CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO DESIGNING AND DELIVERING A NEW MULTI-COUNTRY PROGRAM IN FASHION ENTERPRISE

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Abstract

This paper reports a case study of designing and delivering a three-year Bachelor of Fashion (Enterprise) Programme designed and developed for multi-country delivery. The programme was simultaneously launched and delivered in two developed and developing countries, Australia and Vietnam. The innovative model and uniqueness of the programme design maintains a singular core top-level vision, purpose, architecture, autonomy and flexibility for students and fosters achievements of global industry-level programme learning outcomes. However, the programme delivers in line with the local requirements of the system, such as the two-semester model in Australia and the three-semester model in Vietnam. The programme articulates adaptation in delivery in the context of local industry practices of developed and developing countries. Australia's industry requirements are marketing and retailing as the segment is consumption orientated. This is in contrast to Vietnam, which has a strong emphasis on production. The programme architecture design facilitates adaptation to the specific requirements of local industry, student aspirations and thought leadership. The methodology of the study is qualitative, case study method. Literature and secondary data reviews were conducted by relating to the various phases of the new programme design.

Introduction

The newly launched, undergraduate fashion business programme is a strategic response to the disrupted disruptive Fashion Industry. The fashion industry is dynamic. Most agree that fashion is change. Indeed, the visionary goal of any marketing programme should be to provide flexibility for the programme to adapt to the inevitable changes that the twenty-first century will bring to this field of study (Rolling and Burnett, 1998). Fashion careers require different skills today, which is why fashion education is more common and important than ever. Interest in fashion careers has grown in recent decades. Many schools that once offered home economics degrees have withdrawn their fashion courses, revamped their curriculum, and rehired faculty with academic degrees that are now in vogue.

However, do students know what fundamental skills are needed to transition from the classroom to the field, or do students recognise good indicators of what a fashion programme offers (Williams, 2018)? Students studying fashion are now active thanks to the availability of information because they can easily acquire current information on their studies and the fashion business. Therefore, further research is needed to determine how to create the subjects and curricula for academic programmes relevant to fashion (Choi, 2017).

In this contemporary degree programme, through the lenses of fashion product management, marketing and retail, the students study the environmental, ethical, corporate and consumer aspects of the fashion and textiles sector. In addition, the students actively learn the dynamics of the sector, such as consumer purchasing trends, and how to create, develop, source, advertise and market fashion products. This degree integrates the most recent developments in technology, e-commerce, sustainability and growing consumer trends, focusing on the emerging markets and innovations of the Asia Pacific area. As a graduate, the students will have the foundational knowledge needed to specialise in fashion enterprise and apply their knowledge as budding entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs across large, medium, or small global fashion firms or pursue further education. Roles in the fashion sector involve product management, distribution, marketing, retail, digital analysis and marketing of fashion trends, specialised markets, and emerging technologies. Additionally, students can start their start-up businesses or enrol in postgraduate courses. This degree can lead to careers as a fashion buyer or range planner, merchandise planner, allocator or product manager, manager of fashion retail and e-commerce, fashion marketer or brand manager, social media manager or digital marketer, manager of fashion sourcing or logistics, fashion trend analyst, or manager of fashion business or sustainability.

The programme has exceeded most of the matrices, student experience surveys, employability, industry partner projects, innovative pedagogy, programme admission preferences by school students, Industry internships and engagement and strong growth in student numbers. The programme also won several awards, including the contemporary Industry practices (2020) and the Student Experience and Engagement Award (2021). The fashion industry's economic, social, and environmental repercussions are diverse, dynamic, and disruptive. That calls for human resources that can adapt to and seize the chances presented by a rapidly changing, global industry. Thus, it expects its managers, leaders, and employees to have emerged, developing professional skills.

Programme Architecture

The contemporary central approach to programme design has been an innovative programme architecture (Figure 1). The architecture provides autonomy and flexibility to the students to pursue their aspirations whilst having the flexibility to select the courses. The core courses contribute to around 60 per cent of the programme. The balance is 40 per cent, where the student can choose programme options, school minors or University electives.
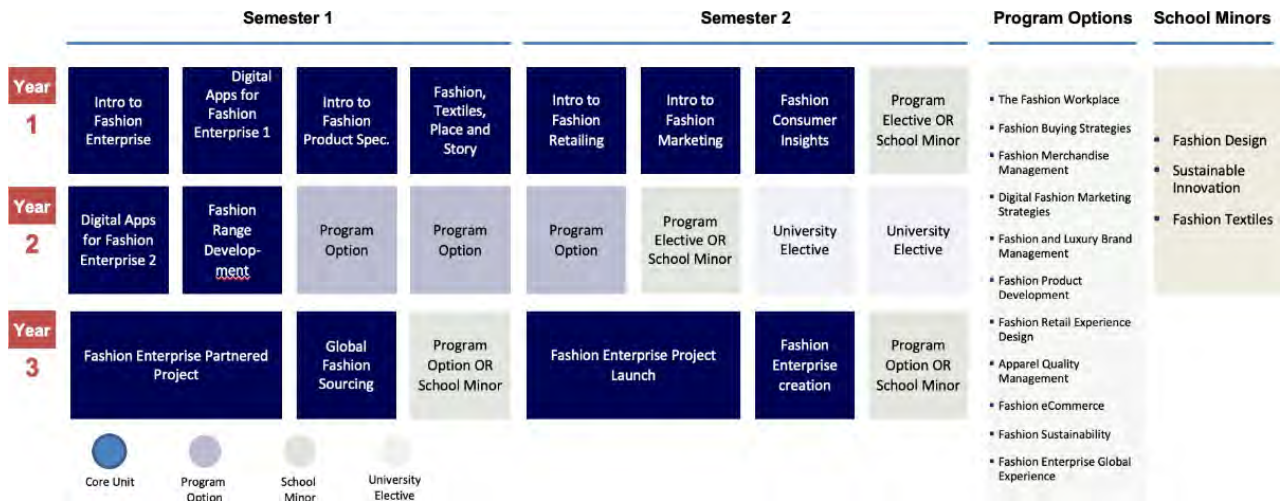
Figure 1.

The programme options are designed in a manner where every course is a career outcome (Figure 2). The programme empowers students to select the career pathway from the three domains: fashion retail, fashion marketing and product management. In addition, this enables the students only to study courses that interest them in building a career within the fashion industry.
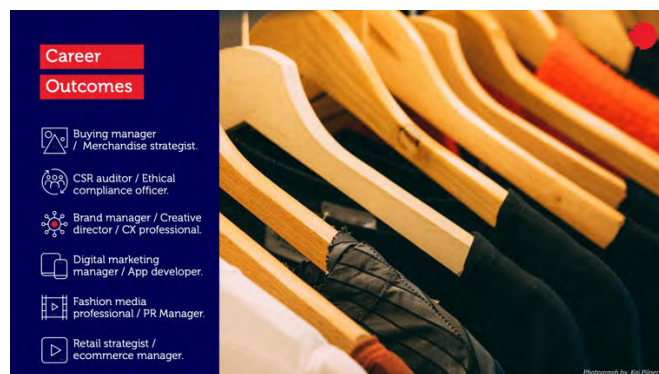

Figure 2. Career outcomes after graduating from Fashion (Enterprise)

In general, the primary goal of any college is to provide students with a platform to develop subject-specific knowledge and skills in their chosen major (Lai and Hui, 2018). The programme learning outcomes articulated the development of creative and commercial skills to practise successfully in a range of roles in the field of fashion enterprise. Most young students will probably desire to include campus learning in their studies shortly (Norton, 2013). One of the critical aspirations of fashion students is to start their enterprise. The possibility of becoming financially independent and the sense of accomplishment were the other factors that encouraged many fashion students to launch their own enterprises (Lang and Liu, 2019). Therefore, integrating the curriculum with various domains in fashion, namely fashion design, enterprise and technology, was critical in the development. Integration of the curriculum enables students to comprehend the relationships between different academic fields and to start building a comprehensive knowledge base (Pedersen and Burns, 2011) which includes:

demonstrating creativity, critical thinking, and innovation to identify and solve problems in diverse contexts within the field of fashion enterprise; taking the initiative and apply judgment in planning, problem-solving and decision-making in their practice or future study. The central setting of learning outcome targets for time-bound students is one strategy for teachers to promote student independence (Marniati and Witcjaksono, 2020). By talking about their experiences with fast fashion and the range of fabrics they are familiar with from living in an urban setting, urban students could be taught. They could also finish exercises that help them understand and comprehend structure and durability (Saiki and Adomaitis, 2017).

The programme architecture allows students from various majors to interact and study various minor specialisation courses in sustainable innovation and fashion design. Students feel supported within their department when they consider how other students with various majors could experience their academic careers and professional growth-field (Jones et al., 2021). The evidence from the body of literature demonstrates that students who proceed through the programme, the ones with a low tolerance for ambiguity, may change majors or not perform up to expectations. Results showed no significant difference among the four grade levels on the total score of intolerance of ambiguity or any of the subscales (Robinson et al., 2019). The feedback system allows the students to share their voices to improvise the programme. Students must understand that they are ultimately in charge of their educational experiences and take the initiative, speak out, and request more responsibility if they are not getting the opportunities and experiences they need (Kozar and Hiller Connell, 2015).

Embedding Sustainability in Business Programme

One of the programme's strengths is the various options provided to the students to study fashion sustainability and best practices in the domain. Recent years have seen much attention given to the circular economy, which is now widely acknowledged as a sustainable alternative to resource-intensive economic models and practices (Elf et al., 2022). The Australian government and industry are aware of the dire environmental repercussions and the advantages of a transition towards a circular economy and product sustainability in the industry, despite the fact that the country's fashion industry is heavily engaged in a linear take/make/waste fashion paradigm (Piller, 2022). Consequently, less emphasis is placed on soft skills in fashion business programmes, despite their direct contribution to sustainability objectives (Rana and Ha-Brookshire, 2019).

While the concept of zero-waste design is new to modern fashion design, the principles of the practice have been in use for centuries worldwide. Many traditional garments, such as the Japanese kimono, Roman chiton and Indian sari, reflect zero-waste design; the fabrics used to make these garments were considered valuable (Yu et al., 2021; Gam and Banning, 2020). When students have the chance to participate in experience-based learning activities that resemble simple industry tasks, it considerably increases their success after graduation since they are better prepared to handle career-specific responsibilities (Jones et al., 2021). The people most likely to be at the forefront of sustainability initiatives are fashion educators. However, there needs to be more resources to integrate sustainability into current model

curricula successfully. Typical teaching methods about sustainable development in fashion curricula are focused on the choice of better raw materials and working conditions, organic materials or fair labour initiatives (Rana and Ha-Brookshire, 2020).

Industry Connections and Partner Projects

Today, fashion careers require different skills, which is why fashion education is more common and important than ever. Interest in fashion careers has grown in recent decades, and many schools that once offered home economics degrees have withdrawn their fashion courses, revamped their curriculum, and re-hired faculty with academic degrees that are now in vogue. However, do students know what fundamental skills are needed to transition from the classroom to the field, or do students recognise good indicators of what a fashion programme offers? (Williams, 2018).

The programme team members have developed solid win-win relationships with the fashion industry, which augurs well for the industry-relevant student experience. Some of the key partners are Hugo Boss, David Jones and Le Specs.

Figure 3.

A study by Conlon (2022) argues that the dualities of the learning architecture clarified how students were integrated into the learning community's industry practice. Here, it is suggested that newcomers are an abundant source of energy and insight for change in a field in transition and that the perspective of individuals on the fringes of practice has to be more effectively tapped through a more porous boundary between academics and industry. It is important that students work in groups and collaborate. By taking the time to tap into the shared experiences of others, students' confidence grew and attention was paid to encouraging lifelong learning (Morley and Jamil, 2021)

It is crucial for students to collaborate with their internship supervisors to create intentional and focussed activities that will help them achieve their goals throughout the internship (Kozar and Hiller Connell, 2015). A general approach to curriculum design in the context of problem-based learning is presented. Ten general 'steps' are proposed for problem-based curriculum development, using case study methodology to describe the underlying iterative process (Wiers et al., 2002).

Additionally, there is an innovative course, a fashion industry partnered project, which provides students with a semester-long opportunity to work on live industry projects in the area of fashion retail, fashion marketing and fashion product development. One of the drivers has been encouraging self-directed learning. Student engagement in the learning process was one of the biggest concerns when changing the fashion and apparel curriculum to include sustainability. Although they have generally accepted the idea, students have taken longer to embrace their responsibilities for self-directed learning fully (Landgren and Pasricha, 2011). The focus is on autonomy, where the student takes responsibility for their learning. When the student does something special for himself, learning improves when it becomes personal. This training method, where students participate in activities rather than teacher-led discussions and demonstrations, allows the student to develop skills at their own pace and reach a higher level of understanding (Dove, 2020).
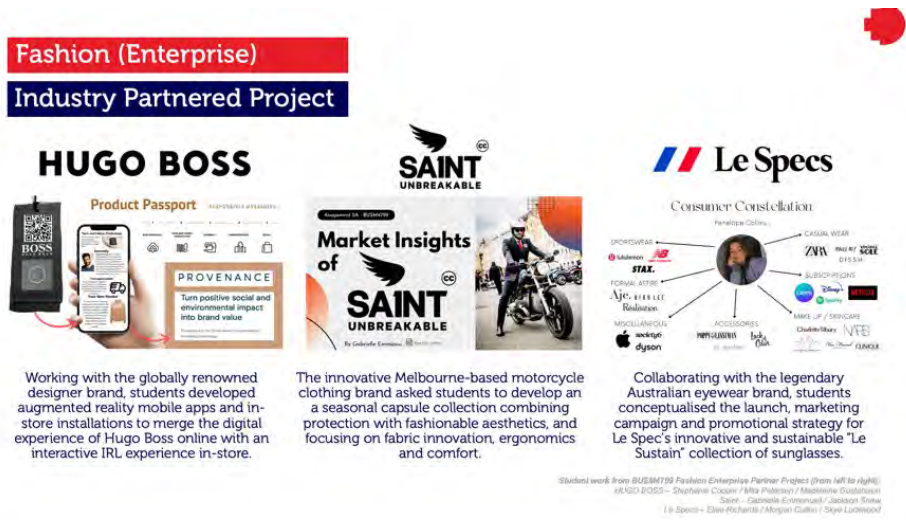

Figure 4.

The intersections of fashion design and entrepreneurship education provide essential opportunities to incorporate business education, while work experience is a means of obtaining business education (Mills, 2012). Fashion business skills training should be done in small groups, as participants can benefit from unique and focussed attention (Nana et al., 2021). With the development and massive use of mobile technology, distribution channels are no longer limited to traditional brick-and-mortar stores. More and more fashion companies are using various online portals to reach their customers (Chow et al., 2017).

Australia's industry requirements are marketing and retailing as the segment is consumption orientated. In contrast to Vietnam, which has a strong emphasis on production.

The programme architecture design facilitates adaptation to the specific requirements of local industry, student aspirations and thought leadership. Cross-cultural research can contribute to evidence assessing the potential marketability of international expansion of slow fashion brands, like a slow trending stream (Jung and Jin, 2016). With the growth of Vietnam's fashion retail market, researching information before purchasing is inevitable, whether the purchase is made in-store or online.

It should be noted that almost all of Danang's fashion retailers have adopted multi-channel sales, with a significant majority of multi-channel retailers currently being chains (Truong, 2021). The acceptance of learning management systems in higher education fluctuates from one country to another country (Zwain, 2019).

Conclusion

Academically researched and strategically co-designed with industry and learning specialists to address the growing demand for entrepreneurially minded professionals blending excellent specialist skills with an understanding of the organisational and global contexts and impacts of their roles, RMIT's *Bachelor of Fashion (Enterprise)* is preparing students to be tomorrow's fashion future. The programme brings industry-engaged pedagogies to its structure and students' learning.

The programme's architecture has resulted in outstanding student experience outcomes: an average satisfaction score of 90 per cent on all 14 courses of the programme; and an mGTS of 4.4, exceeding the school (mGTS-4.38), college (mGTS-4.31) and university (mGTS-4.17) scores. In addition, the excellence in enrolment numbers for the programme, from 80 in 2020 (the first year) to 350 in 2022 (the third year), and growth in first preference by school students (20 per cent) confirms the positive impact of the initiative.

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