Behind the Scenes of a Fashion Show

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Krista Anderson

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Paula Sampson

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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As an apparel design student, I have witnessed the reaction of many people to my major. It is usually surprise, mixed with a sort of sarcasm. It is not a major that is generally taken very seriously, especially amongst well-read, learned members of places such as the Honors College. My classes are just as difficult as those for any other major, and are actually very related to classes taken in fields such as architecture and computer sciences. Yet, to some people, it seems like a laughable career choice. In my Promotions class (FCSMR 481), I learned just how difficult and stressful one of the most utilized choices for events in the apparel design field can be: putting on a professional fashion show. I wanted to take my experiences from this class and show those outside my own field what goes on behind the scenes. I wanted to take the glamour out of fashion for a bit, and show the real work that goes into putting on such an event. In order to do this, I have included an artist’s statement which outlines week-by-week the goings-on in my Promotions class, as well a Power Point presentation showing visuals from before and during the fashion show. I plan to also turn in a DVD copy of the fashion show as soon as it is distributed (the expected day is Friday, May 2\textsuperscript{nd}.)

Acknowledgements

-I want to thank Dr. Paula Sampson for helping to advise me through this project. She was extremely helpful both during the putting on of the show, and my process of attempting to capture the experience of a runway show in both words and visuals.

-I would also like to thank Dr. Joanne Edmonds for being my Honors College advisor for this project. She helped me come up with the idea for my project, and always made herself available whenever I had questions or needed extra guidance.
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Along with this introduction on why I chose to cover my Promotions class for my thesis project, I outlined each week’s tasks, and tried to do a step-by-step breakdown of how a fashion show is put together. A PowerPoint presentation is also included, showing the finished project, in visual form. There are going to be DVDs as well, but these will not be finished until the end of finals week. When I get mine, I will bring it to the Honors College offices, for anyone interested to view.
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On Thursday, one main concept was brought to the attention of the class: making a fashion magazine with a launch party to spark some interest. This idea seemed attractive to a lot of the students at first. It seemed very New York, very vogue. As we began to talk about it in more detail though, it seemed to be twice as much work for the class to do: set up a launch party and actually make a tangible fashion magazine. There were also aspects of putting this event together that most of the members of the class really were not qualified to do, such as write copy for a magazine or put together a page layout. The idea eventually fizzled out, and was replaced by other good ideas, such as window displays, pamphlets, and lookbooks.

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The next week was a lot of planning. Most things were unsure at this point, but ideas were definitely in the works. Julie and I came up with lots of ideas to raise money, although most of them would end up being ruled out later on. Some of these ideas included: running a bake sale, doing a car wash, selling t-shirts with advertiser’s logos on them (to earn more money from the sponsors), and having everyone raise at least $35 on their own from different sponsors. We also chose to raise the ticket price from $5 to $6 a seat. We felt that a $1 price increase was not enough to keep anyone from coming to the show, yet would raise us hundreds more dollars for the event.

Some things became set in stone during the fifth week of planning. The theme was set: In Luxe. The charity was chosen: The Center for Eating Disorders. The venue was chosen: Muncie’s Horizon Convention Center. Though it was great that so many things were getting done, the finance group was still trying to come up with ways to save money, while still putting on a professional, classy show. Along with the coordinators, we decided that we would like to have a good gift bag to give away to each attendee. We felt that this would make them feel more a part of the show, like celebrities do when they earn designer swag at awards shows. We were going to try to get in touch with companies that could give us samples of nice products, such as skincare companies and perfumers.

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As April rolled around, each designer had their garments turned in for inspection to Dr. Sampson. She wanted to ensure that everything would look proper for the runway, with no hanging threads or unfinished seams. It was the hope of everyone in the class to have a very professional show, and for the attendees to feel that it was worth their ticket money. Toward the end of the week, there were two scheduled sessions for models where they would learn about the length and width of the runway, walking, and posing. This would really help for those girls who had never modeled before to look fluid on the runway. This week also brought with it a free advertising opportunity. The Muncie “Star Press” decided to give us a free two-page spread in the newspaper, highlighting some of the garments that would be seen in the show.

It was now the week before the show, and, as a designer, I was preparing for my line. This meant that I researched and purchased the makeup I wanted to use, as well as accessories and shoes for my models. I also decided upon hairstyles that I wanted to implement that would complement my line. The name of my line was modern housewives, and it really blended the conservativeness of the 1950s with the bright, jewel-toned colors of the 1970s. I chose to put hair, makeup, and accessories from the 1960s onto my models, to tie everything together. The hairstyle I used channelled Brigitte Bardot – very bouffant and bombshell-esque. The makeup was more of a Marilyn Monroe look, with lots of liquid eyeliner and mascara, full brows, red lips, but little to no eye shadow or blush. I accessorized with bobby socks and ballet flats, to complete the look. Every other designer put a lot of thought into their styling as well, with such inspirations as the board game “Clue” and video games like “Kingdom Hearts.”

All last minute preparations were made this week. The CD idea had been changed, due to differing opinions and lack of time, and the models group had chosen all the music to go onto the CD, instead of each designer choosing. As the designers already had so much on their plates, it
did not seem to bother anyone. The merchandising students were also finishing up their plans for the merchandising displays to be set up in the venue the day of the show. The final ideas were “Wizard of Oz” and “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” along with an informational graduate student display discussing the issues of knock-off clothing and counterfeit items.

April 13th was the day of the show, and it was terribly busy. All students showed up at the venue at eight in the morning, to begin setting things up. The house group began working on lighting the runway, getting the electronic things set up, and getting the sound system going. The backstage group set tables up for each designer, as well as prepared the model boards and all the garments. The model boards showed the lineup of designers, as well as the lineup of models in each separate line, along with the outfit each of those models would be wearing. The models group got to work on setting up the hair and makeup stations. The merchandising students who were making displays started setting these up, so they could be done before the doors opened at 2 o’clock. The marketing group set up ticket booths and a T-shirt selling station, for last minute attendees and anyone who wanted to promote the show (such as family members, participating models, etc.) The coordinators began to prepare the giveaway table, which held all the things the class would be raffling off during the show’s intermission. The finance group started setting up the goody bags on each of the seats, and filling them with items.

At around 10 o’clock, most of the models had shown up, and were getting their hair and makeup done. Designers started busily steaming their garments and finishing hems, so everything could look its best on the runway. The models were sent to lunch at noon, and a pre-show run-through was set for 1:30 p.m. The run-through went extremely smoothly, and everything seemed as though it would go as planned.
The doors opened at 2 o’clock, and many people started coming in. Between that time and 3 o’clock, when the show began, designers were busy finishing up models’ hair, makeup, and outfits. Lineups were finalized. At precisely 3 p.m., the lights were dimmed, and the emcee welcomed everyone. The show started off quickly, with the fall lines. Seven designers presented, including myself. After this, there was a brief intermission, where the giveaways were distributed and the judges were introduced. The judges included a former Ball State apparel design professor and a Muncie clothing shop owner. They were judging on the best merchandising display, the best designer presentation, the best designer aesthetic, and the best use of target market by a designer. After the intermission, the spring lines from eight designers were shown. The winners in each category were announced. The whole class (even those who didn’t design) did a final walk for the crowd, and the professor, Dr. Sampson, was introduced and thanked. The audience was dismissed, and the class started cleaning up after the show. The clean-up was quick and relatively effortless. The show was over, and it was a success! We ended up selling over 500 tickets, and raising almost $2000 for our charity.
For my Honors thesis project, I wanted to do something different. As my major is apparel design, I thought about doing projects like making a line of clothing based on literature (something I ended up doing in my Books About Books colloquium with Tony and Joanne Edmonds), or even making a sketchbook which would outline my design philosophy. These things sounded interesting to me, but I did not think they would be of much interest to the general population, especially not the well-read, very learned members of the Honors College. I started thinking about the preconceptions of my major, and how people react when I tell them that I am an apparel design student. It is usually negative, and definitely is looked down upon. It doesn’t seem like a major that an Honors student would choose.

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The doors opened at 2 o’clock, and many people started coming in. Between that time and 3 o’clock, when the show began, designers were busy finishing up models’ hair, makeup, and outfits. Lineups were finalized. At precisely 3 p.m., the lights were dimmed, and the emcee welcomed everyone. The show started off quickly, with the fall lines. Seven designers presented, including myself. After this, there was a brief intermission, where the giveaways were distributed and the judges were introduced. The judges included a former Ball State apparel design professor and a Muncie clothing shop owner. They were judging on the best merchandising display, the best designer presentation, the best designer aesthetic, and the best use of target market by a designer. After the intermission, the spring lines from eight designers were shown. The winners in each category were announced. The whole class (even those who didn’t design) did a final walk for the crowd, and the professor, Dr. Sampson, was introduced and thanked. The audience was dismissed, and the class started cleaning up after the show. The clean-up was quick and relatively effortless. The show was over, and it was a success! We ended up selling over 500 tickets, and raising almost $2000 for our charity.
Krista Anderson
Senior Honors Thesis
Artist’s Statement

For my Honors thesis project, I wanted to do something different. As my major is apparel design, I thought about doing projects like making a line of clothing based on literature (something I ended up doing in my Books About Books colloquium with Tony and Joanne Edmonds), or even making a sketchbook which would outline my design philosophy. These things sounded interesting to me, but I did not think they would be of much interest to the general population, especially not the well-read, very learned members of the Honors College. I started thinking about the preconceptions of my major, and how people react when I tell them that I am an apparel design student. It is usually negative, and definitely is looked down upon. It doesn’t seem like a major that an Honors student would choose.

While thinking about this, I decided I would like to start breaking the barriers between design and Honors (which seems to have more of a literature/math/science dynamic.) As I was making my schedule for the upcoming semester (Spring 2008), I realized that I would be taking a class known as Promotions. I knew just a little about this class, and one thing that I knew for sure was that this was the class where the design students were able to put their creations into a fashion show coordinated by the class members.

Fashion shows have always seemed very glamorous to me, and I was definitely excited to put my things out there for everyone to see. I realized that, possibly, the most interesting project I could do for the Honors crowd would be one separating the visual glamour of a fashion show from the actual hard work and dedication that goes into putting one on. It seemed like a great way to show those who might not think of apparel design as a real major just how difficult the classes can really be.
Along with this introduction on why I chose to cover my Promotions class for my thesis project, I outlined each week's tasks, and tried to do a step-by-step breakdown of how a fashion show is put together. A PowerPoint presentation is also included, showing the finished project, in visual form. There are going to be DVDs as well, but these will not be finished until the end of finals week. When I get mine, I will bring it to the Honors College offices, for anyone interested to view.
Promotions class was a Tuesday and Thursday class, so the first class meeting was on January 7th, 2008. Not much happened the first day, as is the case in most classes. We discussed the syllabus, obviously. Dr. Sampson then let us know that, although all classes in the past have chosen to put together a fashion show as their special event, we could choose another sort of event if we would like. For the next two days, the class members brainstormed, and tried to think of other possibilities.

On Thursday, one main concept was brought to the attention of the class: making a fashion magazine with a launch party to spark some interest. This idea seemed attractive to a lot of the students at first. It seemed very New York, very vogue. As we began to talk about it in more detail though, it seemed to be twice as much work for the class to do: set up a launch party and actually make a tangible fashion magazine. There were also aspects of putting this event together that most of the members of the class really were not qualified to do, such as write copy for a magazine or put together a page layout. The idea eventually fizzled out, and was replaced by other good ideas, such as window displays, pamphlets, and lookbooks.

Window displays are things that can be seen mostly in downtown areas, yet some department stores and mall chain stores have “fake” window areas built into their stores to display items. Although window displays would be a fun way to mix apparel design with fashion merchandising (as the vast majority of the class was made up of students in one of these two majors), it would have required many more mannequins than the department currently owns. Also, the issue of raising money for a charity arose. Getting people to pay admission to check out window displays was probably a little out of our league.

Pamphlets and lookbooks are very similar to each other. They both include many visuals, and are a way to spark lots of interest from the viewer. Pamphlets include much more description
than lookbooks, and are much smaller in size. Lookbooks can be any size, and include many pages with mostly visuals and few descriptions. Both of these things would have been fun to put together, but the idea of making money off of them was also very unlikely. More ideas were brought up, but they were all short-lived. The main point of interest was to make sure that, while the apparel design students got a chance to show off their designs, the fashion merchandising students also got a chance to show off the skills they had learned while at Ball State. There had to be a better way to show off all the students’ skills, while also entertaining lots of viewers, and raising enough money to donate a few hundred dollars to charity.

The next week consisted of more contemplation of events. The class finally was able to narrow the choices down to just three: just a fashion show, a fashion show with merchandising displays in special areas of the venue, or a fashion show with merchandising displays set up as a Power Point presentation to be shown during the show’s intermission. Along with narrowing down our choices, we also chose groups for the special event. These groups included house, models, coordinators, marketing, backstage, and finance. I wanted to be in the finance group, but so did some other people. After some deliberation, I ended up being the sole finance group member (under my leader, Julie.) I was very excited about this position, as I consider myself to be somewhat of a “math nerd.”

The third week was the week we voted on our final choice for the special event. The fashion show with the merchandising displays in special areas of the venue option won by a landslide. I felt that most members of the class were happy that this was the chosen option. This week, the groups met together for the first time, as well. I was sick with the flu, and was unable to meet with my leader, Julie. We communicated though emails, though, and decided that for the next week, we would try to brainstorm some ideas to raise more money for the event.
The next week was a lot of planning. Most things were unsure at this point, but ideas were definitely in the works. Julie and I came up with lots of ideas to raise money, although most of them would end up being ruled out later on. Some of these ideas included: running a bake sale, doing a car wash, selling t-shirts with advertiser’s logos on them (to earn more money from the sponsors), and having everyone raise at least $35 on their own from different sponsors. We also chose to raise the ticket price from $5 to $6 a seat. We felt that a $1 price increase was not enough to keep anyone from coming to the show, yet would raise us hundreds more dollars for the event.

Some things became set in stone during the fifth week of planning. The theme was set: In Luxe. The charity was chosen: The Center for Eating Disorders. The venue was chosen: Muncie’s Horizon Convention Center. Though it was great that so many things were getting done, the finance group was still trying to come up with ways to save money, while still putting on a professional, classy show. Along with the coordinators, we decided that we would like to have a good gift bag to give away to each attendee. We felt that this would make them feel more a part of the show, like celebrities do when they earn designer swag at awards shows. We were going to try to get in touch with companies that could give us samples of nice products, such as skincare companies and perfumers.

Our money situation was already tight, though, because the venue cost the class $1200 for the day, along with a $400 damage deposit that had to be paid when the reservation was made. There was a lot of deliberation on whether this venue was worth the money, but the class really preferred it over anything else: it was the classiest (much better than a place like Ball Gym, which was another, cheaper choice), it had a huge backstage area (which is extremely important for getting the models ready with hair and makeup and having them lined up before
the show), and we were able to rent the room for the entire day, which gave the class plenty of
time to prepare before the show.

The finance group had a reality check when the house group turned in their tentative
budget at the beginning of the next week. It was way over what is planned! As mentioned, the
venue cost $400 more than expected, and there were other unforeseen costs that were included in
the budget. We decided that we were going to have to pare down even more, if we were going to
be able to afford to put on this show. We also decided to definitely make t-shirts with
advertiser's logos on them, to raise more money. The shirts would have space for nine logos, and
the logos would sell for $100 apiece. If this idea went as planned, we would raise almost $1000
more for the show!

The seventh week looked pretty promising, as far as the budget went. Eight of the nine
$100 spots for the t-shirts had already been sold: better than we expected! Also, some members
of the class have alerted us that they can get us some of the things we need to put the show on for
free. One class member was able to donate tables for the backstage, something that would have
cost us $150. Another student was able to get our tickets printed for free, which saved us another
$60. Two class members were in the middle of trying to get students to work as camera-people
for the show. If we were able to get the camerawork done at no charge, that would save us $200.
As each member of the class is responsible for one giveaway, the finance team decided that
anyone who is able to get the class something we need for free would be excused from doing
this: a win-win situation.

It was now the end of February, and time was definitely a consideration. T-shirts were
being sold to the class this week, each of which would earn us $3. Not much was new in the
finance department. Many people had gotten their $35 sponsorships to us, so money was looking
like less of an issue than it originally was. The free cameramen were confirmed this week, which was great news, as well.

The first round of model callouts had been scheduled for the next week, so designers were given their first chance to find the perfect ladies to show off their designs. Unfortunately, only three designers showed up to this event. This dismayed both the models who showed up (as they felt they wasted their time on designers who were not even interested enough to come to the call-out) and the model group, who were responsible for getting each designer hooked up with all the models they needed. A month and a half was already a short time for choosing models, fitting them for garments, teaching them to walk, and deciding the “look” for each collection that would fit both the models and the design collections.

The first week of March did not bring a lot of new things. Two deejay selections had been chosen, and the models group was in charge of deciding which one would be the right fit for the fashion show. Also, a second model call out had been scheduled for Thursday. Again, only three designers showed up to the call-out, one of them being myself. I was able to choose three of the five models that I needed from this callout, and the other two designers were able to make some selections as well. The model group members were really getting nervous about the designer-model situation, though, and decided to schedule one last model call-out for the next week.

At the third and last model call-out, only two designers showed up, and one of them was myself. As there were thirteen designers—two of whom were showing off two collections each—, things were really looking grim. I, however, was able to find the rest of the models I needed, and was very excited. The deejay situation had also been updated. The models group discovered that the cost was much lower to get a deejay to make a mix CD for the event than to actually play live
music. They decided to have each model choose a song for their collection, and they would have a deejay put them all together onto a CD to be played the day of the show.

The next week was a very important week for the designers in the class—it was the week when garment fittings took place. Garment fittings are extremely important, as the way a garment fits the model as she comes down the runway can make or break a look. Each designer was responsible for her own garments and models. There was a specified garment fitting time, when designers and models were to show up at the Student Center and make fit decisions, but only a couple of designers showed up, further worrying the models group. As there was a specified date (only 10 days later) when the garments had to be turned in to the professor for inspection, this left designers who were not at the meeting very little time to get together with their models, fit their garments, and make all their changes, while ensuring that their garments had a professional level of quality at the end of everything. I was an incredibly lucky designer, as each of my garments fit their models perfectly, and no real changes had to be made.

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