

Adopting Real-world Learning Opportunities in Fashion Design Pedagogy for Undergraduate Students

Chanjuan Chen, Kim Hahn, Kendra Lapolla
Kent State University

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The purpose of the study was to deepen the understanding of student learning through a course project that integrated real-world sustainability challenges in an undergraduate apparel design course. Real-world learning opportunities help students gain hands-on experience to link knowledge to action for sustainability¹. By collaborating with two notable fashion companies in the United States, the project aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical learning gained in the classroom with sustainable challenges the industry is currently facing, such as designing for repairability or pattern efficiency, researching efficient methods of sampling, and sustainably purging obsolete or mutilated samples. Finally, students learned about critical issues in fashion sustainability and enhanced their research abilities to provide solutions for the fashion industry.

Upon receiving IRB approval, students enrolled in an upper level apparel design studio course to participate in the project. The project lasted 7 weeks and 14 students participated. Two designers from two well-known fashion companies in the United States were invited to work with the students and both had previous experience designing for markets related to sustainability. Each designer addressed three sustainable challenges that they encountered from their own companies. The instructor then asked the students to develop a fashion collection designed for one of the companies based on their chosen sustainable challenges. The designers also provided verbal feedback to the students' works at the end of the project.

Once the project was completed, students were asked about their learning experience in a qualitative open-ended survey. Responses from 12 of the 14 students were received and analyzed for learning outcomes and effectiveness of the project. Overall students responded positively to the project and appreciated collaborating with the designers. Many commented this was a new experience to design for an existing brand and felt this pushed them to think outside the box. One student said, "Instead of choosing our own aesthetic and brands, we need to design for a specific brand which is essentially what our jobs will be." The designers' feedback also helped students reflect on the design process. One student commented, "The feedback was helpful. I think it gives us an idea how the industry actually works." A few negative responses addressed personal creativity and felt that this project was limiting. For example, "I felt like we could have created our own brand." In a real-world context, one may not always get to work for their ideal brand. This helps prepare students for possible future design challenges that may lie ahead.

The project provided students with the opportunity to apply research and design methods learned in the classroom to real-world sustainable challenges the industry is facing. The research project contributes to undergraduate sustainability education and help create more effective projects for undergraduate students wanting to create a sustainable future.

¹ Brundiars, Katja, Arnim Wiek, and Charles L. Redman. "Real-world Learning Opportunities in Sustainability: From Classroom into the Real World." *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 11, no. 4 (2010): 308-24. doi:10.1108/14676371011077540.