



Illustrating Learning While Mentoring Teaching

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Introduction

Many universities offer design courses in illustration, fashion sketching or portfolio development, while some programs even establish a portfolio review as a screening to enter the degree area. An essential component of information transfer, designers communicate mood, detail and design aesthetic through their illustrations. Although fashion illustrators rarely find careers exclusive to drawing, illustrative skill is consistently required by fashion industry firms, and commonly used as a measurement for design ability and job readiness. Yang (2010) asserts that fashion industry professionals, when surveyed, viewed illustration skills as strongly needed by fashion design graduates ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .95$ on a 5.0 scale). Additionally, technical drawing skills were equally critical ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .86$). In design programs, students vary in their degree of expertise. Over years of teaching, artistically talented students appear and integrate through fashion design programs. For most students, illustration is a skill that begins with basic drawing skills that are more highly developed and practiced, until renderings become very realistic and representative of the actual design and fabrication. For some students, natural talent plays a part in skill development, and instruction simply includes exposure to new techniques and practices. For others, skill development begins at the most fundamental level of shape and line quality.

Purpose

It was the goal of this teaching based project to identify and develop teaching and mentoring skills in artistically talented students. Learning to share information and expertise in a manner in which other students could learn, ask questions and apply knowledge was paramount to developing strong student leaders and team players. Thus, a project was developed in coordination with the instructional services department (ISD) of a university.

Procedure

Six different junior and senior level students were identified within the program to mentor through teaching their own skill set in illustration. Specific skills utilizing select art media were practiced by the students in their respective strengths. Coaching was given so that

students knew how to present their information through a demonstrative teaching style. It was noted that artistic skills were commonly exercised without conversation, as a focused and individualized experience. Students had to work on developing a “talk-through” method of presentation that was not second nature to most of them. Practice began with the instructor asking questions about what the student was doing as they illustrated and why, until the student self-initiated the same conversation regarding tips and illustrative pointers as they worked.

Practice sessions were conducted in a classroom with a minimal number of students to get the illustrator 1) familiar with presenting to a group, 2) comfortable with filming, and 3) confident in their presentation style. When well-practiced, the ISD set up filming sessions to capture the demonstrations for editing. Six different sessions were captured with four different art media used and eight different fabrications rendered. Illustrators each presented their respective strengths and unique finishing approaches within 45 minute time frames. Editing was completed on each of the pieces to try to reduce the video version to 12 to 15 minutes. Video editing included weeding out unnecessary conversation, redundant applications and speeding up the image with laid over vocal elements.

Results and Conclusions

The project resulted in several highly positive outcomes. Students who were mentored through the teaching process found that they enjoyed teaching and sharing their expertise with underclassmen. They also appreciated learning the “talk-through” feature of demonstration, despite the initial discomfort of unfamiliarity. Underclassmen enjoyed being exposed to both the upperclassmen and their illustrative knowledge and techniques. Many had just begun fashion sketching classes and needed extensive teaching in illustrating fabric applications, drape, and garment to body movement. The program curriculum was enhanced by the investment these students made in mentoring underclassmen in illustrative skills. Finally, the development of a set of illustrative skill videos from soon-to-be school alumnae was invaluable. Videos could be used to 1) revamp an illustration course to become a distance learning course, 2) add rich content to existing courses in illustration or fashion portfolio development, or 3) become a part of a departmental library of resources. Plans for additional tapings are being made so that each year, skilled illustrators are captured on video and added to departmental resources.

References

Yang, E. (2010). *Technical Skill, industry knowledge and experience, and interpersonal skill competencies for fashion design careers: A comparison of perspectives between fashion industry professionals and fashion educators*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, TX.