



## Job Expectations, Job Preference, and Learning Expectations of Apparel Merchandising and Design College Students

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The majority of current college students represent Gen Y (born between 1977 and 1992). The current workplace population includes 42% of Gen Yers, 31% of baby boomers, and 27% of Gen Xers; Gen Yers will make up 75% of the American workforce by 2025 (Treuren & Anderson, 2010). As they are just starting to impact the workplace, it is critical to understand the characteristics of Gen Y that might influence workplace environment. According to empirical studies, Gen Yers approach work and communication differently from their predecessors as they have grown up with the internet, globalization, mobile phones, and various social media, such as Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Altes, 2009; Treuren & Anderson, 2010). As a result, the reflection of Gen Yers' characteristics (collaborative, skilled in technologies, frank in communications, and dependent on themselves) have been displayed in their workplaces; for example, they are active in their work and view enjoyment as an important part of their work (Josiam et al., 2009).

Most studies on job expectations and preferences in jobs have been conducted with other generations (e.g., Liu, Thomas, & Zhang, 2010) or business majors (e.g., Ng & Burke, 2006). Moreover, previous studies related to job competency or expectations have been conducted from the industry perspective (Ricci, 2010) or educators' perspectives (Jaeger, 2003), not from college students' perspectives. Thus, this study aims to explore apparel merchandising and design students' job expectations in general, preferences for jobs related to the fashion industry, and their expectations of acquiring knowledge and skills from apparel merchandising and design programs to pursue their careers in the constantly changing fast-paced fashion industry.

Data were collected from American college students majoring in apparel merchandising and design in two Midwestern universities. Using an online survey technique, a total of 1,353 students were invited and 276 responses were collected (response rate = 20.4%), of which 205 were deemed usable for data analysis. The mean age was 20.4 years; the majority were female (95.1%) and Caucasian/White (77.1%). About 65% of them were merchandising major students, while 30% were design majors. The participants were freshmen (29.2%), sophomores (16.8%), juniors (26.2%), and seniors (27.8%). The instrument consisted of three parts; items were adapted from previous studies or self-developed to measure job expectations (Tomkiewicz, Frankel, Sagan, & Wang, 2011), job preferences (Ng & Burke, 2006), and learning expectations by major (Lee, 2002) on 5-point Likert scales (1 not important/strongly disagree, 5 very important/strongly agree).

A series of descriptive analyses by focused major (merchandising or design) were performed using SPSS 21.0. The results revealed that the top two job expectations from both merchandising and design major students were job security (merchandising = 4.66, design = 4.56) and a feeling of accomplishment (merchandising = 4.65, design = 4.66). Requiring

supervising others was listed as the lowest expectation for both majors (merchandising = 3.18, design = 2.95). The most preferable jobs among merchandising major students were buyer (m = 4.25), special events manager (m = 4.23), and visual merchandising manager (m = 4.21). Among design major students, creative designer (m = 4.32), fashion director (m = 3.74), and product developer (m = 3.52) were listed as the top jobs. The least preferable job was lab technician (m = 1.99) for merchandising majors and operation manager (m = 1.79) for design majors. Both merchandising and design major students indicated identifying consumer wants and needs (merchandising = 4.73, design = 4.68) as the most important knowledge/skill for merchandisers. However, design major students indicated designing apparel collections for the industry (m = 4.77) while merchandising students highlighted describing the ways in which fabric, texture, and pattern can affect visual appearance (m = 4.55) as the most important knowledge/skills for designers. Students in both majors indicated knowledge and concept of basic garment construction (merchandising = 4.47, design = 4.77) and clothing terminology knowledge (merchandising = 4.69, design = 4.76) as the most important knowledge/skills for both designers and merchandisers. Interestingly, communicating in a foreign language (merchandising = 3.69, design = 3.89) was the least important knowledge/skill for both majors.

The findings from this study shed light on understanding our current students' job expectations and career preferences as well as their associated learning expectations. This study will help educators update curriculums based on our students' needs and provide guidance for students to achieve their goals. Furthermore, this study offers recommendations for fashion job industry recruiters by enhancing their understanding about job seekers' career expectations and decisions.

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