Using ITAA Meta-Goals for Assessment of Student Preparation

Mariana A. Mitova, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA
Barbara Frazier, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA

Keywords: Competencies, Assessment, Meta-goals

The need for high quality education and research that trains students to acquire problem solving skills throughout the global supply chain are of critical importance in the apparel and textile (A&T) academic field (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2012). Due to its complexity and dynamics, the A&T industry has its own unique needs for competent workforce. Despite the ongoing efforts of higher education programs to prepare competent graduates employers often raise concerns about the level of their readiness to meet career challenges (Hart, *et al.,* 1999). The International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) offers a set of educational goals ("meta-goals") to guide curricular development and assessment in A&T programs at four-year U.S. universities. The meta-goals include general statements outlining desired content knowledge and professional skills for graduates of A&T programs and are designed to encompass the broad and rich knowledge base represented by the A&T discipline. Previous studies have examined the importance placed on ITAA meta-goals by industry professionals (Frazier & Cheek, 2016). However, there are no studies that suggest how A&T programs can use the ITAA meta-goals for assessment of student preparation to fulfill these meta-goals, and to aid in curriculum improvement. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of preparation that graduates of an A&T undergraduate program using the ITAA meta-goals as a framework. The selected program uses the present ITAA meta-goals for curriculum development, review, and assessment. In addition, the study aimed to examine the importance placed on the ITAA meta-goals by graduates. The study sample consisted of graduates of an A&T program at a four-year, public research institution. Participants completed an online survey via Qualtrics, which consisted of 43 items (α= .975) measuring perceived preparation and importance of the ITAA meta-goals and competencies. Of the 123 participants, 22.0% were buyers, 19.5% were retail managers, 5.7% were product developers/designers, 8.1% had marketing related careers, 22% had other careers within the A&T industry, and 22.7% were in careers outside of the A&T industry. The majority of the participants indicated that they work for retailers (61.0%), 13.1% in manufacturing or wholesaling, and 26.0% in other A&T-related companies (entrepreneurs, freelancers, or in positions outside of the A&T industry).

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what degree do graduates perceive their preparation in achieving the ITAA meta-goals and competencies?

2. Which ITAA meta-goals and competencies are important to graduates of apparel and textile programs for career satisfaction?

An existing scale was modified to measure meta-goal preparation and importance. Participants were asked to rate the level of importance on each of the 43 competency statements using a five-point scale, (1= not at all important; 5 =absolutely essential). Participants were also

asked to rate the degree to which they felt prepared to fulfill these competencies (1= not prepared; 5 = fully prepared).

Respondents ranked Professional Development meta-goal (*M*=4.48), Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Sustainability meta-goal (*M*=4.16), and Critical and Creative Thinking meta-goal (*M*=3.97) as most important, followed by Industry Processes (*M*=3.59), Aesthetics and Design Process (*M*=3.11), Global Interdependence (*M*=2.69), and Appearance and Human Behavior (*M*=2.66). Respondents perceived their preparation in Professional Development to be the highest (*M*=3.81), followed by Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Sustainability preparation (*M*=3.54), and Critical and Creative Thinking preparation (*M*=3.40). The remaining meta-goals' perceived preparation ratings were: Industry Processes (*M*=3.17), Appearance and Human Behavior (*M*=3.06), Aesthetics and Design Process (*M*=3.03), and Global Interdependence (M=2.63). Findings suggested that participants felt most prepared to fulfill the meta-goals of Professional Development; Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Sustainability; and Critical and Creative Thinking. Participants also rated these three meta-goals as most important in their careers.

Previous research found that soft skills, included in the Professional Development meta-goal, are of highest importance to industry professionals (Frazier & Cheek, 2016). Teamwork, leadership, and verbal communication competencies are not usually included in specific courses in the A&T programs; however, usual curriculum includes elements of these as learning outcomes from group projects, service-learning pedagogy, and courses such as design, visual merchandising, and forecasting. Additional skills are extensively gained through requirements for field experiences, internships, and experiential learning beyond the classroom. This study confirmed previous research findings as 91.9% of participants perceived verbal communication as absolutely essential or very important. Participants also rated leadership (88.6%) and teamwork (88.6%) as absolutely essential or very important.

The results from this study could have a significant impact on A&T programs in structuring specific curriculum to shape students into well-rounded leaders, team players, and problem-solvers. Using the ITAA meta-goals is an effective way to assess perceived student preparation upon completion of their selected undergraduate program. Further examination of the use of meta-goals for preparation evaluation is suggested.

Frazier, B., & Cheek, W. (2016). An industry view of competencies for entry-level merchandising jobs: Application of the ITAA meta-goals. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 34*(2), 1-15.

Ha-Brookshire, J. E., & Hawley, J. M. (2012). Envisioning the clothing and textile-related discipline for the 21st century; its scientific nature and domain from the global supply chain perspective. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 31(1),* 17-31.

Hart, C., Harrington, A., Arnold, J., & Loan-Clarke, J. (1999). Retailer and student perceptions of competence development. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 27*(9), 362-373.