

The Collective: Embedding Sustainability Into the Curriculum via the Development and Testing of a Sustainable Pop-up Store.

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Background: Though the importance of sustainability in the textile and apparel industry is widely acknowledged, there exists a gap between the industry needs and the college curriculum in textile and apparel. Fashion merchandising and apparel design majors are practical and business and entrepreneurship-oriented. However, the traditional classroom/textbook based curriculum does not provide students with opportunities to apply the knowledge they learn in classes in real business situation. While, “on the ground” learning experiences (Cobb, et. al. 2014) are the ideal form of learning for applied fields, barriers (such as different working pace, opposing timelines, priorities, local, proprietary conflicts, consistent funding) make well intentioned industry collaborations difficult to translate into academia. Given these barriers, the researchers view the pop-up as a promising applied retail lab model. Pop-up retailing is an experientially oriented consumer–brand interaction, taking place within a temporary physical location (Storefront, 2018). The pop-up concept is a novel, low-risk, high-impact way retail format adopted by brands seeking to reach consumers in innovative ways, to incubate a new idea, build brand awareness, and to educate consumers.

Purpose: This study involves the development of a Pop-Up concept meshing experiential retail within an online marketplace model. “The Collective” Pop-Up involved a discovery and participatory learning experience (launched twice over two semesters) wherein students were encouraged to apply knowledge and skills they learn from the curriculum in a real world business situation. The exemplary model, reported by Storefront (2018) of Targets “Retail + Learning lab + Meeting Place” pop-up concept was adopted for this pilot, which focused specifically on Sustainable Fashion. A total of 78 undergraduate Fashion Merchandising and Design students at a mid-Atlantic University participated in the pop-up lab. Students of Fashion Sustainability Lecture (a 200 level course) launched a pop-up on campus as part of Fashion Revolution Week and concurrent with University fashion week activities. Students of Lifecycle Approach To Apparel (a 400 level course) launched the pop-up inside the campus bookstore concurrent with parents weekend activities and to celebrate the global launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Each learning module spanned five weeks. Two faculty (experts in sustainable design and retail) worked together in developing and testing the applied retail model.

Teaching Strategy and Implementation: In Summer and Fall 2017, student researchers worked with faculty to develop a sustainable pop-up store concept via a five week learning

module. Specific tasks undertaken by the students included formalizing a business plan, assisting in sourcing, stocking, planning, and organizing retail products, conducting market research and consumer insight, and fieldwork. Students received training from professors on the retail end, including product planning, merchandising, and sales logistics. A sustainable apparel pop-up store consisting of a mobile showroom and online marketplace, "The Collective", derives from the fashion theory of collective selection. Blumer (1969) describes fashion influence as a process of collective selection whereby the formation of taste derives from a group of people responding collectively to the zeitgeist or "spirit of the times." In this way, the pop-up is a mobile sustainability influencer in that it provides a site for educating and opportunities to refine collective tastes, which occur through social interaction among people with similar interests and social experience (Blumer, 1969). Regarding logistics, to source products, the student conducted a survey of nearly 2,500 alumni of the department. A number of brand friends (i.e. connected to alumni) were contacted to showcase sustainable products. Ten vendors agreed participate by offering samples of product. A mobile showroom was fabricated with a series of shelves built off a rolling rack that showcased samples of products. An online marketplace web platform was developed and functioned to educate the consumer on specific sustainability aspects of the product, current events and sustainability initiatives. The online marketplace directly linked the consumer to the brands personal website.

Effectiveness of the Strategy: The purpose of discovery learning is to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations. The PBL charge to students was to implement an applied project that addressed a problem with no knowledge or widely-accepted answers. To assess learning, all students engaged in both personal and group reflection. Spring 2018 students responded via post-module reflections. At the conclusion of the Fall 2018 semester, the students who took part in "The Collective" were asked to complete a survey. 35 out of 38 students completed the survey. Specifically, at least 80% of students indicated they *Strongly Agreed/Somewhat Agreed* they improved their skills/abilities regarding: Working collaboratively with others (87%) Marketing (80%) Sustainability issues (85%) Oral communication (91%) Organizing (85%) Planning (85%) Communicating concepts of sustainability concepts of sustainability to consumers (91%).

Recommendations and Future Plans: "The Collective" Pop-Up provided students with opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the curriculum in a real-world professional environment, highlighting sustainable clothing, offering experiential activities focusing on educating consumers as well as giving students an applied retail lab opportunity. We will continue to launch the pop-up store operated by students with different background, majors, and disciplines, so students will work together to gain experiences that will be useful in their future careers to solve the complex global, national, and regional sustainability problems.

References

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