



TEACHING FASHION DESIGN IN QATAR AND NEW ZEALAND-BICULTURAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

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East-West Encounters: Planning for a Fashion Program in Qatar-Christine Lindholm, Katen M. Guthrie, and Nancy M. Scott

In the summer of 1997, the Qatar Foundation for Science, Education and Community Development, a private non-profit foundation, approached Virginia Commonwealth University in hope of establishing an art school for its female population. Through numerous visits and negotiations and the approval of the State Council for Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), VCU entered into an agreement to establish the Shaqab College of Design Arts in Doha, the capital of Qatar, beginning in Fall of 1998. An Associate Dean was appointed Founding Director, and six faculty were recruited. On one of his initial trips, Richard Toscan, Dean for the School of the Arts, procured space for the first year of classes as plans were drawn up and ground was broken for a new academic facility and faculty residence.

Because of Virginia Commonwealth University's national recognition as one of the top 20 professional Art programs in the United States (US News and World Report), the Qatar Foundation and VCU established this design school with professional programs in fashion design and merchandising, graphic design, and interior design. Supporting curricula in drawing, general education, photography, and the business of design are also included. Additional programs will be added within the next five years including ceramics, metals/jewelry design, textiles, and electronic media design.

Qatar is located at the mid-point of the West Coast of the Persian Gulf, south of Saudi Arabia and north of the United Arab Emirates. It is a small nation, approximately the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined, and has a population of 500,000. Qatar is one of the world's leading producers of natural gas and oil reserves. It has an excellent pre-college educational system with a high literacy rate. English is the standard second language with large expatriate populations from USA, Britain, and Canada. Qatar is the most liberal country in the Persian Gulf. Democratic practices and freedom of the press are supported by the Emir as well as full economic, education, and political rights for Qatar women (School of the Arts Background Information).



The country's first school opened in 1952 and significant progress has been made since then. The University of Qatar opened in 1977 with one campus for males and one for females. The Shaqab College of Design Arts opened in Fall 1998 with 38 female students and is the first university in the country offering an American education. One year later, its enrollment is nearly 80 students including Qatari nationals along with students from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

A major consideration in developing this international program is the issue of culture. Culture is a frame of reference. It is multi-layered, affecting surface aspects such as dress, food, and customs but also hidden within our values and religious practices. To successfully develop an international program, administration and faculty must adapt their behavior, teaching styles and attitudes to embrace and accommodate these cultural differences.

The role of women in Qatar is in a state of flux with dramatic changes currently taking place. Qatari women are still expected to wear veils and to cover themselves completely when in public. Marriages are arranged, and young women are not permitted to go out in public without a proper chaperone. However, women are taking a more active role in the business world. Western women are not expected to adhere to the strict rules of their Muslim counterparts, but they are encouraged to show respect in their appearance and for the basic cultural traditions.

In the more conservative Muslim countries, the decision to attend a university lies with the daughter's parents. These decision factors are the cost of tuition (QR 40K), religious, and environmental concerns. The more conservative the family, the more likely that the daughter must attend a university where her family resides. Shaqab College of Design Arts offers the wealthy Muslim family a creative, high quality, yet controlled, living situation for their daughters. Initially, recruiting was directed to females and their families in Qatar and the Gulf region countries.

Preparation of faculty to teach in Qatar is essential to ensure the success of the program there. Each summer prior to their tenure in the Middle East, faculty join together for a two-day seminar to expose them to both the culture of Qatar and the Middle East and to give instruction on how to adapt their teaching style to a new culture. Now in its second year, SCODA has a new associate administrator and three additional faculty. Five of the six faculty elected to stay an additional year. The sixth faculty returned to the USA because of family matters.

The acculturation process for faculty begins with analyzing the needs of students in English proficiency and basic skills and knowledge. Faculty set learning objectives before designing the curriculum. Then they select the best teaching method to match the culture and learning style of the student body. Teaching materials are developed to complement the methods, and the process is completed with an evaluation of the course. Accommodations have been made for courses that present sensitive material such as art history and figure drawing. Local mentors evaluate curriculum and delivery to ensure culturally appropriate adaptation. Assessment teams of 3-4



faculty and administrators are sent 2-3 times a year to maintain program quality and continuity and to offer problem-solving/trouble shooting opportunities.

After 3-4 years of education at the Doha campus, earned credits will be transferred to VCU on paper. Students will earn their final 30 credits and receive a VCU diploma. Graduates of SCODA will be encouraged to take their place in a growing economy and to establish their own businesses with the financial support of the Qatari royal family.

The benefits of this partnership between SCODA and VCU are significant. Significant amounts of non-state funds allow for projects, equipment, scholarships and activities to be undertaken by the School of the Arts. VCU has the opportunity to develop a world class distance education program and to expand its international enrollment. Faculty have a tremendous opportunity to teach for one or more years in a foreign country with a relatively familiar curriculum. This provides not only financial reward but also international experience and rich ground for research on virtually unlimited areas regarding women, fashion in a foreign culture, and the intersection of the Middle East and the West.

Teaching in a Bi-cultural Country-Sue Thomas and Ross Hemera, Ngai Tahu

New Zealand is in the South Pacific; in fact they are the two largest islands on the Pacific. Historically New Zealand or Aotearoa (the land of the long white cloud) was first settled by Maori, its indigenous people, between 800-100 AD. Between 1400-1600 AD larger migrations of Maori came from Eastern Polynesia. Iwi or tribes can attribute their ancestors and family history (whakapapa) to the specific waka (large ocean-going canoe). European visitors are documented from 1642 with Abel Tasman, and 127 years later Captain James Cook visited on the Endeavour. Settlement, principally European, proceeded over the following years. In 1840 the Treaty of Waitangi was written in English, then translated by two Englishmen into Maori; thus there are two versions of the Maori, read and interpreted differently. Representatives of Queen Victoria and initially some of the northern chiefs (rangatira) signed it in February. By September of the same year a further 500 rangatira (but not all) had put their mark on the treaty.

According to the Treaty, New Zealand is a country of two cultures, both of which are mutually respected. As a government-funded university, Massey honours the Treaty in their charter and thus does the College of Design, Fine Arts and Music and this department of Fashion Design. In our student Bachelor of Design (Fashion) handbook the graduate profile states a graduate should be able to "Recognise the diversity of beliefs, values and lifestyles in New Zealand and practice effectively adopting strategies which will allow the maintenance of cultural integrity." To achieve this, one of the second year Design course Learning Outcomes is that the student will be able to "Demonstrate an understanding of Maori culture, art and design and the customary and contemporary use of Maori design in apparel."



I convene and teach this course with my colleague Ross Hemera, Ngai Tahu (iwi), a practising artist/designer and head of Department of Contemporary Maori Design in our College. Practically it is a six-week project on a course, which lasts two semesters; the second project of the first semester. Ross Hemera gives two lectures in situ in the Maori Collection of Art and Design at Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand (in Wellington). He discusses Maori culture and explains the significance and protocols of utilising Maori design as reference. I give four supporting lectures on the fashion industry and also methods of visual presentation. The students have six three-hour studio sessions and are expected to make up an equivalent amount of time working on their own.

The Project: The students are required to record visually Maori artifacts that interest them, to identify and research their origin, significance and meaning, which includes the artist if known and their iwi. They select aspects from their drawn images which interest them and develop and apply them to apparel. This is for a theoretical market, for example a range of garments to be promoted as New Zealand design in Liberty of London's "Young Designer" department.

My role is to support my colleague, oversee the students' use of Maori images, and insure their understanding of the significance of using a culture's images, symbols, or artefacts (not necessarily their own). Fashion design does not have a blemish free history when working with cultural images. Drawing the artefacts, however, effectively instills a genuine appreciation of and respect for the craft and skill required in making the pieces. Students start on work or study sheets recording colour, texture, shape, form, the artist, iwi and significance, history of the objects. Progressing, they develop their ideas and impressions in a workbook. They draw, paste in information, review contemporary fashion, and apply their selected developed shapes to apparel. This is utilised as a method of evolving silhouettes, style lines and details. I encourage them to source strong ideas, discover appropriate fabrics, select a colour way, develop their drawing skills, and innovate in design. They are challenged to look broadly for inspiration and reference, then develop, innovate, and make the ideas their own.

The students are required to present their ideas as 20 design sketches (complete outfits, front and back views, in colour, with fabrication) six figures (three outfits per A3 page-landscape format).

In this project the students know the culture is Maori and treasured. But in future projects or employment it could be Masai, the Fraiser Clan, or Inuit. We educate the students to recognise, acknowledge, understand, and most importantly respect the origins of other work.