

PUTTING TOOLS IN THE HANDS OF STUDENTS: A 1/3 SCALE DRESS FORM TO MAKE AT HOME

AUTHORS

Dr. Anne Porterfield
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA
japorter@ncsu.edu

Professor Janie Woodbridge
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA
jfwodbr@ncsu.edu

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Small-scale dress forms have been used both by fashion designers and in design classrooms as they enable ideation with lower fabric usage as well as increased efficiency and speed. The recent COVID-19 pandemic removed students from the in-person studio and forced instructors to develop novel approaches to facilitate hands-on learning in the online studio classroom. The objective of this qualitative study was to record and analyze the development and incorporation of a portable 1/3 scale dress form to facilitate online learning.

Method

The researchers are co-instructors of a first-year design studio and they used data collection techniques based in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) to address the research objective, including instructor process documentation and both instructor and student reflections. The dress form was developed over a period of four weeks of testing of several approaches and iterations. The finalized dress form, a 1/3 scale model that could be assembled out of paper, was distributed to students (n=32) to assemble at home. Students carried out their final assignment for the semester using their dress forms and were then asked to reflect on the experience.

Results

Form Development

Paper was determined to be the most accessible material to use for the forms, as pieces could be printed on a standard printer and students could cut and assemble them at home using tape or adhesive. Pieces were initially draped on a size ten half scale form. CLO 3D software was then used to refine and scale the pieces. Seam placement was planned through testing to ensure both optimal curvature in the finished product (to resemble a human female) as well as ease of assembly (avoiding pieces that were too small or complex to handle). The final product contained 26 pieces, including internal supports at the waist, and took about 30 minutes to assemble.

Student Experience

Students reported enthusiasm for having a dress form to use at home. Some added innovations such as covering the form with tape for stability or mounting it on a stand for ease of use. They were able to successfully carry out their final assignment using the device to quickly ideate novel art-to-wear garments incorporating off-the-body forms. They were also able to use simple math to scale their garments up to full size, reflecting the accuracy and usability of the device.

Conclusions

As part of their self-reflective process the primary investigators gathered insights on this adaptive strategy in the context of development, implementation, and reflection. While development and implementation were successful as demonstrated in student work, since returning to in-person learning the co-instructors have refrained from using it again. One obvious conclusion they have noted is that dress forms available in the classroom present a superior experience for the students, however, researcher reflections also point to a trauma association with the paper dress form. As it was a response to a crisis, for them, the paper dress form carries the weight of that crisis even in its ephemeral nature.