



## Designing a University Tartan: A Case Study

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Introduction. Although tartan fabrics originated in Scotland and is associated with Scottish culture and identity (Loranger & Sanders, 2020), use of the tartan pattern has spread throughout the world. In the United States, tartan apparel has found mainstream popularity. Worn by musicians and performers, tartan apparel has a long history in western music- rock and roll, pop, and punk rock (Percival, 2010). Tartan apparel can also be found in contemporary TV and films such as *Outlander*, *Braveheart*, and *Highlander* (Barks, 2018). Tartan has been an inspiration for fashion designers from Vivienne Westwood to Alexander McQueen (Pogoda, 2015). Burberry, known for its iconic trench coat, has built its brand around the tartan (Iezzi, 2010). Universities in the United States are designing their own tartans and incorporating the design into university branded products, which offers opportunities for faculty students, staff, and alumni to express their school pride and affiliation. Although many United States universities have created tartan designs, to date, no one has documented the process. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to document and examine the process of developing a university tartan design.

Background. A tartan is defined as a “design which is capable of being woven consisting of two or more alternating coloured stripes which combine vertically and horizontally to form a repeated chequered pattern” (Scottish Register of Tartans Act, 2008, p. 1). The vertical and horizontal bands of colored yarn that make up the striped and checked pattern are called the warp and weft (Brown, 2010). Thread counts are used to create the different widths of the colors in the tartan pattern (Brown, 2010). The repeat of the tartan pattern warp and weft is referred to as the *sett* of the tartan (Scottish Tartans Authority, n.d.).

The tartan is a symbol that is historically rooted in the culture and identity of Scotland where it originated as everyday wear in the Scottish highlands (Brown, 2010; Nicholson, 2005). In the mid-1700s tartan apparel became associated with the Jacobites, who were viewed as outlaws and rebels (National Records of Scotland, 2020). As a result, the British government passed an act banning the use of highland dress (i.e., tartan apparel) in Scotland; during this time tartan apparel became popular in the lowlands, often worn as a political statement (Brown, 2010; Nicholson, 2005). Tartan apparel also became the uniform of the highland military regiments, which helped in re-fashioning the image, identity and symbolism of the tartan pattern. The ban on highland dress was lifted in 1783 and tartan apparel began to enter mainstream fashion (Brown, 2010; Nicholson, 2005).

The process of classifying the tartans of Scotland began around the late 1700s to early 1800s (Brown, 2010; Nicholson, 2005). The original goal was to systematically classify/link tartans sets to a particular family/clan (Brown, 2010). In 2008, The Scottish Parliament passed

The Scottish Register of Tartans Act, which established guidelines for registering and documenting tartans. The Scottish Register of Tartans is administered and managed by the National Records of Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2020). Today, tartans can be registered under nine different categories: Clan/family, individual/family name, district (e.g., town, county, country), corporate (e.g., company or organization), commemorative, military, royal, fashion, or other (National Records of Scotland, 2020). To register a tartan, the design must be new/unique, there must be a clear link between the person registering the tartan and the tartan's name, and the design must meet the definition of a tartan (Scottish Register of Tartans Act, 2008).

Methods. The process of developing the university tartan design was multi-step (see figure 1.). The *first step* was to collect information related to the process of developing a university tartan. Individuals from other universities who had developed a collegiate tartan were contacted and were asked to share their experiences and knowledge related to developing a university tartan. In addition, the owner of an online retail company specializing in collegiate tartan products was contacted; he shared his experiences and knowledge for developing university tartans.

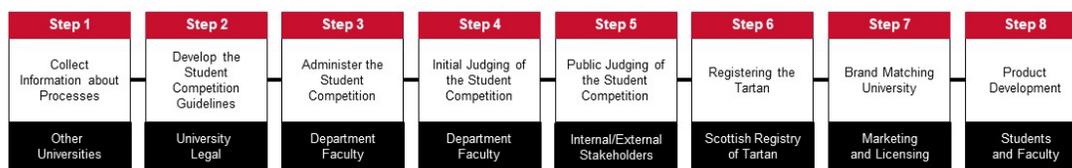


Figure 1. Steps to developing a tartan product line for a university.

The *second step* involved meeting with a member of the university legal team to create guidelines for a student design competition. Once the specifics of the design competition were outlined, a contest was rolled out to students in the XXX program at the university. The *third step* was to administer the call for university inspired tartan designs asked students to create a design that incorporated the primary university branded colors. Design entries were required to be one page in length and include an image of the design and a 200 word statement about the student's inspiration. Entries were narrowed down to the top two designs through a preliminary judging process during the *fourth step*. Judges included members from the Department of XXX and other members of the university community. In the *fifth step*, the top two designs were presented for two weeks to the university community- faculty, staff, students, and alumni- for online voting. 4,850 votes were received; 47% of the votes were from alumni, 20 percent from current students, 21 percent from faculty, and 12 percent from future students and others. The winning tartan was designed by a senior who was inspired by the network of art and architecture around the university. She felt that the tartan design evoked feelings of home, family, and knowledge. The university's tartan was registered with the Scottish Registry of Tartan in Edinburgh, Scotland in fall of 2019. A certificate of registration was received from the Scottish Registry acknowledging that the tartan design was officially registered as belonging to the

university in *step six*. The *seventh step* involved collaboration with the university's marketing and licensing departments to ensure that the tartan met university standards for use on university branded apparel and products. The *eighth step* involved identifying vendors, designing products and securing products to sell in a new retail space managed by the department and opening on campus in fall of 2020.



Figure 2. Iowa State University official Tartan necktie. Photo credit: Ryan Riley.

Significance. This study is significant because it adds to the body of scholarly knowledge related to university designed tartans. The study provides a look at the process involved and outlines the steps taken in developing a university tartan design, which could be beneficial for other universities, educators, and students. American universities are creating their own tartan designs and marketing university branded apparel and other merchandise that incorporates that tartan pattern into the product design. University branded, tartan products are significant because they provide opportunities for university stakeholders such as faculty, staff, students, and alumni to express their school pride and affiliation. For many centuries the tartan fabric has been a symbol of both unique identity and unity (Scottish Tartans Authority, n.d.).

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