technology were used including Spiral, Poll Everywhere, Google Forms, and the learning management system Blackboard. Informal writing was used to expand student knowledge about topics from the course, as a formative assessment tool, and to increase attendance by providing in-class activities. This was a low pressure way for students to practice writing within their fashion courses. Students were given a pre and post survey about their opinion of the importance of writing in their professional field and their opinion about the use of technology to implement writing into the class.

## Results

On the survey students were asked to rank the following statement on a 5-point scale (1 not important- 5 very important) “I think it is important to have good writing skills in my field”.

On the pre-survey, the average was 4.1, on the post-survey the average was 4.5, indicating that students viewed writing skills slightly more important after it was implemented into the class.

When asked if the writing activities encouraged participation and attendance in class, the average score on a 5-point scale (1 strongly disagree- 5 strongly agree) was 4.3, indicating that the in-class writing activities encouraged attendance. On a 5-point scale (1 strongly disagree- 5 strongly agree), students averaged a 4.2 that the apps used for writing in class were engaging and fun.

Student comments about the use of technology for writing indicated that students had a positive reaction. Comments such as “I liked it”, and “kept the class fun” show that students liked using technology. One student “liked the interactiveness of the app” (Spiral). Another student compared the use of technology to more traditional writing strategies and stated “I liked the digital aspect of my class because I do not like using extra paper and losing it in the process. Having everything digital made it easier for me to keep track of my assignments and work”.

From the perspective of the educators, it was easy to implement writing digitally and the technology seemed to keep the students engaged. The technology was easy to use and it was easy to adapt existing assignments and create new ones quickly. Technology also made the writing easy to grade in a quick and efficient way. Some of the technology allowed answers to be displayed in the classroom to spark further discussion as well. Specific examples of how to implement writing with different technologies will be given during the presentation.

## Implications and Future Research

These strategies could be used to further integrate writing into the fashion and apparel merchandising classroom. Not only could this help students see the benefit in possessing strong writing skills within the fashion field, but it could also help them practice and improve their writing in an informal and low-pressure setting, which can reduce anxiety and improve confidence. Similar strategies could also be used for students to practice math skills more regularly in the fashion merchandising classroom in the future.

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