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Abstract
Serving as a faculty advisor to the student-planned, -promoted, and -produced annual fashion show resulted in some of my most proud professional moments – and some of the most wrenching stressors I've experienced to date. As mentioned in a previous Campus Events Professional, the Iowa State University Textiles and Clothing (TC) Annual Fashion Show is the most public event in the TC program and is attended by university administrators, faculty, alumni, industry executives, and family and friends. We have received media coverage for our event and actively seek to raise awareness of our show and program among national and international audiences.

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Disciplines
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Comments
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How to Stay Sane as a Faculty Advisor to a Student-Run Event

Sara B. Marcketti

Last month, Dr. Marcketti shared her strategies for turning a fashion show into an event-planning class. This month, she continues the story by telling us how she stayed sane in the process. –JPL

Serving as a faculty advisor to the student-planned, -promoted, and -produced annual fashion show resulted in some of my most proud professional moments — and some of the most wrenching stressors I’ve experienced to date. As mentioned in a previous Campus Events Professional, the Iowa State University Textiles and Clothing (TC) Annual Fashion Show is the most public event in the TC program and is attended by university administrators, faculty, alumni, industry executives, and family and friends. We have received media coverage for our event and actively seek to raise awareness of our show and program among national and international audiences.

The fashion-industry quality of the show is made more extraordinary when one considers that everything, from the fashion designs to the promotion of the show to the actual set, is completed by undergraduate students. Faculty advisement for the show requires an openness and flexibility regarding the integration of the goals and wishes of both the TC faculty and the student planners.

While the exact time commitment and responsibilities of my role change each year, the expectations remain clear: Guide students in producing the best process and product possible. What follows are some of the lessons I have learned, by trial and error, during my tenure as faculty advisor to the student-run fashion show.

1. Identify and cultivate a common goal for the event.

Unlike in the first year of my role as liaison between students and faculty on goals and interests, this year, as unambiguously as possible, I asked the students to identify the goals and objectives for the show, prefacing each discussion and decision with the question “What is the purpose/function of this show?”

I discovered the benefit of this approach after last year’s students decided that they “needed” to have an obscure reality-show star as the guest designer highlighted during the show. The lack of experience and the controversial personality of this “star” did not sit well with the TC faculty. Although the students ultimately chose an accomplished alumna as the guest designer, the time and heartache caused by the initial decision were counterproductive to planning for the show.

The simple “what is the purpose” question has helped guide students in considering their legacy to the fashion show and program history rather than just following “cool,” in-the-moment ideas. Next year, I will also organize a small group, comprising myself, the academic advisors, and a few selected students who are planning the show, to meet once a month to compare notes, discuss present and future goals, and brainstorm ways to best highlight our students’ professional-quality work, with the ultimate aim of further cultivating a collective spirit and goal for the show.

2. Ask for help.

I have long been of the opinion that two heads — no, make that 10 — are better than one. Because of the complex nature of planning for the fashion show, there were many topics and decisions that I was simply not qualified to handle, let alone rule on. I often relied on community members, alumni, academic advisors, TC faculty, and other university faculty to assist me in best serving the needs of the students.

I invited guest speakers to discuss topics with which I was unfamiliar (accounting and risk management being prime examples); I appointed a well-connected alumna as consultant to the alumni relations committee, to assist the students with contacting former students; and I welcomed an academic advisor who regularly brainstormed ideas with her advisees and encouraged students to present their ideas to classmates.

While I did not want to burden others with my responsibilities or minor conundrums, I consistently discovered the graciousness and enthusiasm of colleagues. Most, if not all, of the individuals whom I asked for help thanked me for allowing them the opportunity to positively impact students’ participation in the fashion show.

3. Take care of you.

Serving as a faculty advisor to a student-planned event requires putting in long hours, dedication to the students and to the event, never-ending patience, and participation in many pizza planning sessions and coffee breaks. While the ultimate credit for the event rightfully is awarded to the students, there is enormous stress (both external and internal) in serving as the faculty advisor. I have found that devotion to regular aerobic exercise, a meditative practice, and the confidential ear of a trusted colleague are the best preventive medicine for the stressors of faculty advising. While this is not to say that I am completely Zen-like in the weeks leading up to the show, adherence to mental and physical well-being have kept me (mostly) sane.

These ideas are not uncommon; however, it is easy to forget the importance of getting everyone involved on the same page, asking for help, and simply remembering to breathe. It is also important to remember that student-planned events are often the highlight of undergraduate students’ careers. I have found that the more sane, calm, and collected I can be during the planning process and the event’s execution, the easier it is to actively listen and guide student planning of the fashion show. Ultimately, this produces a product and a process that we can all be proud to have participated in.