



Impact through state-wide collaboration, “*Mississippi Cotton: Weaving Futures 2015*”

Juyoung Lee, Mississippi State, Mississippi State University
Gallayanee Yaoyuneyong, The University of Southern Mississippi
Brigitte Burgess, The University of Southern Mississippi
Jan Haynes, Delta State University

Keywords: Collaboration, experiential learning, professional development

“*Mississippi Cotton: Weaving Futures 2015*” was a collaborative project based on a joint partnership of three universities with merchandising programs in Mississippi. The goals of the project were to (1) inspire students to pursue careers in the textile and apparel industry through greater access to resources and (2) create a network among merchandising programs to connect students and faculty with industry through experiential learning (Kolb, 2014). In order to achieve the first goal, faculty members in the partnering universities organized and developed a total of three daylong events on each campus where students from all of the institutions participated and interacted with each other. Each institution’s event reflected the strength of their program, careers of interest to their students, and relationships with industry partners, surrounding community colleges and high schools near their campus. As a result of faculty collaboration through email, video conferences, and face-to-face meetings, the second goal was achieved. This paper reports the collaboration’s impact on student learning and industry relations by pre- and post-test, event surveys and reflection papers by participating students.

“Delta Cotton,” Delta State University (DSU), late September 2015

The daylong event at DSU’s campus included an eco-dyeing and printing demonstration and a workshop featuring a well-known fiber artist. Sustainable dyeing and printing practices through experimentation with traditional and non-traditional dyeing and surface printing techniques were presented. Dyed textiles were then used in an upcycled garment design competition, exhibited and judged at MSU. The event concluded with a bus tour to several sites featuring industry speakers who focused on sustainable farming and production of cotton in the Delta area.

“Cotton Coterie,” The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), mid-October 2015

USM’s daylong event focused on education, understanding industry interactions at differing levels of the supply chain, and various career options. The keynote speaker emphasized the importance of adding value, whether to oneself through education or to products by branding and marketing. Breakout sessions provided a variety of speakers from all levels of the supply chain as well as ancillary partners to industry. Additionally, an upcycle competition was held in which students promoted awareness of sustainability in the fashion industry.

“Mississippi Cotton Merchandising Event,” Mississippi State University (MSU), mid-November, 2015

The focus of MSU’s event was to introduce and explore retail businesses in relation to Mississippi’s economy, including branding, marketing and retailing. A variety of speakers made presentations and participated in roundtable discussions with students. In addition to speakers,

students participated in the exhibition of designs made from the upcycled textiles dyed at DSU. They also had the opportunity to participate in a merchandising plan competition, which focused on development of a business plan related to sustainable products manufactured from cotton.

Outcomes

Table 1 shows examples of event outcomes in relation to student learning and industry relations.

Table 1. Outcomes related to project goals of student learning and industry relations

Location	Student Learning	Industry Relations
DSU (80 students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-/post-test: significant differences between knowledge and understanding regarding eco-dyeing, printing and sustainable procedures and terminology ($p = .03$, $N = 50$) • Reflection papers: increased awareness in cotton-related careers, an understanding of sustainability through natural dyeing/printing, and appreciation of MS history and heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained understanding of agricultural importance in the cotton industry • Gained understanding of research importance in the cotton industry
USM (100 students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event survey: learned from both speakers and upcycling design competition; indicated that seminar topics simulated their learning and understanding of textile and apparel related careers • Reflection papers: increased awareness of career opportunities in MS and readiness for future careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created interest in careers in MS rather than leaving state • Learned how to brand themselves. • Had opportunity to volunteer for regional fashion week • Learned about internship opportunities
MSU (110 students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event survey: showed benefit to their future careers and learning • Reflection papers: increased understanding of sustainability MS, enjoyment of networking with peers and practitioners, and an interest in future career related to sustainable fashion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networked with small business owners • Had opportunity to volunteer for regional fashion week • Learned about internship opportunities

Recommendations for other universities

Planning is very crucial; therefore, it is important for faculty to schedule routine meetings. Students are shy and may need prompting to mingle. We recommend ice-breaker activities that require students to interact across universities. Each event should be discussed with students so they can see the larger picture that will result at the conclusion of the events. Students should be encouraged to attend all events so they can benefit from the additive nature of successive competitions and interactions with industry.

Conclusion

Both faculty and students benefited from this partnership. Students from the three universities provided very positive overall feedback. Additionally, they expressed desire and eagerness for more such educationally engaging experiences and opportunities to network with peers and industry practitioners. Faculty had the chance to get to know one another better, to discuss and exchange ideas regarding curricula, and develop the new relationships through research partnerships for continuing collaboration.

Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT press.