

Educating for a Socially Responsible Fashion Industry at AMFI, Amsterdam

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1. Level	UG
2. Pre-requisite knowledge required by educators	A. No background knowledge required
3. Pre-requisite knowledge required by students	A. No background knowledge required
4. Number of students	Whole university
5. Length of time required	N/A
6. Type of activity	Course outlines and learning goals
7. Discipline	Business, Cross-curricular, Design, Marketing, Pedagogy
8. Topics covered	All

OBJECTIVES / LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To develop independent learning, self-directed thorough exploration of complex dilemmas involving problem-solving skills as well as teamwork, communication and high cognitive skills.

The Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI) is a unique institute for about 1300 students that offers courses in Fashion & Branding, Fashion & Design, and Fashion & Management. It is the only fashion institute in the Netherlands that prepares students for managerial professions in the whole fashion demand and supply chain. AMFI's objective is to deliver graduates who meet the demands for sustainable development in the fashion industry. This aim came about as an initiative from the above authors who were the original members of the Sustainability Think Tank at AMFI. Together with the support of the Director Liesbeth in 't Hout, who started in late 2005, and the DHO¹, an atmosphere of awareness building and forward thinking was fostered. Globally there has been a clear shift in mentality concerning the environment and the attitudes towards the livelihoods of people working in the global and agricultural economies; it is no longer possible for those in the Western world to close their eyes to the environmental crisis and the plight of farmers and workers throughout the developing world. An increasing number of consumers in the US (26% or 50 million Americans according to Ray and Anderson back in 2001)² express serious ecological and planetary concerns and want reassurance that their money is not supporting bad environmental practice or unfair and unsafe work conditions. The fashion industry is waking up to its role in the situation and educators need to prepare students to think in a creative and decisive manner concerning 'People, Planet and Profit' when it comes to designing and developing strategy for the fashion industry and achieving, even going beyond, targets in the global fashion supply chain.

At AMFI, our objectives are to make students aware of the people and planet in their first year, in order to develop students' capacities for environmentally and people-friendly attitudes in the long-term. Each year we build upon the curriculum so that, at completion of their degree, students will be integrated into thinking within a 'green mentality'. This green mentality is not only about attitude, but also business and design savvy.

In the Foundation year, all Branding, Design and Management students are given lectures about the 'Triple P' approach (People, Planet and Profit). Lectures in social trends and intercultural awareness highlight workers' rights using industry case examples as researched by the Clean Clothes Campaign and the International Labour Organisation. Back-up media like the films *China Blue*, *Slow Poison*, and lectures by visiting speakers from labour rights organisations such as May Wong from the Hong Kong Globalisation Monitor, bring a realistic perspective to the courses.

In terms of the planet, our BEYOND GREEN sustainability day - with lectures by experts, academics, entrepreneurs and designers like Katherine Hamnett, Peter Ingwersen (NOIR) and Susanna Lee (Central St Martins, London) - gives expert witness to the environmental wrongs committed by the larger fashion industry - like the drying out of the Aral Sea (Katherine Hamnett speaking at Beyond Green Symposium, 2007) - and innovative concepts from within the industry for lessening our environmental impact. Students are expected to write a chapter about applied ethics in their project reports.

In the second and third years, we look to refine the Triple P approach with further lectures, case studies, projects and films in all three disciplines. *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* and *The Corporation* are films that we use; and the BBC series, *Blood Sweat and Tears*, will likely be screened together with Panorama's *The Devil Wears Primark*. In the Beauty, Bodies and Fashion block for second years, students are asked to reinvent the visual language of 'green' for the fashion industry. In a block of study called Jeansworld, students had to create a collection of jeans, and one of the requirements was that the production-process and materials should all be sustainable and people-friendly.

¹Dutch national network for sustainable development in higher education.

²Ray, P. and Anderson, S. (2000) *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 million people are changing the world*, New York: Three Rivers Press

In 2008, the BEYOND GREEN symposium was extended to one week and the format shifted to workshops in order that theory became practice. A hands-on approach is seen as crucial to developing a can-do creative mentality with fashion students. Applied sustainability will be assessed in the students' projects.

An increasing number of students choose a subject connected with sustainable development for their final 4th year thesis/project. For example, one student chose to develop a plan for G-Star's corporate responsibility strategy, while another worked on how to market niche 100% organic fashion design stores throughout Holland. Other students are currently working on theses which take 'green' and 'labour' issues as their key focus, and we project that the number will grow as sustainability becomes a normal part of creative design, management and marketing.

AMFI is now working towards a curriculum where sustainability is approached holistically from day one and integrated into standard assessment criteria for all assignments, projects and theses. We look to alter the perception that a 'green mentality' is something unusual or inconvenient in the fashion industry to something that simply is and, more importantly, is embedded and seen as the norm. The importance of making sustainability accountable by the students means going beyond a type of educational 'code of conduct' into the more concrete realm of industry standards or, in this case, educational standards.

This is an excerpt from:

Sustainable Fashion: A Handbook for Educators

Edited by Liz Parker on behalf of Fashioning an Ethical Industry, UK, and Marsha A. Dickson on behalf of Educators for Socially Responsible Apparel Business, USA.

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