

**Title: Learning How to be an Ethical Fashion Consumer**

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Students typically define ethics as “doing the right thing.” However, students less often consider that “doing the right thing” can be interpreted individually, so actually, they need to be empowered to know what “doing the right thing for me, as a consumer” and “doing the right thing at work” mean. Therefore, we faculty have the opportunity to teach both personal ethical consumption along with general ethical issues related to product development, distribution, and selling in the fashion industry. We have developed a learning module that presents the concept of ethical consumption and leads students through a process of identifying their personal ethical values while also identifying specific decision-making points related to fashion consumption. Ultimately, students identify how to implement their own ethical values within their consumer decision-making activities. By first understanding their own personal ethical consumption perspectives, fashion students will gain deep insight into the decisions reflected in their customers’ viewpoints – which positions them for enhanced career success.

Presented here is an outline of this teaching module:

1. Students are asked to define “ethics” and “ethical consumption.”
2. Students are asked to consider their personal values, with prompts to reflect upon:

...honesty

...environmental well-being

...human safety

...education

...human rights, etc.

3. Students are presented with economic concepts, such a *consumer sovereignty* and *supply & demand*, to understand the power that consumers have in markets.
4. The importance of *full information* is emphasized, noting that without knowledge, consumers (and fashion professionals) *may think* that they are implementing their values but they *may actually* be using “bad data” resulting in unintended consequences.
5. Examples are presented that demonstrate situations where consumers insert their ethical values into procurement decisions. For instance, consumers may select reusable shopping bags rather than single-use bags at each shopping trip; and/or consumers may exclusively select clothing labeled organic. Discussion ensues, with students offering additional examples while also reflecting how various levels of knowledge affect the intended outcome of consumption decisions.
6. Examples specific to industry decisions, in categories including design & development, advertising & promotion, and selling, are presented to support reflective discussion.
7. Corporate promotional activities and brand identities that leverage ethical consumerism are presented. The instructor transitions the learning module to introduce the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Policies and activities linked to specific

companies, such as Patagonia and Sephora, are presented for example and discussion. Similarly, current news examples of industry issues related to CSR topics (e.g. trade policies, labor practices, distribution policies) are presented and discussed.

Students complete a course-long group project where they develop a prototype for a vertically integrated fashion brand, presenting the vision, mission, core values, and code of ethics. Using the information presented in the learning module and drawing from their experiences with the group project, students are empowered to consider the ethical environment of current and potential workplaces in efforts to be positioned for positive career opportunities that reflect their personal values.