



## **Fashion for a Cause, Collection Development, and Professional Presentation**

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The phenomenon of combining fashion with a health-related cause, also called health fashion, has taken many forms in the last two decades (Walker, 2010). As early as 1997 the American Heart Association began a campaign to raise awareness for heart health among women (Mosca, 2004), and in 2004 the AHA began the Go Red for Women campaign and chose the red dress as a symbol of the movement. The fall Advanced Apparel Design class collaborated with the marketing director of a local heart hospital to define a project that incorporated designing for the cause of raising awareness for heart health, as well as planning and executing professional presentation of the designs. The design phase of the project involved researching, design development, prototype realization and refinement, and final fabric gown construction. The professional presentation phase of the project involved styling and organizing a photo shoot, planning and mounting an exhibit in a gallery for the month of February, and planning and executing a fashion show in a boutique.

Developing the designs involved researching (a) a designer from the haute couture/luxury designer market (b) the health and emotional aspects of heart disease (c) fashion trends, (d) a customer persona, and (e) bustier development and construction techniques. Designer: In order to simulate a real-world process for the evening gown collection, each student choose a company that served as a benchmark, working under the assumption that she could present the collection to the creative director in a job interview. Students were required to research and analyze the chosen designer's last four seasons. Heart disease: The marketing director from the local heart hospital came to class with a nurse specialized in heart disease and a heart disease survivor. The students spent approximately one and a half hour interacting with the guests, gaining information and asking questions. The nurse brought a model heart and gave very specific details about possible heart problems. Having the opportunity to speak to a heart disease survivor provided a unique and meaningful perspective, however a few of the students already knew a heart disease survivor personally. Fashion trends: The students employed Stylesight.com to discern the fashion trends for 2014-15. In addition, they were required to the evening gown department of a luxury retailer and examine in-depth at least five gowns, writing a thorough report of their findings. Customer: The students defined the demographic, psychographic, and lifestyle characteristics of the woman who would wear her gowns. Bustier: Following the techniques defined by Mme. Muriel Ivagnes, a professor at the Paris American Academy who worked for Nina Ricci haute couture for 25 years, the students to draped, constructed, and fit the bustier on a fit model who was chosen by the student from a pool of models the class had auditioned.

The design process involved writing and refining design statements, gathering inspirational images and creating a mood board, sourcing fabrics and sketching idea croquis. There were several

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evaluation/critique sessions of the idea croquis. The first session involved evaluating 8-10 swatched croquis that demonstrated at least two different directions. Strengths were defined and 8-10 more sketches building on those strengths were developed. When the idea generation phase was finished, the five best designs were chosen. The students rendered them in full fashion illustrations with accompanying technical drawings. Each student presented her collection to the class and one gown from each collection was chosen for realization in final fabric. Sample patterns, muslin prototypes, and several fitting sessions were necessary in order to define the ideal interpretation of the sketch. Students kept fit logs and created a final sample pattern that was then cut in the fashion fabric and constructed according to the techniques employed in the luxury industry.

The professional presentation phase of the project involved organizing a photo shoot and an exhibit. The students set up a Facebook group to communicate during the preparation of the photo shoot and a graduate student worked as a stylist. In order to project the University allegiance, the



school mascot joined the models. The photo shoot publicized the event to the campus and the larger community. The College PR department recruited the University Photographer.

The gowns were displayed in an art gallery for the month of February. The heart hospital provided monetary award for the designers and they were welcomed with their families at the art

gallery's first Friday event. In addition, the gowns were modeled in a special evening event at a local luxury women's retail store at the end of the month. The heart hospital also sponsored the printing of posters and a physical brochure with the design statements and photos of the designers.

Student feedback from the experience was very positive. While they found the process of designing with so many variables in mind challenging (heart health awareness, the benchmark designer, the customer, fashion trends, and their own aesthetic), all of the designers agreed that the end result was gratifying and that they had learned from the process. In addition, the exposure to the public and the press instilled a sense of pride. The community partners were also pleased with the results. The heart hospital and the gallery are already discussing plans for next year.

Walker, K. L., Hart, J. L., Gregg, J. L., & LaJoie, A. S. (2010). Undressing "Health Fashion": An Examination of Health-Cause Clothing and Accessories, *Health Promotion Practice*, 11 (5) 665-674.

Mosca, L., Ferris, A, Fabunmi, R., Robertson, R. M. (2004). Tracking Women's Awareness of Heart Disease : An American Heart Association National Study, *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*. Downloaded from the Internet March 22, 2013, <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/109/5/573>.