

Surviving the Budget Crunch: Increasing Faculty Productivity Without Faculty Burnout

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The enrollment and funding for higher education institutions has been on a gradual decline. In 2018, state funding across the United States for two- and four-year institutions have decreased by \$7 billion dollars (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson et al., 2018). Within the same time frame (2010 to 2017), full-time enrollment of undergraduate students in two- and four-year higher education institutions fell by 9 % for full time students (11.5 million to 10.4 million), and by 4% for part time students, from 6.6 million to 6.4 million students (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson et al., 2018). Decreased enrollment and budget cuts have impacted all Universities, and unfortunately, fashion merchandising and design programs have not been immune. It has been projected that the enrollment of fashion focused programs across the United States has decreased by 7% (Deloitte, 2020).

As a means to tackle budgeting issues, Universities across the country have taken a myriad of approaches. One approach that has drastically impacted apparel focused programs has been the closure of Human Ecology colleges or schools that house these programs. This has led to the reshuffling of fashion merchandising and design programs to new schools or colleges within Universities, and a continuous fight to keep faculty lines. For instance, a handful of Southeastern Universities have dissolved their Humana Ecology Colleges and have moved these programs into Schools or Colleges of Business, Arts, and Human Health. In addition to these changes, many Universities have terminated PhD programs, and have increased faculty workloads (Ha-Brookshire & LaBat, 2015).

Despite these drastic measures there is a push, now more than ever, to get the most out of faculty to make up for additional budget cuts that are down the line. As such, it is no surprise that department heads and faculty are feeling an increased pressure to prove to Deans and Provosts the importance of current faculty lines. Increasing faculty workload has been the long-standing solution to prove the need for and productivity of existing faculty lines. However, this can cause faculty burnout. Along these lines, the aim of this paper is to review interdisciplinary strategies that can be implemented in apparel programs to increase the productivity of faculty without creating faculty burnout. Specifically, this paper focuses on tactics created and implemented by a Fashion Merchandising program at a Southeastern 4-year University, without a Graduate Program, which, has undergone the above-mentioned changes and challenges. In this paper viable and proven strategies that are heavily imbedded in an interdisciplinary approach are presented and will hopefully help other programs facing similar challenges.

At this particular institution there was an increased pressure to raise Faculty Teaching Equivalency (FTE) hours; a measurement of program productivity based on the classroom

faculty to student ratio. There were three overarching factors that made it difficult to increase FTE's: 1) The fashion program was housed with Interior Design, which required small class sizes for accreditation purposes, 2) The University did not adequately recognize or account for this particular challenge in the departments FTE figure, and 3) Although the fashion program's enrollments had been steadily increasing, adding additional courses to increase class size only cannibalized other courses and as such, FTE's. The program needed a quick solution to increase class size. In turn, faculty focused outwards and implemented interdisciplinary strategies to increase enrollments in current courses (Ha-Brookshire & LaBat, 2015).

First, faculty reviewed the current curriculum and identified courses that could be cross listed as a Domestic Diversity course (DD). Like a General Education requirement, all degree seeking students are required to complete a DD course to graduate, by offering a course that was designated as DD it opened up enrollment opportunities to the entire university. A course offered by the Fashion Merchandising program that appeared to align with the Universities' DD designation was *Fashion and Culture*. This particular course examined United States fashion and culture, meeting the Domestic Diversity guidelines of covering cultural diversity within the United States, and the problems faced by members of specific cultural groups and communities. Faculty arranged a course packet and submitted it to the proper channels and received the Domestic Diversity designation in the Fall of 2014. After receiving the DD designation, the enrollment for this course increased by an average of 47%, mainly from non-majors. Overtime the enrollment in this course reached a stagnant point, at which the faculty decided to try an additional approach to increasing the enrollments by offering the course online. In the Spring of 2018, the *Fashion and Culture* course was offered online, and enrollments again increased, on an average of 11% per course offered over three years.

The second interdisciplinary tactic implemented was opening up courses to non-majors, and cross listing courses with other programs to attract attention more students outside of our program. For instance, the University had a growing demand for 3000 level courses without prerequisites for students in the University Studies Degree, wherein students worked with advisors to craft their own degree program. To capitalize on this demand prerequisites for courses that were deemed appropriate without a prerequisite at the 3000 level were eliminated. For example, we cross listed with the Marketing department and cross listed *Introduction to Fashion* as a means to attract business majors into upper-level courses. This effort resulted in an increase of enrollment of 260% over the three semesters. In addition, we made changes to course titles to increase the attractiveness and clarity of the course content to non-majors. As an example, *Introduction to Fashion*, was originally titled *Introduction to Merchandising*.

Looking beyond the scope of attracting existing University students, we looked toward growing our enrollment with potential and incoming students. In talking with current students and incoming students we found that the current title of our program did not align with keywords

students used when students “Googled” for apparel programs. As such, we added the key words, “Fashion” and “Consumer” into the title of our program, and landed on “Fashion Merchandising and Consumer Studies,” as a way to increase our online visibility among high school students and potential majors.

In Ha-Brookshire and LaBat’s 2015 monograph on envisioning the future of our field they nod to the use of an interdisciplinary approach as a way to keep our field moving forward in these changing times. Aligning with their thoughts we found that the culmination of our our interdisciplinary efforts, creating a university-wide course, cross-listing courses, course titles that appealed to an interdisciplinary audience was very fruitful. During this time frame our FTE production increased 13.39% compared to a college average of 0.33%. In short, these strategies were effective, simple, and fast solutions with faculty burnout. This particular apparel program did not have Graduate student component and was also equally research and teaching focused. Looking forward more research should be done to understand if these strategies are applicable to programs similar to and different from the one in this paper.

References

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