

Layering Basic Elements President's Address at ITAA, Vancouver, November 10, 2016

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I have enjoyed my year as President and would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve this organization. Before you elected me president, I was also invited to be a member of the Accreditation Commission by the former Council. Wearing both hats was busy, but served to make the past year one of my favorite in ITAA.

Last summer, I attended my first (hopefully my first of many!), ITAA Culture and Industry Learning Tours. Linda Arthur led us on a textile production tour in Ecuador where we not only saw cottage production in action, but we literally got our hands dirty printing our own fabric. Over a period of several days, I was involved in building color and pattern on a piece of fabric while also watching my high school daughter next to me do the same. I was thinking about ITAA as my fabric design was coming together. That process of layering brought into sharp focus the manner in which we build programs, processes, and curriculum through our involvement, work, and efforts in ITAA.

On our first day at the factory where our trip was headquartered, Anga Miller, the owner of the clothing manufacturer, Wintersun, explained how they layer color when building prints. Sometimes they employ discharge dyeing where they remove the color from dyed fabric and then layer on different elements to create an outcome that looks entirely different, even though the base fabric element remains unchanged.

In the ITAA part of my life, the Accreditation Commission members were also removing elements and layering on content as we were building the Accreditation Standards. Part of this accreditation discussion has involved representing the diversity of departments and programs prevalent in textiles and apparel. As the retail and consumer landscapes have evolved, so have our curricula, which has resulted in a number of boutique programs and non-traditional degree plans. Thus, accreditation standards development has involved many conversations, many document drafts, a good number of web-conferences, and an incredible amount of give and take trying to lay a credible foundation while accommodating a diversity of approaches to merchandising and design education.

In fabric design, we also might use some resist dyeing techniques to protect some areas while adding color to other areas. In our departments, how do we accommodate an industry based on change at its very core, and still maintain a credible accreditation standard? In other words, how do we protect the essence of the programs, while adding industry-relevant elements to give our graduates a career advantage? Further, just as fashion changes the styles and silhouettes and colors we consume, university administrators change the structures of our colleges and departments to align higher order goals. This diversity of programming can be very positive, forcing us to develop synergies that may not have been apparent in the old structures. Or, they can be less positive leading to program dilution and eventual demise. Metaphorically, color may be removed from some areas, and replaced with different colors, creating a totally new aesthetic.

So, just as we dipped the bleached discharge prints into a solution to stop the damaging bleach action before holes developed, we need to curtail the dilution of programs that may be forced into new structures in new administrative configurations.

When the Accreditation Commission sought the best solution to add structure without harming the relevance or synergy of a diversity of programs, we turned to the work of the Curricular Development and Review Committee and the MetaGoals to provide the academic structure in Accreditation. The MetaGoals employ the essential heart of our textile and apparel programs through two major competency categories:

- Content and Process Knowledge
 - Industry processes
 - Appearance and Human Behavior
 - Aesthetics and the Design Process
 - Global interdependence
- Professional Attitudes and Skills
 - Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Sustainability
 - Critical and Creative Thinking
 - Professional Development

The accrediting goal is to ensure the quality of our programs without sacrificing a common body of knowledge to changing academic structures. In addition to **curriculum**, the accreditation structure also seeks to protect classroom

and research space, labs and studios, faculty credentials, and budgets in order to assure a quality product to our students and ultimately to our relevant industries.

I am fortunate to teach at a university in which the external validation of academic programs through accreditation is a high priority. The central administration at the University of North Texas believes that if an accreditation is possible in any area, it must be pursued. In addition to the regional accreditation that most – or all – of us have, the program-centered credentials communicate the specific rather than the general quality of the education outcome. The University of North Texas views program accreditation as an investment in the curriculum. In the administrator survey launched by our ITAA Commission earlier this year, the primary concern expressed by the department and college administrators who responded was about the cost universities will incur through membership in the Commission. This is an element that continues to be given very careful consideration. We do not want cost to be a barrier, but at the same time, the overhead has to be covered so that the accreditation agency can sustain itself. I hope at this conference, we can alleviate some of the financial reluctance by effectively merchandising the benefits of this endeavor.

Beyond the certificate of accreditation, as a former administrator, I am very excited that we will have a central repository for pertinent statistics representative of the member programs. I am sure I am not the only one in the room who has had to try to figure out how our program size compares to others, or where our faculty salaries fall on the national continuum, or if our undergraduate placement rate is really as good as believe it is. Won't it be great when we can get a yearly report with

this kind of information? At UNT, our central administration is also very impressed with rankings. With the accreditation agency, we too can develop credible rankings for the press releases.

Many of our programs continue to justify existence on the college campus. How is that logical in our economy where textile and apparel industries account for so much of the labor force? It is our hope that the strength of accreditation will change upper administration perceptions by ensuring high quality, industry-relevant programs. We need to continue weaving, designing, layering, and patterning new theories, new pedagogy, new programs, and fresh ideas that prepare our students for their career industries. The curricular foundation – the base fabric – must be of high quality, and the layers of color and texture must be relevant to all of our stakeholders.

The infrastructure of ITAA is designed to accomplish this specific goal. Statistically, many of our members are relatively new in your professorial career. I hope you will use the conference to take ideas to your classrooms and to your research streams. I hope that, as I have, you not only find research partners here, but also colleagues and good friends!

The Accreditation Commission has spent many hours trying to craft a standards document that we can pilot next year. Many of you have joined us in the Town Halls where the work on the standards became literally a work session. Many of you may not know that our Commission leader, Gwen O'Neal, has served in this capacity in her retirement. Would you join me in giving all of our commission,

particularly Gwen, a round of applause for the dedicated “after hours” work they have all done to bring us to this point?

As we continue this conference, I encourage you to share your thoughts, perceptions, and reluctances with Commission members, which I believe you have an opportunity to do later in this session. Continue those conversations in the hallways and at the lunches. Talk to your central administrators in your universities. Join us in bringing visibility to some of the best programs on college campuses all over the world!

Thank you!