Integrating Textile Design in Apparel Construction through a Joint-Class Project

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Textile and textile design choices are integral to the apparel design process. Faculty observed that students struggled with integrating fabric choice into the primary stages of design development and research. In Flat Pattern, students complete fully developed designs, from initial research to finished garment. In an effort to address this challenge, faculty worked to create a cross-course project in which students created a garment that highlighted the interrelated nature of textile and apparel design. Specifically, students in a 100-level textiles course created digital prints to be used by a 200-level flat pattern course as the starting point for the design process.

In the project Flat Pattern (apparel) students "outsourced" the fabric selection and textile design to textiles students. The apparel students then were challenged to pattern a garment based on the textile properties and visual appeal of the printed fabric selected. All communication between courses was limited to written instructions, accompanying design work, to stress the importance of written and visual communication of design ideas. This also served to mimic sourcing to an outside textile agency in which the communication may be limited. The project also had a competition element, with the "winning" garment being included in the (normally) Junior-Senior fashion show in the Division's annual Day of Design.

In order to complete the project both the apparel and textiles courses were required to investigate the use of engineered prints in garment construction. Each of four sections of a textiles lab was provided digital scans of one of the four basic pattern pieces and was instructed to create an engineered print of their choice on the piece using Adobe Photoshop. The apparel students were then randomly assigned one of the four pattern pieces, they were sent the designs via Dropbox, and selected a print on the assigned piece to use in their garment.

The apparel students reviewed approximately ten designs each, selected their top three prints, and wrote design critiques of these choices in the context of the apparel design process. Then students were given the printed fabric of their selected pattern piece and extra yardage of the same fabric. Each designed, patterned, and created ½-scale representations of their design. They also included detailed instructions for the patterning and construction of their garment. The apparel students then critiqued the ½-scale garments, taking into consideration the success of the design, patterning, print, and runway appeal. Based on these characteristics, the class selected the design deemed the most successful to be created full-scale using mass production, or piece-work, techniques (i.e., each apparel student being responsible for a step in the construction process) to again stress the importance of clear written and visual patterning instructions.

A number of design constraints were included in the design process in order to highlight the importance of textile choice in apparel design. The apparel students could not alter the pattern piece containing their print in any way meaning they not only had to incorporate the print, but the implications of the print into their design. All of the selected engineered prints were printed on a medium- to heavy-weight duck to accommodate the printer being used therefore, students were required to use the fabric provided to design the majority of the dress; students could add additional fabric and embellishments to the garment provided it was not on the printed fabric and the purpose was purely aesthetic.
Overall the project was very successful and had positive results. Since the textile selection was "outsourced" to the textiles course, the apparel students had to make their decisions based on the integrity of the engineered print and its potential use. The apparel students initially had strong opinions and bias towards the prints that were chosen; when the fabric was delivered to the class predictions were made as to which design would be the "winner" based on the print. However, the project forced the apparel students to consider fabric construction and print as a starting point for design development and this challenged the students to practice disengaging from personal "I don't like it" critiques. Some students chose to honor the print and fabric they were given in the design process, whereas others decided to keep the fabric as a secondary focus to their envisioned pattern. Upon completion of the ½scale garments, the students ultimately selected the print they originally found the least appealing. The students were then able to ascertain that the reason for this change was the successful integration of the required fabric and print into the overall garment aesthetic, precise pattern and construction techniques, and overall appeal that went "beyond ready-to-wear".

The apparel students were able to consider the importance of textile choices in the design process and the textiles students were able to see their work fully realized onto a garment. In the future, refinements will be made to the project to address challenges faced by the textiles students in the design process. Textile students struggled with altering pre-existing images; a number of them merely used images found in other sources without fully exploring the design opportunities offered by engineered prints. Furthermore, the choice of an engineered, rather than an overall print, was selected due to the constraints of the printer being used. In the future, textile students will be required to research and create an original print in Photoshop which will be further altered in Kaledo Print to be created using a printer allowing for a wider variety of fabric options. It is also expected that as future Flat Pattern students will have completed this project from the textile design perspective, they will be better able to incorporate these choices into their apparel design process.