

## Entrepreneurship education in fashion study programs: The instructor's perspective

Emily M.S. Worrall, Linda S. Niehm, Iowa State University

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**Introduction.** The fashion industry urgently needs innovation and entrepreneurial thinking across all facets of the supply chain as it is responsible for 10 percent of global carbon emissions (Charpail, 2017). Corresponding with the sustainability crisis, small fashion retail businesses face a crisis of their own. Ninety-eight percent of the retail sector is comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which face high failure rates, with a mere 50 percent of SMEs remaining open after five years (Babu, 2023; NRF, 2021). As entrepreneurship curricula advance in higher education, a new era of college-educated apparel employees and entrepreneurs may be better equipped to overcome these challenges. Despite the growing need for entrepreneurial capabilities due to the fashion industry's operational challenges, a gap exists in entrepreneurship curricula for fashion studies students. To successfully innovate and implement entrepreneurship curricula in fashion studies programs, instructors must be prepared and willing to teach entrepreneurship content. The overarching objective of this research was to assess fashion studies instructors' perceived importance of entrepreneurship education (EE) and to determine how EE is incorporated within fashion studies courses and programs. This exploratory study utilized a mixed-method approach guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine this problem.

**Literature.** The fashion industry employs over three billion people and is valued at over three trillion dollars, accounting for two percent of the world's gross domestic product (Vilaça, 2021). The industry employs various positions, including fashion designers, product developers, merchandisers, and retailers. Universities worldwide have developed programs to provide students with the skills to thrive in the highly competitive fashion industry. Pedagogy commonly used to teach students these skills is represented by the concept of "doing and making" (Faerm, 2012). EE has become an important topic among academic researchers and practitioners alike. The increased interest is fueled by students' need for business knowledge, to be prepared for an unforeseeable corporate job climate, and to enhance skills needed to create a business (Duval Courtil & Long, 2014; Faerm, 2015; Hornsby et al., 2018; Lopes-Jr, Ieda, & Figueiredo Milani Filho, 2019). Although the literature has examined unique teaching pedagogies, it calls for instructional changes. One noted change is the need to create program-specific entrepreneurship courses, known as blended programs (Daly, 2001; Doe, 2017; Hornsby et al., 2018; Hynes, 1996; Turner & Gianiodis, 2018; Susanj et al., 2015). The observed disparity in EE for non-business

students is problematic since most practicing entrepreneurs come from varied backgrounds and degree programs (Yi & Duval Couetil, 2021). While the effects of EE, common pedagogy, and motivating factors have been studied, the same cannot be said concerning EE's perceived importance and usefulness for instructors, particularly those teaching entrepreneurship in fashion studies programs. The TPB provides a guiding framework in this research for analyzing institutional academic support, instructor readiness, and perspectives toward including entrepreneurship in their course(s) content. The TPB inadequately accounts for outside factors that may influence fashion studies instructors' employment of EE (Ajzen, 1991). However, to assess perceived university confirmation's impact on fashion instructors' readiness and implementation of entrepreneurship curricula in their courses, the TPB is adapted in this study to account for how institutional support (departmental, college, or university) may impact teaching behavior regarding EE.

**Methods.** This study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data was collected via an online survey to examine university confirmation and the current state of EE in fashion studies programs from the instructors' perspective. In the second phase, interviews were conducted with fashion studies instructors to gain in-depth insight regarding EE and teaching practices. To qualify for participation in the study, respondents were required to be an instructor employed by a fashion studies department who have taught at least one fashion studies course during the last 12 months. In total, 75 educators took part in the survey. After the data was cleaned, 61 responses were deemed complete and usable for statistical analyses. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section one consisted of demographic questions, including the participants' titles, department enrollment numbers, and whether their university has a campus-wide entrepreneurship programming. Section two contained questions regarding the TPB and the Perceived Teacher Confirmation Scale (PTC) (Burns et al., 2017; Ellis, 2000). Ellis introduced the PTC scale in 2000 to study teachers' impact on college students' academic performance. Similarly, universities may impact their instructors' planned behavior as university leaders have a supervisory relationship with instructors, comparable to the dynamic between instructors and college students. The PTC scale was adapted to reflect the relationship between the university and fashion instructors to study this phenomenon. A total of 11 interviews were conducted with instructors in fashion studies programs. The goal of the interviews was to better understand the universities' influence on instructors' engagement with EE in their classes. Participants for the interview portion of the study were recruited from the pool of completed surveys. After completion of the survey, participants were presented with a question asking if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. A series of open-ended questions were developed based on the literature regarding EE, fashion studies pedagogy and instructor impacts.

**Results.** The findings suggest that university confirmation does not moderate the relationship between fashion studies instructors' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions to incorporate EE into their courses. Follow-up interviews were able to provide more insight into this finding. When interviewees were asked about the support they receive from the university, most indicated that they do not receive any support and are unsure if the university is even aware of the EE programming they offer. University confirmation may not have a moderating effect on attitude, behavioral control, and the subjective norm because fashion study instructors do not feel support or awareness of their program from their university. This may further be impacted by department culture. Greater program advocacy, networking, and interdisciplinary collaboration are needed to heighten university awareness of fashion studies entrepreneurship curricula and its importance to student career readiness. The findings also show that most fashion studies instructors intend to include EE in their course(s) and viewed it as being important. While instructors noted the importance, they frequently stressed how there is a void in the developed curriculum to aid in incorporating EE into fashion studies courses. Fashion studies instructors are also frustrated by the lack of guidance on effectively including EE in their teaching. Universities looking to increase non-business instructors' intentions towards including entrepreneurship education in their courses should work with specific departments to find ways to better support the EE initiative. For example, connecting units of instructors with EE leaders to provide them with resources and aid in forming a support group. From this finding, it can be concluded that the role of EE in fashion studies is currently in an emergent phase. This study confirms that EE is currently an emerging topic in the fashion studies program, with most instructors recognizing the importance of its inclusion.

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