



Utilizing a Historic Costume Collection for a Synergistic Educational Experience

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Background and Purpose

University collections are important in educating students and incorporating community partners (e.g. Cross, 2009). Costume collections have specifically been found to be important in fashion programs in teaching, research, and community outreach (Marcketti, Carmen, & Kadoph, 2011). Learning from collections allows for first-hand experience of design details and quality (e.g. Saiki & Adomaitis, 2017). Strategies that incorporate collections include comparing garments today versus collection pieces, analysis of artifacts, building exhibits, and offering work studies (Marcketti). The aim of this teaching activity was to engage students with artifacts in a university historic costume collection to enhance their education and professional development in fashion merchandising and/or apparel design.

Implementation

This teaching strategy was developed in collaboration with a local community group who worked with university faculty on an event that involved raising funds for their scholarship award and bringing awareness to the university collection. The activity culminated in a fashion show featuring historic garments from the university collection rolled down a runway on a dress form, followed by an original apparel design that was inspired by the historic piece and made by a university student. The fashion show was similar to a mid-20th century fashion show with commentary on the style features of each garment. The activity was not part of a formal class and included the following steps completed during a 16-week semester.

1. Faculty selected garments from a university collection that were donated by past members of the collaborating community group.
2. A call-out was distributed to meet with designers, stylists, and volunteers.
3. Faculty outlined the guidelines of the project to student participants - the project included a \$100 budget, four-week timeline, and the students could create whatever they wanted as long as the new garment had similar attributes as the historic garment. At this time, the students also selected the historic garment from the university collection for their design.
4. A week later, the faculty and students met at a local fabric store to purchase the supplies to make the garment, which were paid for by the community partner.
5. Every Saturday for four weeks, students met in the sewing labs to make their garments, and faculty were able to help students when needed.
6. At the same time, a second call-out was made to solicit volunteers to help develop the fashion show.
7. Faculty, student volunteers, and the community partner worked on the script, music, and line-up for the fashion show.

8. The night before the show a rehearsal was held with models and volunteers.
9. Once the fashion show was completed, the audience voted on their favorite garment. The votes were tallied, and the winner received a monetary award.
10. The following semester, the historic and contemporary garments were available for viewing in the collection exhibit space.

The event was collaborative with students taking a primary leadership role in the event. Faculty served as facilitators in the event assisting with the development of the designer work and the fashion show. The students designed and made the garments, wrote the fashion show script, coordinated and emceed fashion show, and made the subsequent exhibit. The community group's board was involved with the program. It consisted of five members, but the president served as the primary contact person with the treasurer managing the funds. They helped with ideas on developing the final show, completed historical research on the donors featured in the fashion show, and assisted with the fashion show script and program.

Description of Effectiveness

Two fashion faculty assisted with the program and 33 students participated in the event. There were over 100 in attendance to the fashion show. Comments about the show from the audience members were positive with many expressing a desire to see the event on a larger scale. When the show ended, the community group expressed an interest in having this collaboration as a yearly event. The faculty thought the show was a significant amount of extra work, but it was rewarding to see the successful end results. Approximately \$1,600 was raised. Students were surveyed to assess how and what they learned. Most students that responded to the survey were freshman (n=6; 30%), sophomores (n= 6; 30%) and female (n=18; 90%). The results indicated that students refined their apparel design skills, examined quality garments, and learned that historical garments are not "bland." In addition, most participants (n=19; 95%) would agree to volunteer for another fashion show in the future. Students really enjoy creating a garment, seeing it come to life, and modelling their own work. They also reported that they learned the tremendous amount of work is involved in preparing for a fashion show, and lastly this experience increased their knowledge about careers in the fashion industry. Students overall felt accomplished and connected to their peers and community.

Plans for Continuation, Revision, or Follow-up

To summarize, the event had positive results and provides an example of how a university costume collection can provide a synergistic opportunity to learn and collaborate for students, faculty, and the community. This event can be repeated and updated given the insights from this experience. The event could be an activity completed by a fashion club or incorporated into an academic course. For example, the show could be planned in a fashion promotions class and a costume history course could include assignments that assist with selecting and researching the historic garments. Implementing the event into a class will enable guided reflection allowing students a better understanding of what makes a fashion show a success. Finally, including the activity within courses or student clubs will help limit the extra time involved in developing and implementing the show.

References

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