



Curriculum to Enable Fashion Students to Gain Real-world Experience Outside the Runway

Dr. Jenifer Roberts, Dr. Cathy Starr, Mrs. Sandra Bailey,
Missouri State University, USA

Key Words: market, imaging, showcase, fashion

Runways, for centuries, have been an important part of the fashion industry. Fashion shows help designers define their market and brand identity in a grand gesture. Not only do runways connect Art and Fashion, they inspire creative individuals to push the envelope when it comes to ornamentation of the body (Duggan, 2015). However, over the past 20 years the fast fashion apparel industry has changed how the runway is perceived by consumers (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Fashion shows have been under scrutiny when it comes to body image as women succumb to the way models look like on the runway. Studies have concluded that social culture influence such as mass media produce social physical anxieties that make women feel the pressures about their appearance (David, Morrison, & Johnson, 2002). Even though these factors continue to exist, it is important as teachers that we acknowledge this issue and look for different ways to influence our students in the classroom when it comes to featuring designer's looks at the end of the year.

For the past 16 years, our fashion program has offered two classes during the spring semester, Fashion Show Production and Senior Collections. The Fashion Show Production students worked during the semester to produce a senior fashion show presented at the end of the spring semester. Fashion Show Production students worked in one of four designated committees: Staging, Public Relations, Garment, and Modeling. Over the last 16 years, the students raised several thousand dollars to produce the spring show by selling tickets and advertisements to sponsors. For the Senior Collections class, the seniors were required to construct a five to seven-piece collection. During the semester, the senior collection students would present their collection to a jury of selection panel for critique. It would be up to the panel of jurors to choose the selected looks for the runway. Much expense, time and effort went into the production of this show. Unfortunately, the element of personal contact with the student and their audience was always missing. The fashion show would last for approximately one and half hours with the guests leaving within 15 minutes. The questions remained for faculty, "How can we do this better?" How can we make this more engaging for the students and the audience?" What can we do to make this experience more beneficial?" and lastly, "What can we do to make this more of a real-world experience for the students?"

The answer is Senior Market and Showcase. Most of our students will be entering the fashion workforce in the capacity of product development, buying, vendor sales and public relations. Starting this spring, our traditional runway will be transformed to senior vendor booths. Taking focus off the runway and diverting it towards quality, construction, marketing, brand imaging and sales. Much of our industry centers on "Markets" (i.e. New York, L.A. MAGIC) designers showing their product and merchandisers selecting and purchasing

merchandise that works for their customers. The Senior Market and Showcase will be a real-world simulation experience. The Fashion Show Production students (FSPs) will become a vendor rep for the Senior Collection Designers (SCD) to help display their collection as well as other designs during the two-hour event. During the 16-week class (FSPs) will be paired-up with a designer to assist in developing the (SCD) logo, put together line-sheets for costing, help find fit-models, coordinate a location photoshoot for the designer's portfolio, and assist in maintaining garment information for market.

For the Senior Collection class, the seniors will construct a three to five-piece collection. The number of pieces has changed since the focus will not be on a runway, but guest's ability to now touch, analyze construction, and quality of the garment. This will raise the level of construction and caliber of student. There will still be a jury of selection; however, the jury will decide the one garment that will be showcased during the runway show. The runway show will take place every 20 minutes during the market and it will not be on a raised stage, but the models will walk on the pathway in front of the market booths. The models will hold a number coinciding with the booth enabling the guests to find the designer. All other collection looks will be showcased at the designer's booth with the designer representing their looks and giving an overview of their collection to each guest. Designers will be able to share their story and vision of their collections, while guests can touch and exam merchandise. The (FSPs) will assist the (SCD) in the booth, which will help the merchandiser learn how to present a line and promote a sale to potential customers.

This Market will not only focus on design students, the Showcase portion of the event will be for the merchandisers. A poster board session will be highlighting all the works of merchandising from the 100-500 level classes. As this event is not a seated event, it is not restricted to 300 guests and allows our department to invite the community, local businesses, local designers, potential employers and prospective students. This event gives both merchandising and design students a chance to experience something of a real-world scenario in a relatively safe environment. Merchandisers will use their skills to assist with marketing, advertising, brand-image and promotion. Designers will develop their designs to meet the expectations of the audience, marketing, brand imaging and promotions. Designers will also bring in other looks or accessories they have created throughout the years.

References

- Duggan, G. (2015). The Greatest Show on Earth: A look at contemporary fashion shows and their relationship to performance art. *Fashion Theory*, 5(3), 243-270, DOI: [10.2752/136270401778960883](https://doi.org/10.2752/136270401778960883)
- Bhardwaj, V., & Fairhurst, A. (2010). Fast fashion: response to changes in the fashion industry. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 20:1, 165-17. DOI: [10.1080/09593960903498300](https://doi.org/10.1080/09593960903498300)

Prabu, G., Morrison, M., & Johnson, F. (2002). Body image, race, and fashion models: Social distance and social identification in third-person effects *Communication Research* 29(3), 270 – 294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650202029003003>

