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Plus Size Draping techniques: Normalizing Fat, Obese, and Plus Size Bodies in the Classroom to Enhance Fashion Design Students Versatility in the Fashion Industry"

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## Introduction

Ideally, fashion draping would take place on the human body but as time is limited student designers must use a mannequin. One of the challenges of draping techniques is the standardized and unrealistic shape of dress form mannequins. As the average US woman grows in size, a more realistic figure should be used to teach draping. Standard draping techniques require the designer to drape a muslin block on a size 8 dress form. Strategies to improve students understanding of the 3 dimensional human form have been developed. For example, by implementing the use of a Cartesian grid in the *Drape to draft* block patterns method presented by Salusso and Vandermer (2012) students are better able to monitor lengthwise and horizontal grain. However, they still lack the skills to drape on a plus-size body shape. Larger mannequins must be used to teach students to design for the mass market.

## Method

In many apparel curricula, a size 8 dress form is the typical size used to teach draping. In order to introduce a realistic figure, Fabulous Fit patented fitting system body pads (Figure 1) and a Size 8 Fabulous Fit Pro Series 2009 draping mannequin were used. I used the book, *Draping 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* by Jaef and Relis to integrate 3 basic drapes; bodice, skirt and bias slip dress. The method begins with taking key measurements of the bust, waist, stomach girth, hip, and thigh. Each of these measurements is taken from side seam (SS) to SS either across the front of the body or across the back. As the female figure expands, body fat deposits in different locations and using only the circumference is insufficient. For example, a woman's hips measure 50" in circumference but her SS to SS across the back measures 28" while hips across the front only measure 22". Thus meaning the muslin block will be larger for the back and smaller for the front.



Figure 1. Fabulous Fit - patented fitting system body pads

The text recommends measuring the widest part of the hip and the length of the skirt to determine fabric width and height. In this case, those measurements were insufficient and it was necessary to start with the measurement of the widest FS or BS across the lower portion of the body. Then, they were instructed to accordingly place body pads on their mannequin to simulate the human shape (Figure 2). For the Cartesian grid, students were instructed use the measurements and draw the grid on the front muslin and back muslin block. This provided ample seam allowance, fitting ease and allowed the fabric to remain on grain.



Figure 2. Fabulous Fit – hip shaping pad body

### Conclusion

I found this teaching method allowed students to understand and appreciate the unique shapes of human bodies. I also feel that students became more accepting of body types that deviate from the social norm. It was discovered that dart depth and length varied greatly based on the position of the body pads. This generated lenient rules for placement of darts in order to develop a smooth and appealing garment on the figure.

The only issue that arose was student comparison of dart placement and dart depth. Some students feared they were “doing it wrong” because every drape was slightly different. After reinforcement that body pads placed in different locations require different shaping techniques, students gained confidence in their skills. Overall, I think this approach will be more beneficial to students than only draping on unrealistic shaped size 8 dress forms. I look forward to the expansion of plus size draping techniques. If possible, implications of this method will result in an academic text supporting fashion design professors in teaching a designated plus size fashion design course.

### References

Figure 1 & 2: Dress Forms Accessories. (n.d.). *Dress Forms Up to 50% off. Sample Sale T. 800.853.9644*. Retrieved March 11, 2013, from <http://www.fabulousfit.com/accessories.html>

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