Creating Cooperative Learning Environment through Cotton Capsule Wardrobe Project

Hae Jin Gam, Jiyoung Kim, Barbara Trippeer and Pureum Yeo
University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA

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Introduction University educators in clothing and textile program should prepare students to meet the evolving demands within the apparel industry characterized by innovation in information technology, changes in international trade, and growing concerns on environmental and social responsibilities. (Karpova et al., 2011). Previous studies (i.e., Frazier & Cheek, 2016; Wang, 2009) indicate that creating a collaborative learning environment is effective in terms of training students to industry standards of professional behavior, leadership, and critical thinking skills to meet the demands of the current business environment.

In higher education, often the classes and programs are structured in isolation not allowing the expertise and knowledge of students in one class to concurrently flow to another class or program. This could be especially true in the textile and apparel related disciplines where merchandising/retailing and design are often separated into different programs, not allowing simultaneous interaction among students as they learn. As the common objective is to educate students on the process of producing and delivering fashion product to consumers, there is a need to provide cooperative and interdisciplinary learning approaches to instruct students in these programs. This will allow students from different classes and programs to benefit from each other's expertise-while gaining the experience of working in a collaborative environment that mimics the professional practice and operations in the fashion industry.

Therefore, the purpose of this project was to engage students from multiple related degrees through a semester-long Cotton Capsule Wardrobe project that bridge the design process and the merchandising process. Through this collaborative project, the students enrolled in a merchandising/retailing course and apparel design industry technique design course worked together on developing a cotton capsule wardrobe collection. A capsule wardrobe consists of a limited number of essential items that can be worn for multiple occasions, which encourages the end consumer to have more efficient wardrobes through recirculation of key items (Lapolla & Sanders, 2017).

Curricular Framework The Cooperative Learning Model (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) was employed as a curricular development framework. According to this model, cooperative learning approach increases students' involvement and engagement in learning by positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing. This learning model has been effectively applied in various disciplines (e.g., art, sciences, social studies, and physical education) (Gillies, 2016).

Student Learning Outcomes The Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) for students in the merchandising and retailing program (SMR) were to; 1) analyze the market and industry trends for cotton, 2) understand how their research is actualized and operationalized through the design process 3) develop a post-collection consumer report to gauge consumer attitudes and acceptance toward the design product. SLO for students in the fashion design program (SFD) were to 1) utilize market and industry trend analyses of cotton for their design development, 2) integrate feedback and evaluations from team members during the design process, 3) develop products for a specific market, and 4) present and promote the collection. This project enabled students in both classes to learn the value of collaboration through effective communication, cooperative problem-solving and decision-making essential in their future careers.

Project Detail To collaboratively develop a cotton capsule wardrobe, SMR developed a situational analysis by analyzing the market and industry trend for cotton and presenting a hypothetical brand's profile including mission, target market and 4Ps (i.e., product, promotion, price and place). The information from the situational analysis was presented to SFD. SFD were divided into 8 groups consisting of 4-5 group members. Each group in SFD utilized the situational analysis provided by the SMR and created design sketches for a specific market that the SMR identified. Then SMR reviewed design sketches from eight groups, collected data from students on campus, and selected top four collections that would be actually produced. SFD group members of four groups whose collections were not selected were merged to other winning groups. Four winning SFD groups were required to collaboratively conduct research on purchasing fabrics for production. Based on their research, four SFD groups submitted fabric purchase orders. All members in each group collaborated in developing patterns, muslin samples and final product production. Meanwhile, with the winning designs, SMR developed a marketing strategy to market and promote the collection. In the coming weeks, the four finished collections will be presented to SMR to conduct post-production evaluations including focus group interviews.

Assessment of Outcome To assess student learning, this study utilized the meta-goals developed by the international Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) that provides a guideline for curricular development and assessment in apparel and textile programs. A questionnaire was developed based on the ITAA meta goals and data was collected before and after the project implementation. In addition, a reflection paper is to be collected from the students who participated at the end of project. As this is an on-going project for Spring 2020, we do not have the complete data set for the survey or the reflection paper. The findings will be shared during the conference presentation if the study is accepted for presentation.

Conclusion Our research has shown that use of a cooperative project when implemented in existing courses can improve students' learning experience. This teaching strategy emulates the product lifecycle management in many large fashion design organizations, where design concepts are not wholly owned by design or merchandising, rather the development process is

often moderated by a team. The project experience exposes students to the idea that they will be presenting and promoting their ideas to a range of both internal and external stakeholders, and that design in industry practice is often an experience of negotiation between these industry partnerships. Because this approach utilizes non-standard activities different from typical class projects, the practice presents both challenges and learning opportunities for students. Despite many opportunities with this teaching strategy, challenges such as assessing each student's contribution within the team environment (Kimmons & Spruiell, 2005) and intervening the students conflicts (Kreie et al., 2007) should be documented as well. Future studies should continue to explore the cooperative learning approach with the different topics or majors.

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