



## Does Integrating Sustainability Content into an Online Introductory Fashion Curriculum Improve Student Learning?

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Recently, there has been an alarming increase in textiles being disposed of as waste. For instance, the Council for Textile Recycling (2015) states that each year Americans produce roughly 82 pounds of textile waste per resident of which only 15% is donated or recycled and the remaining 85% goes to landfills. This level of textile waste is unsustainable. Therefore, there is an increasing need for students to become aware of sustainability issues in fashion, and video-based modalities may be helpful to disseminate sustainability information to students through online introductory fashion curriculum. In the past, millennial students have positively responded to video technology in education (Baytar & Ashdow, 2014). Similarly, Banning and Gam (2013) stated that students reported that movies are relatable and help provide a better understanding of fashion. Since videos can be used to introduce and reinforce learning content for students, it is important to understand if students improve in their student learning by watching sustainability videos. Students who have the opportunity to have different levels of exposure to sustainability course content may perform differently based upon their overall course grade. Therefore, the following research question is addressed in the present study.

RQ1: Do students' overall course grades improve if they a) complete extra credit and regularly assigned sustainability video assignments, b) do not complete extra credit but complete the regularly assigned sustainability video assignment, and c) complete neither the extra credit nor the regularly assigned sustainability video assignments.

Students' scores for completing assignments and overall course grades were assessed from an introductory online fashion course offered in a Southeastern United States University. Students were given the opportunity to participate and complete two video-based assignments. The first video-based assignment offered was a short two-minute online video "The Story of Microfibers" (Story of Stuff Project, 2017) where students posted on a discussion board their solution to the fashion dilemma of microfibers contaminating water when washing clothing. The second video-based assignment for extra credit entailed students watching the hour and a half long video "The True Cost" (Morgan, 2015) and write a one-page paper on its personal impact. The short-required video assignment was worth five points, whereas the long extra credit assignment was worth ten points due to time invested.

There was a total of 14 students enrolled in the course that had their scores evaluated. The students that completed each assignment received full credit for their responses earning them the maximum number of points per assignment. The average student who completed both the extra credit and regularly assigned sustainability video assignments had an average overall course grade of 90 out of 100. Students who did not complete the extra credit but did complete the

regularly assigned sustainability video assignment had an average overall course grade of 85 out of 100. Furthermore, students who completed neither the extra credit nor the regularly assigned sustainability video assignment had an average overall course grade of 64 out of 100.

These results suggest that it is important to not only expose students to sustainability content in online introductory fashion curriculum to improve overall student learning, but that greater exposure to sustainability is more beneficial. For instance, the students who watched both sustainability videos performed better on their overall course grade than the rest of their peers. This was not due to students simply gaining more points due to doing extra assignments. Since the extra assignments were only worth five or ten more points that would not significantly change a students' letter grade alone, it seems that exposure to sustainability content improved the students' overall learning rather than the mere points they earned from the actual assignments. Also, the difference in letter grades was not attributed simply to overachievers gaining more points than the rest of their peers since students who had a low course grade were also the ones that attempted the sustainability assignments. Therefore, the results were not due to overachievers doing more work and getting more points than their peers. Instead, exposure to the sustainability content appeared to make a significant impact on the students' overall learning reflected in their final course grade. This improvement in learning may be due to the relevance and relatable real-world-value of learning about sustainable issues. As a result, this research encourages the incorporation of sustainability into online fashion introductory course curriculum.

Due to the limited sample size of 14 students, it is recommended that future research be conducted with a larger sample size such as a longitudinal study or with other universities. Also, these results may have implications for other fields. Therefore, future research could be conducted in other departments and disciplines by determining student learning improvement when incorporating sustainability-based curriculum content.

### References

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