

Criteria Decision Matrix Applied to Pedagogy: A Pilot Study for Fashion Art Studio

Adriana Gorea, Katya Roelse, University of Delaware, USA

Keywords: Fashion, sustainable, pedagogy, curriculum

Introduction: To achieve success in the global apparel industry, a fashion merchandising professional must be skilled at operating in a multicultural and multifunctional setting. Skills are not separate from knowledge; workplace skills are practiced from a base of academic knowledge (Standish, 2012). Fashion merchandising students are required to complete a single course on basic design and color theory. However, the apparel industry demands additional practical application of basic concepts by the students such as demonstrating a keen eye for craftsmanship, professional quality layout, enhanced visual communication, critical thinking and articulation of the concepts presented. Contemporary learning theories stress five vital factors for effective instruction: relevance, building upon students' prior knowledge, social factors, motivation, and reinforcement. The pedagogical challenge for the educator is to decide how to integrate industry skills and learning factors into assignments and projects that can be easily evaluated and redesigned, leading to a sustainable pedagogy. A criteria-based decision matrix analysis is frequently used by businesses for quality improvement and was applied to this pilot study for updating a basic design theory course for the curriculum of fashion merchandising major.

Purpose: Two different instructors with substantial fashion industry experiences worked together in Spring 2014 to re-design the syllabus of the Fashion Art Studio, a required foundation course for fashion merchandising major. The aim was to eliminate projects and class work that were purely art based and did not have a current fashion merchandising industry application while still fulfilling the same course learning goals. A sustainability approach was also thought out for re-purposing the physical outcome of the assignments and having most of them feed into another project or ending into a portfolio page. The purpose of this paper is to present our common strategies and outcomes from the pilot study and share our findings.

Implementation and Outcomes: After reviewing numerous art and fashion literature and adding our own knowledge about common art skills required by fashion industry as well as general learning characteristics of the millennial student, we made a list of 30 assignments including homework, class activities, bigger and smaller projects and study exercises. After our analysis, we implemented only 18 assignments. The initial selection criteria were that all coursework had to be suited for a studio environment, therefore allowing instructors to work "cooperatively with learners to help them change their understanding" (Ramsden, 2003, p. 110). One issue we had to overcome was that of merchandising students' mindset that they are "not good at art". Dweck (2002) demonstrated that students who believe ability is inborn tend not to work hard or persevere. After brainstorming about what the common characteristics should be for all of the course work, we made a final selection of 14 criteria, each of them belonging to one of the five learning factors. The "relevance" factor was translated into two criteria: applicable to industry and applicable to learning goals. The "student engagement/motivation" factor was split into six criteria: enjoyable activity, reasonable degree of difficulty, reasonable time allowed for

completion, reasonable quantity of supplies needed, easy access to supplies and repurposing/use again criteria. The “building on previous knowledge” factor was translated into two criteria: introduction of new media and developing creativity. The “social benefit” factor was interpreted into two criteria also: group critique with individual feedback and group project/collaboration/class activity. The last factor, “reinforcement”, was split into two criteria: grade weight relative to final course grade and best work displayed on hallway/class wall/Instagram. The analysis of the assignments was done using a multiple criteria-based decision matrix that scored each assignment on each of the 14 characteristics. The scale used for evaluating each assignment characteristic was: 0 = n/a, 1 = low, 2 = moderate, 3 = high. For example, one of the highest scoring assignments, with a score of 25, was the “Makeup Color Schemes”. A color scheme assignment was previously done where students to painted color chips with different color schemes. That assignment scored 18 points on the matrix. Identifying the weak scoring criteria led to the improved assignment that now requires students to not just paint color schemes, but use them creatively on a face template and compose makeup designs. Also, the introduction of a stronger creative component led to a group critique and therefore increased the social benefit of this assignment. Both instructors received great feedback from students that they found this activity enjoyable and applicable to industry. Another high scoring assignment is the “Digital Photo Story”, scoring 28 points. Students are required to drape strips of paper on an artist’s mannequin, creating five different looks. Then they take pictures of all the looks to compose a one-page digital photo story with a written narrative. This assignment serves multiple learning goals and is an updated version of a previous assignment, draping tissue paper on a plastic bottle, which scored only 20 points. Adding elements that maximize the scoring criteria resulted in an updated fashion focused project that students enjoyed and used for their portfolio. Grouping assignments by their lowest scoring criteria brought up the fact that coursework designed to introduce students to fashion illustration has low industry relevance. Creative changes were made to these assignments and are now tested in Spring 2015 semester.

Plans for Continuation: The assignment design tool created in this pilot study is a work in progress that will be developed over several semesters as part of a longitudinal study. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in assignments leads to higher quality pedagogy and ultimately to a better learning outcome. Sorting the matrix by any of the criteria such as “relevance to learning goals” enables the instructors to evaluate the distribution of class assignments for each learning goal and adjust based on student evaluations. Plans also exist for testing this approach to other courses from current fashion merchandising curriculum. The success of this method depends on the willingness of faculty to evaluate and redesign in an ongoing reflective teaching manner.

References:

- Dweck, C.S. (2002). Messages that motivate: How praise molds student’s beliefs, motivation, and performance (in surprising ways). In J. Aronson (Ed.), *Improving academic achievement: Impact of psychological factors on education* (pp. 37-60). Boston: Academic Press.
- Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (2nd edn) Routledge, London.
- Standish, A. (2012). *The false promise of global learning: why education needs boundaries*. New York: Continuum