



Helping Students Take Visual Design to New Heights:

Utilizing Design Concepts to Create Fantasy Fascinators

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Visual Design and Dress is one of the first courses that design and merchandising students take. In addition to serving as an introduction to design, the course is designed to create excitement about the major and to give students a taste of things to come. It also attracts non-majors, allowing it to serve as a recruiting tool. To prompt students to actually utilize the course concepts—the elements and principles of design—the final project always involves the creation of an article of dress (anything that is worn on the body or carried). The final project is also the basis for a design competition among all sections of the course. The title of the 2012 project was “Fantasy Fascinators.” The charge was to create a fascinator of the type worn and popularized by Kate Middleton and based upon a theme of each student’s choice. This project was selected because fascinators could be constructed and decorated without sewing skills, which few entering students possessed. A variety of materials and themes was also possible.

The professor introduced the project on the first day of class and showed examples of fascinators, which were purchased in London. Students could build the fascinator entirely “from scratch” or use an existing, millinery base. Although they could use any theme or form of decoration, students were encouraged to consider recycled items. Other project requirements included creating a title and hang tag for the fascinator and to use Adobe® Photoshop to create a storyboard that showed their inspirations. The course included lectures on finding and using inspirations as well as a workshop on using Photoshop to create storyboards. This introduced students to Photoshop as a fashion tool and to the library’s Instructional Media Center, which is a valuable resource for design and merchandising students.

The textbook was Davis’ *Visual Design in Dress*<sup>1</sup>. The lectures described how to use the elements and principles of design and illustrated how designers use them for garments and accessories. Lectures also included color theory—including color schemes, value keys, and color groups—and Fibonacci numbers. Students were exposed to lots of resources, including books

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, M. L. (1996). *Visual design in dress* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

and websites on historic costume, ethnic design, and millinery. In addition, they were prompted to visit websites, vintage shops, and museums to view headgear of all kinds.

To assist students in applying course concepts, they completed a design checklist developed by the professor. The checklist required students to record how they used each design element (light, space, pattern, etc.); which principles they used and how; which color scheme and type (related or contrasting), which value key, and which color group they used and why; etc. Twice during the semester, students were required to bring in their fascinators for progress checks. Neatness and professional workmanship were stressed throughout. Each student also submitted a notebook with photographs that documented the process.

Students demonstrated considerable creativity in selecting materials and themes. Inspirations included the opera, cupcakes, movies, Native American war bonnets, love, Christmas, burlesque, sports, and the circus. Embellishments included vintage brooches, feathers, silk flowers, sequins, seashells, cupcake wrappers, crocheted trims, and buttons.

Judges were recruited from the university and community and included university professors and administrators, past winners, officers of the student fashion organization, stylists, and retailers. During the judging process, students' names did not appear on the fascinators. Only the hangtag with the fascinator's name, such as "A Night at the Opera" and "Walk Me Down the Aisle," was present. Each of the 18 judges selected his/her six favorite hats, in order. Points from all judges were tallied to select the winners. The prizes were percentage points for the final grade and certificates.

Students reported that they enjoyed the project and the ability to actually apply the design concepts. They also said that they enjoyed having the creative freedom to make the project unique. Many have listed the Visual Design project as their favorite project in the curriculum. In course evaluations, students gave the course an overall rating of 4.7/5.0.

The fascinators will be displayed in the regional history museum in an exhibition designed by students in the Visual Merchandising course. Several other exhibitions are scheduled, as well. The exhibitions will be covered by print and broadcast media.

Because the design competition and project were so successful, they will be repeated with a different topic each time the Visual Design course is offered. They met the goals of allowing students to be creative and to utilize course concepts; of recruiting students; and of garnering publicity for the program.