



Teaching textile design to merchandising students  
Sara Jablon-Roberts, Johnson & Wales University, USA

**Introduction:** It would likely be universally acknowledged that an understanding of textiles is essential for all apparel students. Many fashion-related programs require an introductory textiles course, no matter the career goals of the student. In addition to the introductory course, one program that teaches only merchandising and retailing offers a higher-level textile design course. Configuring this course necessitated meeting learning objectives while considering the needs and abilities of students with no design training. This presentation will explain the development of an appropriate curriculum of textile design for merchandising students and will share strategies intended for student engagement and knowledge acquisition.

**Course context:** At a private mid-sized university in the Northeast, students can earn a Fashion Merchandising and Retailing degree. The program, housed in the College of Business, focuses on “prepar[ing] students for careers in a variety of marketing, managerial, and executive” positions, e.g., merchandise buyer and sales representative. Students do not learn illustration or construction skills, and there is no course on fashion design. The only design course within the major is a 300-level course called Textile Design for the Apparel and Home Industries, a hands-on “introduction to basic textile design techniques used by designers and manufacturers.”

**Curriculum development:** This course needed to be reconstructed in its entirety. It had not been taught in several years and the previous instructor had left the university, taking all teaching materials with her. Moreover, the course had no designated textbook. To gather the appropriate content for a 300-level textile design course, the instructor read four textbooks (Cadigan, 2014; Steed & Stevenson, 2012; Udale, 2014; Yates, 1996) and reviewed the textbook used in the introductory textile course (Johnsons, Cohen, & Sarkar, 2015). In addition, two questions were asked:

1. What do students studying merchandising and retail need to know about textile design?
2. What can students with no design training reasonably be expected to produce in a design course?

Based on the course objectives, consideration of the questions above, and textbook content, a curriculum was developed featuring the following topics:

- An overview of fiber and textile properties
- A history of textiles and the textile industry
- Color
- Surface manipulation techniques
- Pattern design

- The current textile industry, including fiber producers, yarn manufacturers, textile mills, and converters
- Ethical issues in the textile industry
- Differences among apparel and interior textiles

These topics were determined to be necessary for students training to be textile-product buyers and sales representatives to understand the merchandise for which they would be responsible, while also giving them the opportunity to be creative and develop their own textile designs. At the beginning of each lesson, the course objectives that would be addressed that day were identified, to provide students with the context for why each topic was included in the class.

**Course projects:** Students had a variety of hands-on projects, including dyeing swatches of different fibers, designing residential interiors, and evaluating and comparing the properties of fabrics provided by the instructor. Class lectures were accompanied by textile samples that students could swatch for their personal collections, and guest speakers talked about their experiences within the textile industry. The Term Project required students to select an inspiration image, develop a color palette, design three patterns and their repeats, and create a mini-collection of fashion products (i.e., garments and bedding) utilizing the patterns, choosing appropriate fibers and methods of color. They also had to identify the target market that would be most attracted to their collection. With no illustration training, some students were concerned about the design segment of the project, but grading was not contingent on the artistic merit of the patterns. Instead, students were measured on completing the project as assigned and students who developed beautifully rendered designs in Photoshop or via their own watercolor paints received the same evaluation as those who used Powerpoint or even crayons. For some, this was the only course they have taken that obliged them to use their imagination in this way.

The Term Project was developed to assess student understanding of and facility with textile design, but the Final Exam assessed the application of general textile knowledge. Each student was given a swatch and had to identify fiber, method of fabrication, method of color, textile properties (e.g., hand, luster, degree of elasticity), potential end uses, and lastly, the name of the textile itself. Together, these two summative assessments measured student learning of the course content that they are most likely to need in their merchandising or retailing careers. Unfortunately, according to student feedback, one shortcoming of the course design was that students did not always understand why the projects had been constructed as they were. For future classes, the instructor will work to explain the purpose of projects more completely.

**Conclusions and implications:** This course is unlike any other in the Fashion Merchandising and Retailing program. As one student noted, “It’s the most hands-on course in the entire fashion program and it’s the most creative. I realize that this is a business degree but it helps to have classes like this one.” Another student commented, “What I liked about the class is that it is very different from the other fashion courses. This class focuses on design and not the business side. For a student wanting to stay on

the business side, it was very interesting learning the design side for a change.” With observations like these, it appears the course curriculum was successfully constructed to teach textile design to merchandising students.

As with any course, the instructor plans to apply continuous improvement methods to Textile Design for the Apparel and Home Industry. However, it is the intention that the strategies discussed here will be of interest to other instructors training non-design students in design content.

**References:**

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