



2020 ITAA Special Topics Session

Elevate to Innovate: Finding Innovative Ways to Incorporate Diversity and Inclusion into the Textile and Apparel Curriculum

Names of Presenters: Beth Myers, Georgia State University; Alexandra Howell, Meredith College; and Kelly Reddy-Best and Eulanda Sanders, Iowa State University

As textile and apparel educators, we feel that we have a responsibility to incorporate DEI into the curriculum to not only improve the industry, but to have a more just society. We also want to empower our BIPOC students to advocate for themselves in instances where they experience racism and injustice in the workforce. Therefore, the purpose of this special topics session was to 1) allow ITAA members to talk in a safe space about DEI issues in the textile and apparel field, 2) allow ITAA members to share ways that they have incorporated DEI topics into their classes, and 3) encourage ITAA members to think about innovative ways to incorporate DEI into not just one course, but holistically throughout the curriculum.

After a brief introduction, participants could select a breakout room from the options of merchandising and marketing, history, design/product development, or textiles. One of the presenters served as a moderator in each breakout room to guide the group discussion with a prompt. Next, we left the breakout rooms and returned to the main meeting session to share our thoughts from the breakout room and engage in a group discussion.

Below is a summary of topics discussed in each area:

Merchandising/Marketing

The merchandising and marketing discussion focused primarily on sharing ideas for improving existing projects. While not formally discussed among participants there was an agreement, it seems, that many projects in this area of curriculum are similar. There was an importance placed on how existing projects could be improved to better reflect a more diverse consumer base.

Participants also shared the following ideas for assignments within the merchandising/marketing curriculum:

- Continual review of current events that impact diversity in the fashion industry
- Work from a shared knowledge, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Engage students in BIPOC/BBIA professional organizations for development
- Setting “multi-cultural” ground rules for classes that have general ed requirements such as writing intensive.
- Use merchandising/marketing to build DEI across curriculum.

History

The conversation in this area first acknowledged that some of the courses in the textile and apparel field have been rooted in the idea of teaching about white history, and there may have been some incorporation of people of color into the curriculum, but it was not strong or in an essential way. Participants felt like the resources that are currently available do not include diverse interpretations of history. To create a more inclusive curriculum, participants suggested using the Fashion and Race Database (fashionandrace.org) and having students do self-directed research studies on topics of their interest

Design/Product Development

The discussion in this breakout session centered on designing for a range of body types. Participants discussed having a greater diversity of mannequins, dress forms, patternmaking, and croquis. It was acknowledged that designers need a commitment to inclusion throughout the ideation process, as fashion solves problems for real life people. As educators, we can demonstrate our commitment to inclusive excellence as we select members of our advisory boards, as we bring in industry professionals into classes, as we form partnerships with retailers.

Textiles

Topics from the textiles breakout session included the importance of addressing how cotton was responsible for slavery in the U.S. and the unjust treatment of workers in the textile industry across the world. Although the textiles course is often taught as a science-based course, participants suggested that issues of DEI in this area must be addressed so that all students can feel valued and included in a safe learning environment.

To conclude the session, we shared with participants the possibility of having a new category of DEI in the ITAA Teaching Collection and a newly proposed minor at Iowa State University in Fashion, Culture, History, and Social Justice. Overall, we believe the goals of the session were achieved. Participants were highly engaged in the main session and breakout rooms in talking about DEI in the textile and apparel field, and shared ways to incorporate DEI in their classes. We hope they will take what they learned in this special session back to their campuses and engage their colleagues in ways to incorporate DEI throughout the curriculum.