

Student Learning Outcomes of an Interdisciplinary Fashion Event

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Significance. A knowledge view that consciously applies methodology from more than one discipline to examine a central theme or experience is defined as the interdisciplinary approach in education (Jacobs, 1989). Across the realm of design, an interdisciplinary approach in a curricular or extra-curricular setting – such as planning a fashion show – may benefit college students by providing them with an opportunity to broaden their disciplinary perspectives and facilitate learning how to collaborate effectively with people from other disciplines (Jacobs, 1989). The purposes of a cross-college fashion show held at a Mid-Atlantic university were to: a) provide a platform for developing or emergent professionals to display their career talents, b) provide an opportunity for students to work collaboratively across multiple creative disciplines, c) give students a holistic academic experience, and d) support undergraduate scholarships. Such an interdisciplinary event for students from various majors across a university may stimulate the growth of knowledge and motivate real-life applications. It also may help to overcome any fragmentation of concepts among different majors and encourage creative and divergent thinking (Kim, Ju, & Lee, 2015).

An interdisciplinary approach was used in the production of a fashion show to enhance student learning. Eighty students from multiple creative disciplines such as fashion design, fashion merchandising, design studies, communication studies, graphic design, journalism, theater, and education participated in planning and executing the event. All the students collaborated successfully. The project goals were aligned with the aforementioned benefits of taking an interdisciplinary approach in an educational setting. Students were provided with a platform to display their career talent – such as fashion design students showcasing their garments and graphic design students creating promotional materials – which may have helped them expand knowledge in their own field of study and further validate their future career talent.

There were a limited number of studies that examined the curricular issues related to creative thinking in apparel education (Im, Hokanson, & Johnson, 2015; Karpova, Marcketti, & Barker, 2011). This study aimed to investigate the student learning outcomes of a fashion event where the students were provided an opportunity to combine their creative thinking skills in an interdisciplinary setting.

Methods. In order to assess the student learning outcomes of the fashion event, we created an online survey using the Qualtrics website, and distributed the survey to the students who participated in the fashion show event. There were a total of 14 questions including nine questions that used a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree, and five open-ended questions. An example of the multiple choice questions is “Overall, I learned much from participating in this event.” An example of the open-ended questions is “Has

this event expanded your thinking in relation to the type of setting you want to explore following graduation? If so, please explain how this event expanded your thinking.”

Results. Nineteen students participated in the online survey. The respondents were involved in modeling, event planning, photography, and backstage assistance for designers and models. Overall, the outcome of the fashion show event as a learning experience was reported to be positive; 90% of the respondents believed that their creative thinking skills expanded, 85% rated that they learned much, 85% had a new appreciation for making linkages across disciplines, 80% achieved a better understanding of what the term design meant, 79% perceived that their overall creativity increased, 79% reported that their knowledge of the design process increased, 74% believed that their academic confidence increased, and 69% noted that they gained a new appreciation for connecting divergent elements as a result of planning and executing this project. The standard deviation ranged from .81 to 1.13. In-depth responses were obtained through open-ended questions such as, “What activity/activities did you most enjoy doing for the event?” The responses to the above question included “I really enjoyed working backstage because I got to experience the excitement and fast-paced environment. I also felt like a valuable volunteer when working with the collections,” “I enjoyed attending rehearsal with the finished garments, seeing behind the scenes which is an advantage of being a fashion student, and the photoshoot,” “Working with individuals from different fields and backgrounds,” “The sharing of conversation. Helping the models.”

Discussion and Conclusion. The results of this survey suggested that the event facilitated creative thinking and interdisciplinary communication among students from various majors, as they had to plan and execute the fashion show together. The event also provided a holistic academic experience to students from different knowledge backgrounds. Students may have overcome any fragmentation of knowledge that came from their own area of study. They may have improved their professional readiness where cross-functionality or teamwork often is required. This pedagogical study filled gaps in the literature in that it documented positive learning outcomes of a creative interdisciplinary activity.

References

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