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Using Historic Costume Collection Artifacts for Active Learning of Strapless Eveningwear Internal Structure

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Key words: museum, collaboration, eveningwear, active

Innovative strategy. Most students lack practical experiences with constructing the internal structure such as underlining, boning, and waist stays are essential to support strapless dresses (Khalje, 1997). Therefore, these concepts were taught in a junior-level draping course, which covered eveningwear. Active learning through analysis of examples is an effective way for students to more deeply understand new knowledge (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991), so we sought to teach these concepts through a combination of lecture and active learning, looking inside garments to analyze their internal structures. However, student closets rarely contain garments that exemplify the diversity of methods and materials that can be used in developing strapless internal structures. An historic collection can be used in the classroom to assist with student understanding of apparel design and construction concepts and in so doing provide a valuable educational contribution (Marcketti, Fitzpatrick, Keist, & Kadolph, 2011). The instructors collaborated with the department's historical costume collection to have students conduct structured observations of historic strapless dresses, prior to designing their own. The students were able to actively explore the internal structure used in a variety of dresses. In turn, these activities supported the collection's mission: "... to promote the scholarship and appreciation of historic and ethnic textiles and clothing, with an emphasis on visual and active learning" (Textiles and Clothing Museum, n.d.).

Purpose. The purpose of this teaching innovation was two-fold. First, we wanted students to gain a deeper knowledge of garment construction, especially regarding evening-wear dresses. We sought to teach junior-level students how to build appropriate internal structure such as boning, underlining, and waist stays in their draped strapless dresses. We wanted to promote student engagement with the concepts through active involvement in the analyzing the dresses (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). Second, we sought to collaborate with the historic fashion collection to provide an active learning experience that allowed "fashion to be celebrated and appreciated through an historical lens" (Holt, 2017, p. 1). "As up-and-coming fashion designers, apparel design students are exposed to a plethora of different inspiration sources, but museums offer additional background information and insight into their collection artifacts, which stimulate a deeper understanding of the social and political environments in which their artifacts were created (Reaves & Romeo, 2016, p. 1)."

Implementation. This innovative teaching strategy was implemented in a junior-level draping course as part of an eveningwear design projects with a strapless dress requirement. The course description is "Apparel design through basic draping techniques on industry standard dress forms. Analysis of fit and design, problem solving and interaction of fabric characteristics with style features." The course includes basic principles of draping as well as application of these principles to the design, draping, and construction of sportswear and eveningwear

ensembles for a specific target market. The students had taken a flat patternmaking course and had an essential knowledge of garment construction, patternmaking, and draping.

The historic dress active learning assignment was conducted before students began draping their own strapless dress designs. First information regarding the internal structure of evening-wear including lining, underlining, boning, waist stays, and other elements that can be used to support a garment's shape was presented to students in a PPT lecture. Numerous pictorial examples were included in the lecture. In the next class period, the historic collection staff brought four strapless dresses from the time period 1980s to 1990s. These artifacts were selected for their variety of internal structural components as well as to show historical silhouette changes. Each student was



Figure 1 Students examining historic dresses

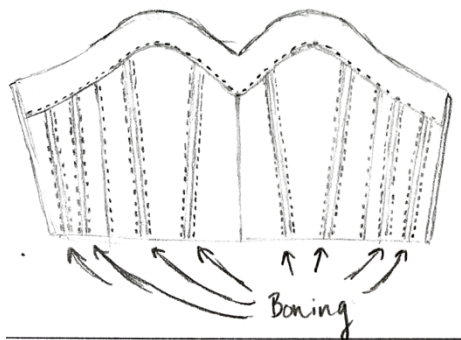


Figure 2 Student drawing of internal structure

assigned one of the dresses to analyze (Figure 1). A worksheet was provided, which students completed individually, to focus their observations and analysis. Students were required to record: (a) type of dress, (b) estimated year, (c) brand (label), (d) front and back technical sketches, (e) fabric grain direction, (f) the internal structure including stitches, boning, waist stays, or any other details (Figure 2), (g) fashion fabric(s), (h) underlining fabric, (i) stiffening materials, (j) closures, (k) edge finishes, and (l) hemming technique. They took photos of the overall design, internal details, and external details. In the following class period, each group delivered a presentation of their findings. This enabled each student to learn about all four dresses.

Effectiveness and Future Plans. The in-class assignment worksheet and group presentation were effective in deepening student knowledge of strapless dress internal construction, needed to successfully construct their own draped eveningwear designs. Especially, their detailed technical sketches based on their observations helped them to actively understand the role of support materials. The assignment was also successful in developing students' awareness of the textile and clothing museum's artifacts. This assignment increased interactions between students and the museum staff members. In the future, this active learning assignment with historic costume will be repeated and extended to more assignments. To further enhance the learning process, additional reference materials related to internal construction and historical eveningwear designers' backgrounds and construction methods will be provided. These tools may enhance the depth of students' understanding.

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