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Jessie Chen-Yu  
Virginia Tech, chenyu@vt.edu

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## Sharing Strategies of Teaching an Introductory Textile Course

Jessie Chen-Yu, Virginia Tech, USA

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**Purpose of the abstract.** Increasing students' interest in textiles poses a challenging task for many instructors who have been teaching this subject matter in Fashion Merchandising and Design. I have been teaching textile courses for 20 years and have gained many precious experiences. My students have consistently given high evaluations for the courses and commended that textile courses are interesting because the information is applicable to their daily life and the course materials can prepare them for their future career. In our school, the introductory textile course consists of two parts: a lecture part with three credit hours and a lab part with one credit hour. The purpose of this abstract is to share some of the strategies that I use in teaching the lecture part of the introductory textile course and to offer some teaching tactics for colleagues in ITAA who also teach this course.

**Determine the proper amount of course contents and amount of information in each exam.** It is important to consider students' learning ability and include the right amount of information that students can fully comprehend for each exam. If students were overwhelmed with information, they would become frustrated and lose the drive to make efforts in their studies. On the other hand, too little information would not sufficiently challenge students, and they would no longer find the course interesting and fun. The way I determine the proper amount of the course content is to ask the students for feedback twice in a semester. I first divided the course into five sections (i.e., fibers, yarns, fabrics, coloration, and finishes) and gave an exam after each section to evaluate the students' progress and understanding of the course materials. With five exams, the students voiced concerns on too much information to learn for each exam. After I increased the number of exams to six, some students expressed that the amount of information was manageable, but the majority still thought that each exam covered too much information. Now I divide the course into seven sections, each with an exam, changing the original sections on fibers and fabrics to two sections each. The students express their preference for shorter and more frequent exams, which allow them to fully comprehend the information covered in the classes. The learning ability of students in various schools may differ, and it is important to determine the right amount of information for students in different schools.

**Develop an organized class-note package with filling-the-blank spaces.** I organize and update the course content every semester and prepare a class-note package for students to purchase at the beginning of each semester. I find that students prefer buying a hard-copy package instead of downloading the files from the course website. I prepare the same information that I show on the lecture PowerPoint slides in the class notes, but leave some empty spaces for students to fill in the blanks to help them pay attention and follow my lectures closely. Students express that they love the interactive format because it helps them concentrate on the explanations and examples that I give in the class. In addition to filling in the blanks, I also keep

a two-inch empty space on the page for students to write their own notes. Many students commented that they like to write down the explanations that I provided in the class. When they study for the exam, their own notes could help them understand the materials better.

**Utilize visual aids.** In the course, I use various visual aids, including pictures, video clips from YouTube and DVDs, fabric samples, and flow charts. For pictures in the PowerPoint slides, to reduce confusions, I find it better to show only a few clear examples than to show many pictures. It is also vital to show the textile to be used in a garment or other textile products so that students can connect the information to the objects that they observe in their daily life. After finishing each course, I post the lecture PowerPoint slides on the course website so that students can use them for future studies. Students enjoy the video clips that show them the manufacturing processes. However, it is better to show one or two short clips between lectures than to show one video clip that is longer than five minutes because students lose their attention easily when they watch a long video clip. Flow charts are included in the class-note package for each lecture. At the end of the class, I review the flow charts and give the students an overall picture of how the information was organized and presented in the class. Many students responded that the flow charts are a great tool for them to study and prepare for the exam.

**Provide an in-class group assignment for extra credits.** Students are required to purchase a swatch kit and bring it to every class. I ask them to examine the examples in the kit after I introduce one type or one group of textiles. This swatch kit is also a visual aid, as mentioned in the last paragraph. In addition, I use it for an extra-credit in-class assignment. I do not penalize the students who miss class; instead, I reward the students who attend the class with extra credits. In the middle of the class, I give the students a list of swatch numbers and ask them to match each of the swatches to the information that I have just given in the class. Rather than calculating the extra credits at the end of the semester, I add the extra credits to the associated exam so that the students are encouraged to attend every class to earn extra credits for their next exam. In addition to encouraging attendance, the in-class assignment provides two other benefits. First, it provides students a break between lectures. Bunce, Flens and Neiles (2010) found that college students' maximum attention span is about 20 minutes. It is important to incorporate different activities for active learning. I encourage the students to work on the in-class assignment with a classmate. I find that group work not only increases the interaction between students, but also enhances students' interest in the subject matter. Second, the in-class assignment provides students an opportunity to review the information given in the class and a chance for me to clarify any confusion and be sure that the students fully understand the course materials.

**In conclusion.** Improving an academic course is a continuous process. I continue asking students for feedback every semester even after I have taught this course every semester for the past 20 years. Students continue to provide me with various suggestions to further the development of the course. I hope these tactics can offer some useful suggestions for my colleagues in ITAA who also teach an introductory textile course.

**Reference.** Bunce, D.M., Flens, E.A., and Neiles, K.Y. (2010). How long can students pay attention in class? A study of student attention decline using clickers. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 87 (12), 1438-1443.