

8-2013

Effectiveness of Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising Program

Christie Martin
Old Dominion University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ots_masters_projects

 Part of the [Fashion Business Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Martin, Christie, "Effectiveness of Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising Program" (2013). *OTS Master's Level Projects & Papers*. 572.

https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ots_masters_projects/572

This Master's Project is brought to you for free and open access by the STEM Education & Professional Studies at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in OTS Master's Level Projects & Papers by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.

EFFECTIVENESS OF OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY'S FASHION
MERCHANDISING PROGRAM

A RESEARCH STUDY PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF STEM EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES AT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF SCIENCE
OCCUPATIONAL AND TECHNICAL STUDIES

BY
CHRISTIE MARTIN
AUGUST 2013

SIGNATURE PAGE

Christie Martin prepared this research paper under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in SEPS 636, Problems in Occupation and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Program Coordinator as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of the Masters of Science.

Approval By: _____

Dr. John M. Ritz
Advisor and Program Coordinator

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank those of the Old Dominion Alumni Association, Dan Campbell, Trinity Massey, and Dawn M. Richardson, as well as Dr. Reed for help with getting my cover letter and questionnaire out to the population of this survey. They have truly helped me to initiate my study. I would also like to thank Dr. Ritz for teaching me all that I have learned in this class.

Christie Martin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SIGNATURE PAGE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTERS	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Problem	2
Research Objectives	2
Background and Significance	3
Limitations	5
Assumptions	5
Procedures	5
Definition of Terms	6
Overview of Chapters	7
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
Fashion Merchandising Program	9
Fashion Industry	11
Knowledge and Skills	17
Fashion Merchandising Programs	19
Summary	21

III.	METHODS AND PROCEDURES	23
	Population	23
	Instrument Design	23
	Methods of Data Collection	24
	Statistical Analysis	24
	Summary	25
IV.	FINDINGS	26
	Data Collection	26
	Data Analyses	28
	Research Objective 1	28
	Research Objective 2	28
	Research Objective 3	30
	Research Objective 4	31
	Research Objective 5	33
	Summary	36
V.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	37
	Summary	37
	Conclusions	39
	Recommendations	42
	REFERENCES	44
	APPENDICES	
	Appendix A: Sample Online Survey	46

Appendix B: Sample Cover Letter	49
Appendix C: Sample Follow-Up Email	50

TABLE OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Desired Occupations	33

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As children, people are told that they can be anything they want and accomplish anything they want as long as they put their mind to it. People are told that in order to be successful in life, they have to go to school, get good grades, and obtain a college degree. Upon obtaining that college degree, naturally the next step is finding a career in their field of choice. Unfortunately, some college graduates are having a hard time finding a decent career that will allow them to flourish and become successful on their own without the help of their parents. Whether this is due to the economy or due to lack of preparation during school, is unknown. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the Fashion Merchandising program at Old Dominion University is preparing graduates with the proper knowledge and skills needed for future employment. Are students being properly trained to enter the fashion industry upon graduation?

Students want to make sure that if they are investing four (or five) years in getting a college degree that it will be worthwhile. Just like any other major, business, engineering, nursing, etc., the courses and resources that are offered should be ones that are preparing students for their chosen career field. When one looks at a fashion merchandising program, including its courses, internships, and even field trips, they should find that these experiences are designed in such a way that the knowledge and skills needed in the fashion industry are being learned.

Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program literature states, it "prepares students to enter the fashion industry to become buyers, fashion coordinators, and merchandise managers" (Fashion Merchandising, 2011, para. 1). Students will begin their degree by taking general studies, which include basic classes for mathematics, science, history, and, English. Then, they will move to taking their technical major content courses and electives. In this study, the researcher will evaluate just how effective the program content courses were that were offered and if their content was enough to make a student attractive to an employer in the fashion industry.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising program in preparing students to enter the fashion industry as properly prepared employees.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study was designed to answer the following research objectives:

RO₁: Evaluate the relevancy of courses and electives offered in the fashion merchandising program.

RO₂: Determine if the courses are teaching skills that are needed for specific fashion industry jobs.

RO₃: Investigate the career management resources made available to fashion merchandising students in order to help them find internships, co-ops, and job opportunities.

RO₄: Determine if graduates are employed or have been employed in fashion careers after graduation.

RO₅: Determine recommendations that need to be made to the fashion merchandising program to improve the career readiness of its graduates.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Fashion merchandising is an industry which offers various occupations. In the fashion cluster, students can choose from a number of career pathways. These include fashion buying, visual merchandising, product development, trend forecasting, store management, and personal styling.

The Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising Program was created in 1985 by “the request of Dr. Joseph M. Marchello [President], after inquiring why the school did not have a fashion merchandising program” (Dave Netherton, Personal Communication, 2012). Mr. Netherton was then notified with this inquiry and came up with an idea for the program the next day. It was originally a B.S.Ed. in Marketing Education, and then became a B.S. with a major in Occupation and Technical Studies degree in 1987 (Dave Netherton, Personal Communication, 2012).

During completion of this degree, students take at least 120 credit hours including participating in an internship between their junior and senior year. They also have the option to study abroad at American Continental University in London, England (Fashion Merchandising, 2011).

A study assessing ODU's fashion merchandising program was conducted by Allison Dorsey in 2006. Her paper was entitled, *A Follow-Up Study of Old Dominion University Fashion Graduates*. The purpose of her study was also to see how students were transitioning from ODU's fashion program to careers in the fashion industry. The purpose of this research is to analyze the courses and electives being offered to see if they are relevant to the industry and if the university is using the proper resources available to them in attempts to improve resources made available to fashion students.

If a student has an interest in working in retail management, they may not have a hard time becoming employed because the retail management industry is expected to grow between 2008 and 2018 (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2009). If a student has a desire to work in buying, which is a part of corporate retail, it could be difficult because it only makes up 2% of the industry. Also many retail stores are eliminating buying departments and creating just one department at headquarters for all stores (bls.gov, 2009). Becoming an employee in the fashion industry will be competitive no matter what avenue one takes, because many schools offer merchandising programs. Currently there are 196 colleges and/or universities offering fashion merchandising programs in the U.S. (collegeboard.com, 2012).

LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were set to provide boundaries for this study:

1. This study was limited to graduating students in fashion merchandising at Old Dominion University from 2007-2011.

2. The study was conducted during summer 2012.
3. The intent of the research was to determine the employment of graduates from the Old Dominion program and the skills they identified were used in this career pathway.

ASSUMPTIONS

The results of this study were based on the following assumptions:

1. Students who graduated from ODU's Fashion Merchandising Program were seeking entry-level jobs in the fashion industry.
2. The fashion merchandising program was not fully preparing students to obtain entry-level jobs in the fashion industry.
3. Graduate response to a survey concerned with the courses and electives being offered by the fashion merchandising program from 2007-2011.
4. Opportunities for internships and careers in the fashion industry were limited and difficult to find.
5. Opportunities to create internships with current companies in the Hampton Roads area were partially being utilized.

PROCEDURES

In order to conduct this study, the researcher contacted administrators from the ODU fashion program for basic information and details on the education program. Information was sought about course and electives being offered, opportunities for internships and co-ops in the area, and job prospects for graduates. The researcher then

created a cover letter and survey to collect data from each graduate to compile information for review. The survey consisted of a list of questions that pertained to the effects of the courses offered, internships obtained, careers after graduation, and suggestions for improvement. The Old Dominion Alumni Association provided a list of graduates from the fashion merchandising program between 2007 and 2011. Once the surveys were completed and returned to the researcher, the answers were tabulated and evaluated to discern conclusions based on the study's research objectives.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms were defined in order to explain the meanings as they pertain to this study:

1. Fashion Merchandising: A part of the fashion industry that involves all activities related to the development, buying, and selling of merchandise.
2. Technical Content Courses: The courses that a student must take in their field in order to equip them with the skills needed in the fashion industry (Dorsey, 2006).
3. Career Pathway: A specific concentration under fashion merchandising, in which students have a general interest to pursue as a possible career.
4. CAD: Computer-aided design.
5. MAGIC: Annual fashion market show, where professionals in the fashion industry come together to trade information, preview new trends, build business, and shop fashion.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this chapter, the researcher discussed why it was important to investigate Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program. The chapter stated the problem of the study and the research objectives which would help answer to the problem statement. The assumptions and limitations of this study were relayed in this chapter to show the foundation of the study. The procedures used to conduct this study were also discussed in this chapter, as well as a section to explain terms used throughout the study specific to the fashion industry. Overall the purpose of Chapter I was to introduce the reader to the study, to explain the history of the study, and describe why it was significant.

In Chapter II the researcher will analyze literature on various aspects of fashion merchandising programs as well as careers in the fashion industry. The literature will discuss career potential as it relates to the fashion industry. There will be information using labor statistics in the fashion industry, as well as job descriptions and qualifications. The researcher will also review information found in previous studies on this topic.

Following the review of literature, in Chapter III, the researcher will explain how she gathered data for this study and what specific instrument was used to do this. Chapter III will also describe in detail the demographics of the population in question, and how the researcher contacted them. Once the information was collected, it was organized, tabulated, and analyzed.

In Chapter IV, findings from the surveys will be examined. After discussing the findings and results, the researcher will draw conclusions. These conclusions will be presented in Chapter V. Similarities and differences among the participants will be compared. Chapter V will also provide recommendations to be made for improvement in the fashion program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program in preparing students to enter the fashion industry as prepared employees. The researcher reviewed materials related to the variables presented through this study. This chapter will examine previous studies undertaken on fashion merchandising programs. This chapter will also cover the courses offered in the fashion merchandising program at Old Dominion University, along with knowledge and skills needed for various careers in fashion, and the state of this job market.

FASHION MERCHANDISING PROGRAM

The fashion merchandising program at Old Dominion University is a 120-credit hour program. Students complete general studies courses which include English, mathematics, public speaking, history, and philosophy, as well as introductory science and technology courses (ODU University Catalog, 2012). These courses are typically completed over the student's freshman and sophomore years, while the major content courses are studied in the latter years.

There are 20 technical content courses in this program as well as eight electives. Of the 20 content courses, seven of the courses are based specifically on content for the fashion industry or are fashion related courses. These include buying, advanced merchandising, fashion product development, merchandise retailing, social aspects of clothing, survey of dress and costume, and the fashion industry. Other courses that are in

this program focus on workplace/retail management, marketing, and technology (ODU University Catalog, 2012).

One important course offered in the fashion merchandising program is SEPS 409, Fashion Market Trip. Students enrolled in this course will travel to a city known for its fashion where students will be able to meet and network with people who are employed in the industry. Each year the Fashion Market Trip class travels to Las Vegas, Nevada, to visit MAGIC. MAGIC Marketplace is the biggest conference where the fashion community gathers to study, preview, and sell the latest trends and conduct e-commerce (magiconline.com, 2011). One important requirement of the fashion program is for students to complete an internship during the summer of the junior or senior year (Fashion Merchandising, 2011).

It is stated on the Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising homepage that while many students enroll in the program to become buyers, the program's focus is on the marketing of fashion, so students are prepared to work in any aspect of the fashion merchandising industry (Fashion Merchandising, 2011). Students have successfully transitioned from Old Dominion University to careers in the fashion industry as buyers, fashion and marketing coordinators, retail managers, visual merchandisers, and fashion writers (Fashion Merchandising, 2011).

In Dorsey's (2006) unpublished paper, *A Follow Up of Study of Old Dominion University's Fashion Graduates*, 61.11% of the respondents from 1998-2003 were employed in the fashion industry after graduation. Ultimately she found while several students had fashion-related careers, the consensus was that they were undecided on

whether the electives offered in the program were effective in preparing them for their careers. In her study she found that 44% of the participants found that the major strength of the program was the instructors and their level of knowledge in the fashion industry.

FASHION INDUSTRY

According to the American Marketing Association, merchandising is defined as “the planning involved in marketing the right merchandise at the right place at the right quantities at the right price” (Vogt, 2007, p. 55). Although merchandising was an important aspect of the fashion industry, it only made up a portion of it. In Dorsey’s paper (2006), the fashion industry involved all of the industries that worked together to produce apparel, accessories, and home fashion. The fashion industry could best be divided into seven categories, all-encompassing various careers. These categories would be textiles, production/manufacturing, retail, media, promotions, education, and miscellaneous (Vogt, 2007). Some of these occupations are detailed below.

The textile, textile product, and apparel manufacturing industries include establishments that processed fiber into fabric and fabric in clothing and other textile products (bls.gov, 2009). Careers in this category would include market researchers, fabric librarians, product manager (textiles), sales representative (textiles), textile conversion manager, textile research scientists and colorist, and textile designers (Vogt, 2007). Many textile workers would prepare natural and synthetic fibers to spin into yarn and then they would take the yarn and produce it into various textile products (Ferguson, 2007). Other careers in textiles would allow the workers to create new fibers and come up with ways to process them. They would also come up with new ways of converting these

fibers into textiles (Ferguson, 2007). Due to the fact that the textile industry was very labor-intensive, the majority of the jobs took place outside of the United States (bls.gov, 2009). The apparel manufacturing industry did, however, employ the most people in 2008 with 198,400 salaried workers (bls.gov, 2009). Many of the jobs available in the U.S. were in the Southeast in states such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. These three states combined to make up 60 percent of the textile industry in the United States (Ferguson, 2007).

According to Ferguson (2007), students who were interested in working in the textile industry in research or in quality control should be those who are fluent in mathematics and sciences. Being fluent in mathematics would help a student if he/she had a career interest in market research. A market researcher would gather information to relay to textile manufacturers to help them “accurately determine which products they should develop, in what quantities, for what prices, and when” (Vogt, 2007, p. 4). Researchers would gather two types of information which included qualitative and quantitative data (Vogt, 2002). It also helped for a student interested in this part of the industry to take sciences classes like biology, chemistry, and physics. These classes would be essential to those who were working in laboratories producing fibers and fabrics to manufacture into textiles.

In production/manufacturing, there were several different career paths that a student can choose. Those paths included accessory designer, costing engineer, cutter, fit model, industrial designer, marker maker, piece goods buyer, quality control engineer, sales representative (apparel), sample maker, sewing machine operator, showroom sales

representative, sketcher, spreader, merchandiser, fashion designer, fashion forecaster, and product manager (Vogt, 2007).

When one puts all of these occupations together, the end result was the very clothes that were seen every day in clothing stores, magazines, catalogues, on television, and in your very own closet. Each occupation's duties were important and critical to the production of fine made clothing items. A fashion forecaster, which was probably the career most closely related to merchandising, "uses research findings, extensive fashion industry experience, and, to some degree, intuition to predict fashions that will be "hot" one or two years in the future" (Vogt, 2007, p. 41). Fashion forecasters used their knowledge of current trends and styles to predict and set goals for new trends and styles to come.

Entry level opportunities for fashion forecasting were very limited because the person needed to have a comprehensive background in the fashion industry and similar education history (Vogt, 2002). It was not likely that a person would receive an entry-level job opportunity in fashion forecasting because most of those jobs were saved for people who have 5-10 years experience (Vogt, 2002). Most people would start out as being a retail sales associate for a company and work their way up to forecasting. They would probably gain experience in merchandising and product development before forecasting. Another way to secure a job in this part of the industry would be to participate in an internship with a fashion company.

Getting into the fashion design business was difficult for the inexperienced. This part of the fashion industry was expected to have little or no change in employment

growth since approximately 22,000 Americans held fashion design jobs according to the 2008 census (bls.gov, 2009). Although the fashion industry was competitive, it was still possible for students to have careers in fashion. According to Vogt (2007), most designers worked for an established company or are going into business for themselves, working as a freelance designer. The best way to get experience in fashion design would be to pursue a degree in design as well as work as an intern, and then a design assistant, and move up the corporate ladder (Vogt, 2007).

Fashion designers were the creative minds behind the fashion industry. They had visions and desires of fashions that were attractive to them, and they used their visions and imaginations to design new styles and trends. They must also keep up with fashion trends and consumer wants and needs to make sure that the line they were producing would be suitable and attractive to the consumer (Vogt, 2007).

Retail in the fashion industry was probably the biggest sector of fashion which is constantly growing. Retail careers included boutique owners, buyer's clerical, cashier, department manager, distribution planner, fabric store manager, fashion buyer, stock clerk, sales representative, store managers, visual merchandisers, and fashion coordinators (Vogt, 2007). According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the reason why it was an ever growing part of the industry was because there was a high turnover rate in these occupations (bls.gov, 2009).

Employees in the retail sector of the fashion industry had the most interactions with customers on a day-to-day basis. This included mainly those who were working in places that sell clothing, like boutiques, department stores, specialty stores, thrift stores,

etc. Since they interacted with customers all the time, they could be very impressionable. An important part of fashion was being able to sell fashions. While designers may come up with designs and clothing lines to be sold in stores, retail employees were the ones who used skills and techniques to convince consumers to purchase products. Owners and managers had many duties when it came to overseeing a store because they must supervise all operations in the store. A boutique owner:

...is a jack of all trades. On the other one hand, he or she is responsible for all of the business-related aspects of the store such as accounting and finances, employees, security, and cleanup. On the other hand, the Boutique Owner must oversee marketing and promotions, advertising, sales, merchandising, buying, visual displays, and the many other apparel-specific duties that go into operating a store that will be financially successful and appealing to prospective customers. (Vogt, 2007, p. 100)

Another important aspect of fashion aside from merchandising and retail would be media and marketing in the fashion industry. Fashion media would include occupations combined with journalism in the fashion industry. These careers include fashion editor, fashion illustrator, fashion photographer, fashion stylist, and fashion writer (Vogt, 2007). An editor in the fashion industry was much like any other type of editor except they were overseeing the development and presentation of fashion-related content (Vogt, 2007). This could be done for magazines like Elle, Vogue, Seventeen, and even publications like Women's Wear Daily (WWD). In 2007, there were approximately

319,000 writers and editors employed in the United States. Those classified as fashion writers and editors only made up a small percentage of these careers (Ferguson, 2007).

The illustrator would draw apparel items by hand or on a computer to be used by magazines, newspapers, websites, and retail stores (Vogt, 2002). Important subjects for an interested fashion illustrator would be subjects like art and business. This was essential because an illustrator would work with designers, editors, and even models to create illustrations for various companies. Many illustrators would sketch from a designer's note or even sketch live models (Ferguson, 2007). As American's were consistently becoming more dependent on computers, it would be helpful for illustrators to know how to operate certain computer software programs, like Adobe Photoshop and how to make CAD drawings.

A way to make items in the fashion industry relevant, available, and aware to all target market consumers was through promotions. Promotions were the advertising and marketing sector of the fashion industry. Careers in promotions would include advertising professional, copywriter, fashion public relations specialist, fashion show producer, graphic designer, media buyer, print model, and runway model (Vogt, 2002). Just like any other product, marketing of clothing was essential to the growth and sales of the items.

A common and exciting way for clothing designers and stores to introduce their new line of clothing to consumers was through fashion shows. Fashion shows were put on throughout the year typically in the fall and spring to showcase clothing and

accessories that are new, relevant, and trendy. A fashion show producer was someone who would plan and implement these shows (Vogt, 2007). A fashion show producer:

...can work on several different types of shows. The most well-known type of show is the *designer* show, the elaborate, glamorous production in which a top-name designer shows his or her latest collection to guests like industry media, celebrities and other socialites, and top Fashion Buyers and Fashion Directors. Sometimes the person who produces the this type of show is and in-house employee of the designer of his or her manufacturer. (Vogt, 2007, p. 176)

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Stated on ODU's fashion merchandising homepage, many students who enroll in this program have goals of one day becoming buyers. Fashion buyers select and purchase apparel and accessories from manufacturers or wholesalers for retail sale to consumers (Vogt, 2002). It was important for students interested in a career in buying to be fluent in mathematics, planning, and budgeting (Vogt, 2002). Useful courses to take in preparation for a career in buying and/or merchandising would include: accounting, economics, commercial law, finance, advertising, marketing, and various business classes (Ferguson, 2007). Buyers have to take time to study trends and consumer needs to make sure they were purchasing what would sell best in the market. An important skill to have if interested in being a buyer was decision-making. According to Stone, who wrote *Fashion Buying* (1987):

Fashion buying is a business of taking gambles and those who are not prepared to make decisions that represent a gamble will never win. A successful fashion buyer possess a talent for making decisions quickly and decisively, and is not afraid to take a risk. Obviously, those decisions must be based on as many facts as can possibly be gathered, but expert buyers recognize that they will always have to rely on a little intuition that what they have chosen will sell. (p. 6)

Buying can be a very tedious and stressful job, but it can also be exciting and spontaneous. Most buyers get their start by working in retail stores or participating in executive training programs (Vogt, 2007).

According to ODU's fashion merchandising program, graduates have successfully transitioned into other careers such as fashion coordinating, visual merchandising, and fashion writing (Fashion Merchandising, 2011). In order for a student to become a fashion coordinator, it was essential to gain skills in communication/ideas and leadership/management (Ferguson, 2007). It was also important for students interested in this career to get on-the-job training through fashion retailing and merchandise jobs (Vogt, 2007). In order to be successful in this career, students should have a number of skills. They should have organizational skills along with an understanding of what consumers want and current fashion trends. Fashion coordinators needed to have knowledge of industry trends and forecasts, so they could work alongside buyers, visual merchandisers, and marketing staff (Vogt, 2007).

Visual merchandisers oversee the conceptualization, design, and execution of visual displays of apparel in stores, at trade shows, and in fashion showrooms (Vogt, 2002). The employment opportunities in visual merchandising were fairly good and the opportunity to climb up the corporate ladder was open. The best way to gain experience in this field was to work in a part-time fashion job or to participate in an internship (Vogt, 2007). According to Vogt (2007), skills that would be essential to this career included artistic and creative abilities, some technical skills, and communication skills (Vogt, 2007).

Lastly, of the most common careers that were transitioned to by graduates of ODU's fashion merchandising program, was to fashion writing. Fashion writers expressed, promoted, and interpreted fashion ideas and facts in written form (Ferguson, 2007). Fashion writers should be knowledgeable of word processing software for computers, and preferably a degree in journalism or English and a strong knowledge of the fashion industry (Ferguson, 2007). According to Vogt, getting into fashion writing was fair and it was necessary for students to gain as much experience as they could (Vogt, 2007). Internships were an excellent way for students to get experience in this field.

FASHION MERCHANDISING PROGRAMS

Several studies over the past thirty years have been done to evaluate what skills, courses, career needs, and training should be offered in undergraduate programs that were desirable to employers. Chambers (1986) conducted a study of retailers and educators in order to find the most desirable competencies of fashion merchandising students. In this

study, 222 questionnaires were sent out to retailers and educators combined. A total of 125 questionnaires were returned (56%) from the population participated. In the study, Chambers divided the questionnaire up into five sections including, sales promotions, basic skills, social skills, management and administration, and selling skills. The retailers and educators were given 39 competencies to rate according to what was the most desirable in a fashion merchandising student. Chambers found that the top five competencies for retailers were: 1. good relationships with employees, 2. use of sales reports in planning, 3. communicate effectively, 4. work with customers, and 5. developing seasonal budgets. Among educators, the top five competencies of fashion merchandising students were: 1. work with customers, 2. good relationships with employees, 3. delegate responsibility, 4. arrange floor space, and 5. identify needs of customers. Chambers found that while fashion merchandising educators rated competencies high in all areas for students, retail only rated high competencies for work-related requirements. She proposed that this was due to the fact that educators had limited understanding of what jobs students would be doing, so they expected them to have high competencies in every area.

Shanley (1987) conducted a similar study to address the effectiveness of the fashion merchandising four year degree program at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. In her study, she had a two-part survey. The first part was to specific characteristics for a merchandising student rated on importance level. The second part of the survey was for rating development characteristics. Each survey consisted of 40 characteristics, all ranging from basic work skills, to management skills, to communication, personal behavior, interpersonal behavior, and fashion merchandising

related activities. For importance characteristics, fashion merchandising related activities had the highest mean (2.15), and interpersonal behaviors had the lowest mean (1.39). For development characteristics, basic work activities had the highest mean score (2.43), while communications had the lowest mean score (2.08). Overall, Shanley concluded that fashion merchandising programs would probably serve students better if they had more practical, hands-on experience and business related courses. Even though fashion merchandising activities were helpful, they were not as helpful with high level positions in the fashion industry. The surveys were completed by graduates, retailers, and educators. The population in total consisted of 108 graduates of WSP, 41 retailers, and ten educators of WSP. A point scale was not mentioned in Shanley's survey.

According to *Adequacy of Career Training for Fashion Merchandising Majors*, an unpublished dissertation by Tuntland (1987), internships are one way that fashion merchandising programs can blend classroom training with businesses. She found that retailers were more interested in participating in internships if the curriculum was strong and if students had backgrounds in communication, merchandising, and management.

SUMMARY

In this chapter the Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising Program was discussed in detail. The researcher discussed the classes needed to be taken and requirements that needed to be met in order to graduate. This chapter also examined possible employment opportunities in the fashion industry. In order to know if the Old Dominion University program was preparing students to seek fashion careers, one thing that was important was to know what it takes to perform each job and employment

statistics surrounding it. This enabled the researcher to list career opportunities in the fashion industry and to detail the knowledge and skills needed for the most common careers that students might transition to, once they had graduated from ODU. In Chapter II, the reality of jobs in the fashion industry was discussed. The researcher wrote about how easy or difficult it was to obtain a job and the employment potential and growth for various jobs.

In Chapter III, the population for the survey will be defined and methods of retrieving information from that population will be determined. The instrument that was used to survey each individual will be detailed in this chapter as well.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of Chapter III is to detail the methods and procedures used to gather data from participants for this study. This chapter will discuss the demographics of the population and the statistical analysis used to analyze the data. Chapter III will also describe the instrument used to gather that data and how it was developed.

POPULATION

The population of this study was graduates of the STEM Education and Professional Studies Department who obtained a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Fashion Merchandising from Old Dominion University, between the years of 2007 and 2011. The number of students who were identified to participate in the survey was 136. Of the 136 graduates only one was a male. Contact information and addresses were obtained from Old Dominion's Alumni Center. The reason for choosing this population was so the study would have the most accurate and up-to-date information. Since program guidelines and curriculum have the potential to change, five years would cover any recent changes to the program as well as garner a wide array of information toward the program.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The instrument used to collect data from the participants was based on Dorsey's Old Dominion University study from 2006. The study was comprised of questions using a five point Likert scale survey. It started with general questions to gain background information on the participants as well their interests pertaining to the fashion industry.

The Likert scale questions were based on the study's research goals. Each question dealt with a participant's feelings and would have them choose an answer between *strongly agree*, *agree*, *undecided*, *disagree*, and, *strongly disagree*. Following these questions were open-ended questions. These gave the participant a chance to express themselves and share information that was not gathered in the Likert questions. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In order to reach the population, the graduates' contact information, addresses, and email addresses were collected from the Old Dominion University Alumni Center. The surveys were distributed between June and August 2012. The answers to the survey were collected through an online program called Survey Monkey. The link to the survey was sent in an email along with the cover letter in the body of the email. In the cover letter, the purpose of the questionnaire and why it was important to gain their feedback was stated. After sending an initial email, and a follow-up email, 52 alumni were asked to participate through Facebook. Twenty alumni phone numbers were found via white pages and were contacted via telephone. Please see Appendix B and C for a copy of the cover letter and follow-up email.

STATYSTICAL ANALYSIS

After the surveys were returned, the data were analyzed to produce findings. In order to find the average response of each question, the mean for each question was tabulated. To analyze the open-ended questions, the researcher notated which responses were the most common among the participants. The frequency was reported.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the methods and procedures used to gather information about graduate's feelings toward the fashion merchandising program were discussed. The population was described and demographics were listed. Chapter III also explained the instrument design, the survey, and the methods that were used to gather information. In Chapter IV, the answers to the survey questions will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and feelings of graduates of Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program between the years of 2007 and 2011. This was in order to determine if the program is properly preparing its students for an entry-level career in the fashion industry. In this chapter data collected will be presented and analyzed according to participants' answers to the online survey.

DATA COLLECTED

Of the 136 alumni emailed, there were only 19 participants to respond at first. This made up only 13.9% of the population. About three weeks after the initial email, a follow-up email was sent out to 136 alumni and from that, only one additional participant responded to the survey. After contacting available alumni through a social networking site, Facebook, another 23 (43 in total) participated in the study. This was 32% of the population. In addition to this, 20 alumni were phoned and asked to participate in the study. Of the 20, no information was gathered, due to either not electing to participate in the study or not being able to reach alumni from the phone number retrieved. While 32% is not a fairly high response rate, it is quite normal when administering online surveys. However, for the findings of this study to be significant, 100 responses were needed.

Online surveys have a number of variables that ought to be considered when determining an effective response rate. Some of these variables include number of email addresses bounced, total number of questions, number of people opting out, length of invitation, number of reminders, and many more (Archer, 2008). According to Hamilton

(2009), an online survey analyst from Ipathia, Inc., the average response rate for an online survey is 32.52%. This was based on 199 survey with 523,790 invitations sent to potential respondents (Braun, 2009). The average survey response rate for a sample size of less than 1000 was 41.21% (Braun, 2009). However, these numbers are not significant. In 2008, a comparison was conducted between paper-based and online surveys in the *Journal of Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. It found that in general, most response rates to online surveys were much lower than paper-based responses (Nulty, 2008). When Nulty is describing “paper-based” surveys, he is referring to surveys administered face-to-face, instead of online. For this comparison, eight studies were evaluated, one for each paper-based and online. The average response rate to paper-based surveys was 56%, while the average response rate for online was 33% (Nulty, 2008).

The study consisted of 16 questions with three different formats. The formats were multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The multiple choice questions were used to determine specific demographics from the participants, like their employment status and year of which they graduated the program. For questions 6-10, these were written in the Likert scale format, so participants could choose which answer best reflected their feelings towards the program. The Likert scale was scored using numbers 1-5. Five represented Strongly Agreed, 4- Agreed, 3- Undecided, 2- Disagreed, and 1- Strongly Disagreed. The open-ended questions were summarized by explaining the answers that were given the most by the participants.

DATA ANALYSES

Research Objective 1: Evaluate the relevancy of courses and electives offered in the fashion merchandising program.

Survey Question 8 was used to answer this research objective. Question 8 stated, “I was able to choose from a variety of electives that were relatable to my career interests.” Three respondents (6.9%) strongly agreed that they were able to choose from a variety of electives that were relatable to their career interests. Twenty-two respondents (51.2%) agreed they were able to choose from a variety of electives relatable to their career choice. Six respondents (14.0%) were undecided as to whether there was a variety of electives available to choose from. Nine respondents (21.0%) disagreed that there was a variety of electives to choose from relatable to their career choice. Lastly, three respondents (6.9%) strongly disagreed that there was a variety of electives to choose from. The mean for this question was 3.30 which meant the population was undecided on whether or not they were able to choose from a variety of electives that were relatable to their career choice.

Research Objective 2: Determine if the courses are teaching skills for the specific fashion industry jobs.

Survey Questions 6, 7, and 13 were used to answer this research objective. Question 6 read, “Old Dominion University’s Fashion program helped prepare me for a career in the fashion industry.” Twenty-six of the respondents (60.5%) agreed that ODU’s fashion program helped prepare them for a career in the fashion industry. Five of the respondents (11.6%) felt undecided as to whether the program helped prepare them

for a career. Eight respondents (18.6%) disagreed that ODU's program helped prepare them for a career in the fashion industry and four more respondents (9.3%) strongly disagreed that ODU's fashion merchandising program helped prepare them for a career. The mean for this question is 3.14. This indicates the population was undecided as to whether or not the fashion program prepared them for a career in the fashion industry.

Question 7 stated, "The courses I took taught me sufficient knowledge I needed to know for my first fashion position". Three of the respondents (6.9%) strongly agreed that the courses they took taught them sufficient knowledge they needed to know for their first fashion position. Twenty-two of the respondents (51.2%) agreed that the courses they took taught the sufficient knowledge they needed to know for their first fashion position. Eleven of the respondents (25.6%) were undecided on whether or not the courses they took taught them sufficient enough knowledge for their first fashion position. Six of the respondents (14.0%) disagreed that the courses they took taught them sufficient knowledge, and one respondent (2.3%) strongly disagreed that the courses they took taught them sufficient knowledge for their first fashion position. The mean for this question was 3.47 which means the overall population was undecided on whether or not the courses taught them sufficient knowledge they needed to know for their first fashion position.

Question 13 was an open-form question which stated, "What were the most important skills and knowledge the program has taught you?" Thirty-eight of the participants responded to this question, while five participants skipped this question. Of the 38 responses, the most important skills and knowledge learned was customer service

(6), interviewing skills (5), merchandising math (12), time management (4), current trends (4), and networking skills (7).

Research Objective 3: Investigate the career management resources made available to fashion merchandising students in order to help them find internships, co-ops, and job opportunities.

To answer the research objective, the researcher used survey Questions 9, 10, and 12. Question 9 read, “There were resources in the career management center available for me to use when it came time to finding an internship.” Two respondents (4.7%) strongly agreed that there were resources in the career management center available to help them find an internship. Eight respondents (18.6%) agreed that there were resources in the career management center available to use when it came time to finding an internship. Thirteen respondents (30.2%) were undecided as to whether there were resources in the career management center for them to use when it came time to finding an internship. Eight respondents (18.6%) disagreed that there were resources in the career management center available to use when it came time to finding an internship. Twelve of the respondents (27.9%) strongly disagreed that there were resources available to use in the career management center when it came time to finding an internship. The mean for this question was 2.53 which indicated that the population again was uncertain that there were resources in the career management center available for use when it came time to finding an internship.

Question 10 stated, “After graduation, the career management center was helpful in finding a job for me.” Thirteen of the respondents (30.2%) were undecided if the

career management center was helpful in finding a job for them after graduation. Fourteen of the respondents (32.6%) disagreed that after graduation, the career management center was helpful in finding a job for them. Sixteen respondents (37.2%) strongly disagreed that the career management center was helpful in finding a job for them once they graduated. None of the respondents chose Strongly Agree or Agree. The mean for this question was 1.93 which indicated the population disagreed that after graduation the career management center was helpful in finding a job for them.

Question 12 stated, “How did you obtain your internship between your junior and senior year?” Forty-two of the participants responded to this question. Four of the respondents were able to complete their internship with help from instructors in the fashion program. Other means of finding an internship were done through personal connections through family and friends (17), searching online (13), and using their current employers at the time (8).

Research Objective 4: Determine if graduates from 2007-2011 are employed or have been employed in fashion careers after graduation.

The following questions were used to answer this Research Objective, Questions 1, 2, 4, and 5. Question 1 stated, “In what year did you graduate from Old Dominion University?” Of the 43 respondents, five (11.9%) graduated in 2007. Six respondents (14.3%) graduated in 2011 and six (14.3%) graduated in 2010. Eleven respondents (26.2%) graduated in 2008, while fourteen (33.3%) graduated in 2009. One participant did not respond to this question.

Question 2 stated, “Are you currently employed in the fashion industry?”

Seventeen respondents (39.5%) answered yes and 26 respondents (60.5%) answered no.

Those who answered no were instructed to skip Question 3 and go to Question 4.

Question 3 asked, “If yes, what is your occupation?” Store manager, assistant buyer, and retail were each listed twice. Other answers given included the following:

office/marketing manager, cosmetologist, visual merchandiser, planning analyst, merchandise planner, retail analyst, and retail management.

Question 4 stated, “Were you employed in the fashion industry after graduation?”

Of the 26 respondents, ten (38.5%) answered yes, and sixteen respondents (61.5%) answered no.

Question 5 stated, “What was your desired occupation after pursuing your degree?” For this question participants were able to choose one or more occupations from a list of 10. The occupations included in this question were Assistant Buyer, Buyer, Boutique Owner, Fashion Coordinator, Fashion Designer, Merchandiser, Fashion Marketing, Retail Assistant Manager/Store Manager, Stylist, Visual Merchandiser, and Other. The occupation that was chosen the most was Assistant Buyer/Buyer. This had a response rate of 22 which was equal to more than 50% of the population. Eighteen participants (41.8%) chose Merchandiser, and 15 (34.8%) chose Visual Merchandiser. Stylist was chosen by nine participants (20.9%), and Fashion Marketing was chosen by six participants (13.9%). The occupations that were chosen the least were Boutique Owner, Fashion Coordinator, and Fashion Designer. Boutique Owner and Fashion Coordinator both were chosen six times. Fashion Designer was chosen three times.

Please refer to Table 1 for a list of occupations and the number of times they were chosen.

Table 1

Desired Occupations

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Response Percent</u>
Assistant Buyer	22	51.2%
Boutique Owner	6	14.0%
Fashion Coordinator	6	14.0%
Designer	3	6.9%
Merchandiser	18	41.9%
Fashion Marketing	6	14.0%
Retail Assistant Manager/Store Manager	5	11.6%
Stylist	9	20.9%
Visual Merchandiser	15	34.9%
Other	5	11.6%

Research Objective 5: Determine recommendations that need to be made to improve the fashion merchandising program so graduates are prepared for careers.

This Research Objective was addressed through Questions 14, 15, and 11.

Question 14 read, “What do you feel were the strengths of the program?” Thirty-five participants responded to this question and three skipped this question. According to the participants, the strengths of the program were as follows:

-The fashion marketing department (2)

-The variety of courses (6)

- “Real life” projects (creating a business plan) (5)
- Approachable instructors and relationship between instructors and students (9)
- Retail math courses (1)
- Specialized classes (buying, visual merchandising, study abroad) (3)
- Small classes (2)
- How involved the professors were in the program (4)
- Classes were well organized (2)
- Capstone project (1)

Question 15 stated, “What do you feel were the weaknesses of the program?” Of the 38 respondents, only 34 answered this question and four did not answer this question.

According to the respondents the weaknesses were as follows:

- Not enough emphasis on practical careers (6)
- Retail math and buying courses not offered closer to graduation (1)
- Classes were not hands-on (3)
- Not enough visits to stores or trips to meet with designers and executives in the business (3)
- Repeated information in classes (2)
- Not enough opportunities for internships (7)
- Not enough instructors or experienced instructors (4)
- Availability of the specialized classes (4)
- Needs more specific majors and classes for pinpointed fashion (2)
- Not enough resources for students, i.e., sewing machines (1)
- Lack of technology (1)

Question 16 read, “Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the program concerning curriculum, resources, and/or etcetera?” Thirty-five respondents provided suggestions for improvement of ODU’s fashion merchandising program, while five did not provide any feedback. Improvements suggested were as follows:

- More significant curriculum (4)
- Specialized classes pertaining to various careers in fashion (3)
- More retail based classes (3)
- More connections with the career management center (6)
- Supply packages for various classes where creating outfits and trend/mood boards are part of the curriculum (1)
- Discuss purchase orders (1)
- Have seminars on networking and communication (2)
- Expansion of the program (3)
- Make Las Vegas trip mandatory (1)
- Expand field trips to Atlanta, for the Atlantas Mart (1)
- Non-fashion related classes are not needed (1)
- Develop more connections with bigger cities and companies for the purposes of internships and jobs (4)
- Keeping a working relationship with NEXCOM (3)
- More electives need to be offered (5)

Question 11 was not created for any specific research objective. It was created to understand how graduates felt toward the program.

Question 11 stated, “I have positive feelings towards Old Dominion University’s Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum.” Nine respondents (20.9%) strongly agree that they had positive feelings towards ODU’s Fashion Merchandising program. Twenty-two respondents (51.2%) agree that they had positive feelings towards ODU’s Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum. Seven respondents (16.3%) were undecided as to whether or not they had positive feelings towards ODU’s Fashion Merchandising program. Five of the respondents (11.6%) strongly disagreed that they had positive feelings towards ODU’s Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum. The mean of this statement was 3.76 which indicated that the population agreed they had positive feelings towards Old Dominion University’s Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum.

SUMMARY

In this chapter the participants’ answers to the survey were provided. Of the 136 alumni who were contacted and asked to take part in the survey, only 43 responded. In this 32% response rate, the majority graduated in 2009 and over half were currently not employed in the fashion industry. While many do not feel that they received help from the career management center to find a job or an internship, they do feel like the curriculum is substantial, yet could be improved. In Chapter V, a summary of the findings will be reported. Once the findings are reported, the researcher will present conclusions and recommendations. Recommendations will be determined based upon respondent’s answers to the questions in the survey.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of Chapter V is to summarize the research that was done as well as report the findings collected from the survey. Each of the research objectives will be reexamined with findings provided from Chapter IV. The researcher then proposed recommendations based on the research objectives in order to improve the Fashion Merchandising Program at Old Dominion University.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising Program on preparing students to enter the fashion industry as properly prepared employees. The purpose of this study was to acquire information about employment of students post graduation and make suggestions for improvement of the program. This study was completed to answer the following research objectives:

RO₁: Evaluate the relevancy of courses and electives offered in the fashion merchandising program.

RO₂: Determine if the courses are teaching skills that are needed for the specific fashion industry jobs.

RO₃: Investigate the career management resources made available to fashion merchandising students in order to assist them to locate internships, co-ops, and job opportunities.

RO₄: Determine if graduates were employed or had been employed in fashion careers after graduation.

RO₅: Determine recommendations that need to be made to the fashion merchandising program to improve the career readiness of its graduates.

This study was also based on three limitations which were as follows:

1. This study was limited to graduating students in fashion merchandising at Old Dominion University from 2007-2011.
2. The study was conducted during summer 2012.
3. The intent of the research was to determine the employment of graduates from the Old Dominion program and the skills they identified were used in this career pathway.

The study was undertaken with graduates of the fashion merchandising program between the years of 2007 and 2011. The survey was sent to 136 alumni and 43 of those alumni (32%) responded.

The survey was composed of a total of 16 questions, both open- and close-ended. Six of the questions were created in a Likert Scale format in order to measure participant's feelings towards the program. The survey also included open-ended questions, so participants were able to express their opinions and provide recommendations for the program. The survey was initially sent out as an electronic link to all alumni. Included in the email was a cover letter explaining the study. The participants were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their identity would be anonymous. Follow-ups to the survey were made by email with an

electronic link attached. The follow-up also explained the purpose of the study and informing participants that their participation was completely voluntary and anonymous.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study are based on findings from the survey and will represent 32% of the population. To be significant, 100 responses were required. In this section each research objective will be listed with conclusions drawn based on the mean score from the Likert-scaled questions and similarities and differences in answers to the open-ended questions.

Research Objective 1, Evaluate the relevancy of courses and electives offered in the fashion merchandising program. It was determined through Question 8 that the population agreed that they were able to choose from a variety of electives that were relatable to their career choice. The mean of this question was 3.30.

Question 11, which stated, “I have positive feelings towards Old Dominion University’s Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum”, received a mean of 3.76. This indicated that the population agreed that they had positive feelings towards Old Dominion University’s Fashion Merchandising program. In conclusion to Research Objective 1, the courses and electives offered in the fashion merchandising program were relevant to the fashion industry.

Research Objective 2, Determine if the courses are teaching skills that are needed for the specific fashion industry jobs. Question 6, “Old Dominion University’s Fashion program helped prepare me for a career in the fashion industry”, received a mean of 3.13

which showed the respondents were undecided as to whether or not ODU's fashion merchandising program helped prepare them for a career in the fashion industry.

It was found through Question 7, "The courses I took taught me sufficient knowledge I needed to know for my first fashion position" the majority of respondents agreed with this statement. This was shown through the mean of 3.47. In conclusion, the participants felt unsure if the courses and electives they took taught them sufficient knowledge for their first fashion position, and they were unsure if the program as a whole prepared them for a career in the fashion industry.

Research Objective 3 read, "Investigate the career management resources made available to fashion merchandising students in order to help them to find internships, co-ops, and job opportunities. Question 9, "There were resources in the career management center available for me to use when it came time to finding an internship" received a mean of 2.53. It indicated that the population was uncertain as to whether or not sufficient resources were available in the Career Management Center when it came time to finding an internship.

Question 10, "After graduation, the Career Management Center was helpful in finding a job for me", received a mean of 1.93. This indicated that the population disagreed that the Career Management Center was helpful in finding a job for them after graduation. In conclusion to Research Objective 3, there were not enough resources made available to fashion merchandising students to assist them to locate internships, co-ops, and job opportunities according to answers given in Questions 9 and 10.

Research Objective 4, Determine if graduates are employed or have been employed in fashion careers after graduation. Of the 43 respondents, 17 (39.5%) were

currently employed in the fashion industry. Of the 26 (60.5%) who were not currently employed in the fashion industry after graduation, ten (38.5%) were however employed in the fashion industry after graduation. Sixteen respondents (61.5%) are not and have never been employed in the fashion industry since graduating from ODU's fashion program. It was determined that 39.5% of the graduates from 2007-2011 were currently employed in the fashion industry and 60.5% of graduates were not currently employed. However, 38.5% of those not currently employed were working in the fashion industry at some point in time. Overall, 62.8% of the respondents are currently employed or were previously employed in the fashion industry following graduation.

Research Objective 5, Determine recommendations that need to be made to the fashion merchandising program to improve the career readiness of graduates. Question 16, "Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the program concerning, resources, and/or etcetera?" had thirty-eight participants (88.4%) respond to this question. Of the 38 participants, ten made a recommendation in reference to helping them find employment. Many graduates felt as if the program did not help enough when it came time to find internships and find careers after graduation. This was founded in Questions 9, 10, and 12. Seven respondents made reference to the expansion of the program. They felt as if the program should offer more pathways or clusters of courses within the fashion major to explore various fashion related careers. One respondent replied that the program should invest in more specialized classes, especially pertaining to retail math. Another respondent felt that the curriculum should rid classes that do not have anything to do with fashion like SEPS 400, *Instructional Systems Development*, and SEPS 402, *Instructional Methods in Occupational Studies*. They felt as if classes like

these did not help them in getting a job. Four respondents felt there was a lack of experienced teachers within the program and the program should invest in hiring teachers who have extensive experience within the industry before obtaining a teaching job. Other suggestions included make Old Dominion University more prominent among fashion schools and to expand the school trips to Atlanta and to make the Las Vega MAGIC trip mandatory for all students. In conclusion, many participants offered suggestions and recommendations that could be used to improve the fashion merchandising program. Of those made, the researcher drew four recommendations based off of the suggestions given.

RECCOMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the survey, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising program should consider expanding the curriculum so more careers in the fashion industry are explored in depth through the electives. The program should be structured into various specializations, so students may choose a career pathway that lets them learn extensive and significant knowledge pertinent to that career. Participants of the study were not sure if there were enough elective courses to choose from that related to their career interests.
2. The program should create relationships with well-known businesses in the area, such as NEXCOM, Nordstrom's, Dillard's, and the Coast Guard Exchange as well as local boutiques in order to provide students with

internships and opportunities to network and communicate with people in the industry. The program could work to develop standing internships where each year the companies allow a certain amount of students to intern during the fall and spring semesters. Creating these relationships with businesses outside of the Hampton Roads area would also be a plus to the program.

3. The program should work with the Career Management Center in order to create better resources for students to use when it comes to finding an internship and career upon graduation. Resources could include help with building a fashion portfolio, more opportunities listed on the Career Management Center website, and more fashion retailers attending the career fair. A major concern of participants was when it came time to finding a career, there were not many resources available through the Career Management Center.
4. Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program should offer more opportunities for networking through offering several trips to different fashion markets besides the Las Vegas trip and also hosting seminars with local fashion business owners to learn how and what they did to start their own business. For those who have an interest in owning their own business, they can gain insight and knowledge on how to establish their business.

REFERENCES

- Archer, T. (2008) Response rates to expect from web-based surveys and what to do about it. *Journal of Extension*, 46(3). Retrieved from: <http://www.joe.org/2008june/rb3.php>
- Bureau of Labor and Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2009). Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos023.htm>
- Bureau of Labor and Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2009). Clothing, accessories, and general merchandise managers. Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs022.htm>
- Chambers, J. (1986). A comparative study of desirable competencies of fashion merchandising students. Published dissertation. The University of Alabama.
- College Board, College Search. (2012). Retrieved from: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>
- Dorsey, A. (2005). A follow-up study of Old Dominion University fashion graduates. Unpublished research paper. Old Dominion University.
- Duncan, D. (2008). The adequacy of response rates to online and paper surveys: what can be done? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 33. Retrieved from: <http://www.uaf.edu/files/uafgov/fsadmin-nulty5-19-10.pdf>
- Ferguson. (2007). *Careers in focus: Fashion, Third edition*. New York: Infobase Publishing.

Hamilton, M. (2009). Online survey response rates and times. Retrieved from:

[http://supersurvey.com/papers/
supersurvey_white_paper_response_rates.pdf](http://supersurvey.com/papers/supersurvey_white_paper_response_rates.pdf)

Neal, E. (1981). *Effectiveness of undergraduate fashion merchandising programs relative to professional preparation*. Unpublished dissertation. Texas Women's University.

Office of Academic Affairs. (2012). *Old Dominion University catalog 2011-2012*. Norfolk, VA.

Shanley, D. (1988). An evaluation of the effectiveness of the fashion merchandising four year degree program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Unpublished Thesis. University Of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

Stone, E. (1987). *Fashion buying*. New York: Mc-Graw-Hill, Inc.

Tuntland, C. (1987). Adequacy of career training for fashion merchandising majors. Unpublished thesis. California State University.

Old Dominion University Undergraduate Fashion Program. (2011). Retrieved from: <http://education.odu.edu/ots/acadmics/undergrad/fashion.html>

Vogt, P. (2007). *Career opportunities in the fashion industry*. New York: CWL Publishing.

APPENDIX A

Fashion Merchandising Program Follow-Up Study 2007-2011

Purpose: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Old Dominion University Fashion Merchandising Program in preparing students to enter the fashion industry as properly prepared employees.

Directions: Please check the box that best applies:

1. In what year did you graduate from Old Dominion University?

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011

2. Are you currently employed in the fashion industry? If no, skip to Question 4.

YES NO

3. If yes, what is your occupation? _____

4. If no, were you employed in the fashion industry after graduation?

YES NO

5. Please place an "X" to represent what your desired occupation was after you pursued your degree:

<input type="checkbox"/>	ASSISTANT BUYER/BUYER	<input type="checkbox"/>	MERCHANDISER
<input type="checkbox"/>	BOUTIQUE OWNER	<input type="checkbox"/>	RETAIL ASST. MANAGER/ STORE MANAGER
<input type="checkbox"/>	COORDINATOR	<input type="checkbox"/>	STYLIST
<input type="checkbox"/>	DESIGNER	<input type="checkbox"/>	VISUAL MERCHANDISER
<input type="checkbox"/>	FASHION MARKETING	<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER

Please answer the following questions by circling the answer that best describes your feelings. SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, U= Undecided, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree.

6. Old Dominion University fashion program helped prepare me for a career in the fashion industry.

SA A U D SD

7. The courses I took taught me sufficient knowledge needed to know for my first fashion position.

SA A U D SD

8. I was able to choose from a variety of electives that were relatable to my career interests.

SA A U D SD

9. There were resources in the career management center available for me to use when it came time to finding an internship.

SA A U D SD

10. After graduation, the career management center helpful in finding a job for me.

SA A U D SD

11. I have positive feelings towards Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising program in regards to its curriculum.

SA A U D SD

APPENDIX B

June 21, 2012

Dear Fashion Merchandising Alumni,

The purpose of this study is to determine if Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising Program is properly preparing graduates for initial employment in the fashion industry. The researcher would like to gain insight on how the program has affected the program graduates. To collect data to answer this question, a survey is being conducted.

The surveys are brief questions that will collect information about you, your status, and feelings toward the program. Your information will be kept confidential. If you complete and return this survey, you are authorizing your participation. Your participation is voluntary and there is little risk to for participating in this study.

As a graduate of this program, your knowledge and experience will help to improve the current curriculum and its resources. By detailing how the program helped prepare you for your career will in turn help make changes or improvements based on past students' inputs. By completing this survey, you will be giving the program insight to how its students are benefiting from the program.

Please complete the link to the survey provided in this email. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please feel free to contact me at 757-615-9666 or cmart031@odu.edu.

Sincerely,

Christie S. Martin
M.S. Candidate

John M. Ritz
Faculty

APPENDIX C

July 19, 2012

Dear Fashion Merchandising Alumni,

Your help is needed in gathering information about your experience in Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising Program. In order to make adequate recommendations for the program we need as much participation as possible. The purpose of this study is to determine if Old Dominion University's Fashion Merchandising Program is properly preparing students for initial employment. All it takes is a few minutes of your time to answer a brief survey regarding the program. If you have already participated in this study, your help is appreciated and you may disregard this email.

The surveys are brief questions that will collect information about you, your status, and feelings toward the program. Your information will be kept confidential. If you complete and return this survey, you are authorizing your participation. Your participation is voluntary and there is little risk to for participating in this study.

As a graduate of this program, your knowledge and experience will help to improve the current curriculum and its resources. By detailing how the program helped prepare you for your career will in turn help make changes or improvements based on past students' inputs. By completing this survey, you will be giving the program insight to how its students are benefiting from the program.

Please complete the link to the survey provided in this email. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please feel free to contact me at 757-615-9666 or cmart031@odu.edu.

Sincerely,

Christie S. Martin
M.S. Candidate

John M. Ritz
Faculty