

5-2012

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## Recommended Citation

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**The Career Closet Upcycling Program: A Business Plan**

**by**

**Brian McCaster**

**Advisor: Heather Sprandel**

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of  
Science in International Business.**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

**May 11, 2012**

## **Executive Summary**

In 2012, the average person living in the United States throws away 70 pounds of clothing, shoes and other household textiles each year. This textile waste goes into landfills where it makes up 10% of all the waste there (<http://www.sustainuclimbing.com/national-collegiate-clothing-drive-collects-16-tons-of-clothing/>). A lack of capacity and water contamination are two problems that are forcing landfills to close, and reducing the waste that goes to these landfills is a very important option to consider.

The Career Closet Upcycling Program is one solution to the waste problem. Through this program, the Walton College Career Center partners with the Apparel Studies Department to offer the Career Closet Upcycling Program in order to change articles of clothing that are out of style and without value into products that are both desirable and marketable. The most important element of the Career Closet Upcycling Program, however, is to give University of Arkansas students an experiential and educational business opportunity.

The market that the program will service is made up of Leadership Walton Students and Apparel Studies students. The primary goal of this program is to create an educational experience and a lesson in sustainability for these students. No money will change hands in the “sale” of these products to these students. Instead, a merit-based system will be in place to reward students for their work with the program and for other professional development opportunities of which they have taken advantage. By way of Blackboard, students will be able to submit activities for revision and then receive a number of Career Closet Credits toward the “purchase” of an upcycled product of their choice.

Clothing that cannot be donated will be transported to the Apparel Studies department to be upcycled. Leadership Walton students will be responsible for activities such as sorting and collecting these materials in the Career Closet. The products will then be manufactured by Apparel Studies students. This production process will be done in the form of a class project led by instructor and local business owner Ashley Donell.

This program presently incurs no cost at all. However, the vision for the Career Closet Upcycling Program will be a competitive one. In the future, the organization of a nationally recognized competition will cost an estimated \$26,845. However, we will offset some of this cost through registration fees.

## **Literature Review**

Municipal Solid Waste has become an increasingly important issue in our nation. MSW is made up of all the things which we use on a daily basis and then discard. In 2010, it was reported that Americans generated about 250 million tons of trash while only recycling and composting just over 85 million tons of this material. This represents a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 186 million metric tons, but there is room for improvement. One entity in the business of gauging the successful management of all of this waste is The Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has gathered data over the course of more than 30 years which documents where we stand as a nation. “On average, we recycled and composted 1.51 pounds out of our individual waste generation of 4.43 pounds per person per day” ([http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw\\_2010\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw_2010_factsheet.pdf)).

The EPA organizes this waste into different categories for analysis. The largest component is made up of organic materials such as paper, food scraps and yard trimmings. Paper represents the largest percentage at 28.5%. Then yard trimmings, plastics, metals, rubber, leather and textiles, wood, and finally glass make up the other specified areas of waste from the greatest to the least percentage. Other miscellaneous materials make up approximately 3% of MSW generated in 2010.

In 2009, Earth 911 conducted a study to find the top recycling states and recycled products. California was the top state, and computers were the top recycled product. After computers, batteries, televisions, paint, aluminum cans, used motor oil, compact fluorescent light bulbs, glass, fluorescent lamps and then Christmas trees were the next most recycled (<http://earth911.com/news/2010/02/08/weve-found-the-most-recycled-material-of-2009/>).

The data available on the amount of waste is abundant; however the management of this waste is the next important question and challenge for Americans to deal with currently. The Annenberg Foundation presents some interesting views on how waste can be managed. Landfills are one common method, but many of them have to be closed eventually for either or both a lack of capacity or groundwater contamination. This contamination can be expensive or impossible to reverse. Burning is another solution that could potentially cause harm to the environment. The most obvious way to reduce waste is to reduce the production of it. Throwing things out is how they accumulate in landfills and in other places where waste does not belong (<http://www.learner.org/interactives/garbage/solidwaste.html>).

For many, recycling is the first option that comes to mind when deal with waste. One way of reducing waste is to use less packaging. Paper and plastics account for one third of the garbage that is sent to landfills. Minimal packaging for products is one way that businesses can do their part for the environment. A number of businesses have been capitalizing on the opportunities inherent to reducing, reusing and recycling. The fact of the matter is that waste takes up space, and the companies listed in the following paragraph have found innovative ways to conserve resources.

As stated above, textiles are another form of solid waste making up 8.4% of MSW along with rubber and leather. In 2012, the Chairman for the Council for Textile Recycling said that the average person in the U.S. discards 70 pounds of old clothing, shoes and other household textiles into landfills each year. He also notes that this material is one of the most recyclable ([http://www.textileworld.com/Articles/2012/January/Council\\_For\\_Textile\\_Recycling\\_Promotes\\_Apparel\\_Recycling.html](http://www.textileworld.com/Articles/2012/January/Council_For_Textile_Recycling_Promotes_Apparel_Recycling.html)). In 2009, the U.S. generated 25 billion pounds of textile every year. This number includes clothes and footwear as well as accessories, towels, bedding, drapery and much more. Despite the recyclability of these products, 85% is not recycled, and the amount generated is expected to grow to as large as 35.4 billion pounds by 2019 (<http://www.wearonaterecycle.org/about/issue.html>).

Upcycling is one way to deal with textile waste. The Dictionary of Sustainable Management defines upcycling as “the process of converting an industrial nutrient (material) into something of similar or greater value, in its second life. Aluminum and glass, for example, can usually be upcycled into the same quality of aluminum and glass as the original products” (<http://www.sustainabilitydictionary.com/upcycle/>). For example, one can transform plastic bags into a laptop case (<http://ocs.library.dal.ca/ojs/index.php/YAHS/article/viewFile/201/235>).

Another way to picture upcycling would be to note that one does not merely conserve the resources in the material but adds to their value through the course of recirculation. In 2002, the concept of “upcycling” became popular when used in the publication called *Cradle-to-Cradle* by

William McDonough and Michael Braungart. In this seminal book, paper and rice husks were “upcycled” into more valuable products. The paper was made into a higher-grade product through a technical process that could be called “material upcycling”. The rice husks were turned from non combustible packing material into naturally fire retardant building material. This can be called “design-led upcycling” ([http://tedresearch.polimekanos.com/media/files/PROJECT\\_REPORT\\_2011.pdf](http://tedresearch.polimekanos.com/media/files/PROJECT_REPORT_2011.pdf)).

As mentioned above, many companies have used the concept of upcycling to reduce waste and thus lower costs. For instance, grain processors often burn husks and stems in order to power their plants (<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-upcycling.htm>). Other for-profit firms are using this efficient concept in their own business models. One company in the United Kingdom has made this practice their entire business strategy, “Worn Again works with large companies to upcycle their existing textiles waste into new products while developing and integrating closed loop textiles solutions for the future” (<http://www.wornagain.co.uk/pages/our-story-2>). Worn Again has even partnered with familiar firms like McDonald’s UK to create the first closed loop corporate uniform that will clothe 85,000 staff members by the 2012 Olympics in London. Uniforms will be collected in the restaurants, reprocessed into raw materials and turned back into uniforms as part of the “closed loop” system. In July 2011, Worn Again launched a new product which was made in partnership with Eurostar Train Managers. Using decommissioned uniforms, special bags were made specifically for the train managers of Eurostar. In the world of textiles, upcycling has become a profitable way to reduce one type of waste in the world. However, there is an entire market that can be tapped in order to further impact the environment for the better.

One company which is closer to home has utilized the realm of higher education in order to encourage textile waste reduction is SustainU. SustainU is a producer of high performance clothing that is made completely from recycled materials and is manufactured in the United States. SustainU hosts a campaign every year called “oneSHIRT”. “OneSHIRT” is a clothing drive for clothing that will be reused or recycled. Through partnerships with more than 90 universities and colleges, and with the help of over 1,300 student volunteers, nearly 32,000 pounds – approximately 16 tons – of clothing has been received at SustainU through donations. Chris Yura, CEO of SustainU, made the following statement about the campaign, “The results of oneSHIRT were more than we ever could have imagined. Its success is a testament to all the hard work from everyone involved. In 2010, our first year of the initiative, we collected 1,300 pounds, so this year’s result blew away our expectations”. SustainU creates its apparel in Raleigh, North Carolina, out of recycled cotton, post-industrial textile waste and even post-consumer plastic bottles. Yura has his own way of stating the mission of the firm - “By using recycled materials and clothing to make high quality fabrics for new apparel, we can have a positive impact on the environment. By changing the way we think about clothes, we can change the world” (<http://www.sustainuclimbing.com/national-collegiate-clothing-drive-collects-16-tons-of-clothing/>).

For years, waste reduction has helped not only the environment but the bottom line of many firms that employ many across the nation. These firms have taken their missions and perpetuated that passion on universities across the U.S. Textiles are only one form of waste that is filling the finite amount of space available on our planet. Upcycling that fabric is one way to creating a better future for coming generations. This is part of the mission of the Career Closet Upcycling Program. Students will acquire a wealth of knowledge in both business practices and environmental sustainability. This program will also aid in the reduction of textile waste in our

campus and community. This model for change has proven effective in businesses and can be effective in institutions of higher education as well.

## **Business Description and Vision**

### **Mission Statement**

The Sam M. Walton College of Business Career Closet Upcycling Program will provide students with experiential education opportunities by leveraging Walton College Career Closet overstock inventory donations, primarily textiles, and converting them into marketable, repurposed items to be sold in an ecommerce, retail environment.

### **Vision**

With upcycling as the vehicle, our vision is that students will be driven, through this startup business project, to deepen their knowledge of free enterprise and to put that knowledge to use for the benefit of the environment.

### **Business Objectives**

1. To create an experiential educational opportunity that will immerse students in real world business applications, including product development and innovation, manufacturing, marketing, business management, financial analysis, ecommerce, logistics and sustainability.
2. To incorporate cross-functional teams to ensure rich diversity of product innovation that addresses environmental sustainability and has consumer appeal.
3. To benefit the environment through the use of repurposed materials.

### **Business Principles**

With the guidance from an interdepartmental group of project directors and faculty advisors, a program board of students from Leadership Walton and Apparel Studies will be responsible for the Sam M. Walton College of Business Career Closet Upcycling Program.

- Project Ownership: Walton College Career Center
- Project Directors: Heather Sprandel, Walton College Career Center Director  
Sara Yell, Walton College Career Center Manager of Special Programs
- Faculty Advisors: Kathleen R. Smith, Apparel Studies Instructor  
Claudia Mobley, Center for Retailing Excellence Director
- Program Board Members: Apparel Studies Students  
Leadership Walton Participants

### **Brief History of the Business**

The Career Closet opened its doors to Walton College students in August 2010 as a resource of upscale, gently used and free business casual and business professional attire. The

Career Closet was conceived when business professionals had no use for their business attire but had no desire to simply throw the clothes away.

Business students consistently asked Walton College Career Center staff for assistance in finding inexpensive business casual and professional attire. With the opening of the Willard J. Walker Hall and the generous donation of a space provided by the Graduate School of Business, the Walton College Career Closet was made possible. Timeless clothing pieces are donated to the Career Closet and offered, free of charge, to current business students. The Career Closet is located in room 420 of Willard J. Walker Hall.

## **Current Business**

The Career Closet is open every Tuesday (9-11am) and Wednesday (1-3pm). It is managed by the Walton College Career Center and is staffed primarily by Leadership Walton volunteers. As of March 2012, more than 1,000 students have visited the Career Closet, and the total amount of clothing donations has been valued at several thousand dollars. Currently enrolled Walton College students can visit the Career Closet and take up to 4 individual apparel items (i.e. 3 ties and 1 shirt, or 2 blouses, 1 skirt and a of pair shoes) per semester or 1 suit during an academic year. The clothes students take are theirs to keep, free of charge.

## **Donations**

Once a semester (fall, spring, summer), Leadership Walton students conduct a clothing drive to increase inventory for the Career Closet. The clothing drives focus on obtaining attire that is cleaned prior to donation, is of good to excellent quality and was purchased in the last five years, or is with current fashion. Donations are tax deductible.

## **Sam M. Walton College of Business Career Closet Upcycling Program Proposal**

As a result of the success of the Career Closet clothing drives, the Career Closet has an abundance of overstock inventory that can be repurposed, also known as upcycled. Upcycling can be defined as “a process in which disposable or discarded items are repurposed to make them valuable, useful, or simply aesthetically pleasing” (<http://www.etsy.com/shop/mydesignink/policy>). Upcycling is designed to work in opposition to consumer culture, encouraging people to think of new and innovative ways to use things, instead of simply buying new consumer goods. It also benefits the environment, by promoting reuse over discarding whenever possible (<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-upcycling.htm>).

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly important issue. Following its annual “oneSHIRT” clothing drive campaign, Sustain U, a clothing company which makes its products out of 100% recycled fabrics, recognized over 90 universities across the nation for their combined 32,000 pounds of donated clothing. The article which covers this event also makes the following statement: “Nationwide, approximately 68 pounds of clothing per person is thrown away every year, amounting to about 10 percent of all the waste in landfills today” (<http://www.sustainuclimbing.com/national-collegiate-clothing-drive-collects-16-tons-of-clothing/>). Sustain U is using the valuable resources in our nation’s universities and colleges to reduce waste in the apparel industry. We believe we can do the same. With the creativity and expertise of University of Arkansas students, donated clothes which, are unwanted and/or out of

style, will be converted into sellable products, including handbags, book bags, scarves, hats and more.

The educational piece of this project lies in the creation and marketing of these products through a collaborative effort primary between Sam M. Walton College of Business students and Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences Apparel Studies students. This upcycling educational business project will consist of a board made up of a group of both colleges' students who will organize, produce and market the upcycled products. Clothing drives will be the primary method of acquiring donated materials. Donated clothing will be reviewed and organized into two groups. Some clothing will be kept for the Career Closet, while the overstock will be used in the Career Closet Upcycling Project. The apparel studies students will participate in this project each semester by way of a class project for certain courses such as Introduction to Apparel Production and Quality Assessment. Leadership Walton students will act as the lead management group of the program. Possible additional partners might include Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), The Center of Retailing Excellence and The Sustainability Consortium. Each semester, the students who are members of this board will be responsible for the continued success of the program through the development and marketing of these upcycled productions.

The goal of the Upcycling Program is to use cross-campus collaboration between colleges to contribute to the University of Arkansas' mission of education.

## **Growth and Potential**

Within the first year of the project's launch, we hope to sell at least 20 upcycle items through the merit system and achieve campus-wide awareness of the program. In the future, the Upcycled Program board would explore entrance into a physical retail space which would greatly extend the project's reach, as well as developing an Upcycled Business Planning Competition for University of Arkansas students and other university teams invited from across the nation.

Providing experiential educational experiences to students is the primary goal of this project. Participating students will be able to deepen their understandings of several business operations including product innovation, marketing, finance, transportation and logistics, design and product manufacturing. As the project expands so will the competitiveness of each of the students involved.

The potential growth of this program also lies with the possibility of collaboration between different universities and colleges. Education of environmental sustainability and the promotion of new ways of addressing the problem have led us to ponder the future possibility of creating a nationwide competition. Different universities would compete based on the most innovative and sustainable solution to solid waste reduction in apparel and beyond.

## **Proposed Timeline**

September 2011 – Spring 2012: Business Plan Development

- Survey faculty and students in Apparel Studies and Leadership Walton to determine involvement possibilities. (See Appendix for notes on visits to classes and student organizations)

Spring/ Fall 2012: Pilot Project

- Form board of students, finalize product line and begin production  
Spring 2013: Full Program Launch
- Raise awareness of the program around campus and community  
Fall 2013: Possible Competition

## **Definition of the Market**

### **Industry and Outlook**

The Career Closet is beneficial to current business students, and now it is time to capitalize on the success of the Career Closet and the Closet's resources. All Walton College business students can visit the Closet to obtain gently used business attire at no charge. The Career Closet Upcycling Program will broaden University of Arkansas students' educational experience by providing them with an experiential education opportunity and the ability to make an impact and learn about sustainability. Not all of the donations to the Closet are able to be given away to students, and some of the clothing is simply too out of style to be beneficial in the current job market. The Career Closet Upcycling Program seeks to reduce the amount of waste that could result from the disposal of this unwanted clothing. Therefore, in an effort to combine this environmental vision with the resources provided by clothing and students, The Career Closet Upcycling Program will expand its operations to include product development, production, retail and other business practices.

A group made up of both Leadership Walton and Apparel Studies students will unite to create a variety of products that can be marketed and earned by them.

### **Critical Needs of Market**

As waste reduction becomes a growing problem across the nation and the world, the Career Closet Upcycling Program realizes that in this problem lies an opportunity for a solution. Unwanted clothing will be transformed into wanted items for which customers are willing to pay. The market of environmentally conscious people is in need of new and innovative ways of reducing waste. Others, who may be as environmentally conscious, will enjoy the fashionable item produced by the creative students of the University of Arkansas. The needs for environmental sustainability and fashion are two drivers which encourage this initiative.

### **Target Market for Upcycling**

Our immediate target market is represented by Leadership Walton and Apparel Studies students. In the future, we hope to reach the entire University of Arkansas community. That community is comprised of students, staff, faculty, Northwest Arkansas community members as well as online shoppers.

## **Target Client Profile**

Presently, only Leadership Walton and Apparel Studies students will have access to the upcycled products. With the help of a merit-based system, which is further described below, these students will be rewarded for their efforts both in this project and as productive students.

## **Organization & Management**

First, clothing is donated to the Career Closet where they are sorted. Then, clothes that are not suitable for the Career Closet are sent to the Apparel Studies Department to be upcycled. Upcycled products will be produced by students in two sections of an Apparel Studies class instructed by Ashley Donell, a local business owner, each fall and spring semester. The organization of this production will be that of a class project which will be launched this Spring 2012 semester as a pilot. Ashley Donell provided the following description of this pilot project to her students who were tasked with manufacturing the products as a class project:

### **Spring 2012**

Introduction to Apparel Production

### **Project Dates**

First Draft Due: March 7<sup>th</sup>      2<sup>nd</sup> Draft Due: March 14<sup>th</sup>      Project Due: April 25<sup>th</sup>

### **Project Draft**

1. List of materials being used
  - a. Items such as elastic, buttons, zippers, interfacing etc. may be purchased. But, all fabric used must be from the garment provided.
2. Sketch of assortment (colored)
  - a. The assortment must contain 3 or more items which are trend relevant and represent the suggested items for each bag.
3. Word description of each item
  - a. Explain details about the items and how they will be constructed.

### **Project Assortment Information**

Each group will receive a bag of donated clothing which came from the Walton College Career Closet. This clothing will serve as the fabric for each group's assortment; however, additional notions such as buttons, zippers, elastic etc. may be purchased. For each bag there is a list of suggested items. This list must be followed to ensure variety and relevancy of the merchandise. Remember these items will be marketed to the University students thus they are your target market. Keeping them in mind you are tasked with designing and producing aesthetically pleasing and usable merchandise. Patterns may be used, but the internet may serve

as a better resource for ideas and instructions. With fabric being limited to the clothing provided, mock up with muslin is suggested.

### **Description of Products and Services**

Clothing will be upcycled into new clothing or accessories including, but not limited to, skirts, vests, headbands, pillows, ties and scarves.



(This student is putting the finishing touches on a skirt made from disassembled business attire)



(These two students are working on infinity scarves)

## Organization

The merchandise of the Career Closet Upcycling Program will be displayed online, in the Career Center and in the Career Closet, which is located in Willard J. Walker Hall. The day to day operations of Career Closet Upcycling Program will be handled through the Career Center with the help of student volunteers of Leadership Walton and the Apparel Studies Department. See the Organizational Chart and the Flow of Operations below in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively.

The organizational structure is as follows:

- Project Ownership: Walton College Career Center
- Project Directors:
  - Heather Sprandel

Heather Sprandel is currently the Director of the Sam M. Walton College Career Development Center at the University of Arkansas where she has worked for 13 years. She has also completed her Ed.D in Workforce Development at the University of Arkansas.

- Sara Yell

Sara Yell is Manager of Special Programs of the Walton College Career Center and also has a Master of Science in Operations Management (MSOM) from the University of Arkansas.

- Faculty Advisors
  - Kathleen R. Smith

Kathleen R. Smith is an Apparel Studies instructor in the Bumpers College School of Human Environmental Sciences specializing in areas of Fashion, Merchandising and Retailing, Computer Aided Design, 20th Century Historical Apparel and Industry Advisory Board.

- Claudia Mobley

Claudia Mobley is the Managing Director of the Center for Retailing Excellence and specializes in retailing, merchandising, retail operations and retail trends. She is also a Campus Expert in the Sam M. Walton College of Business Department of Marketing.

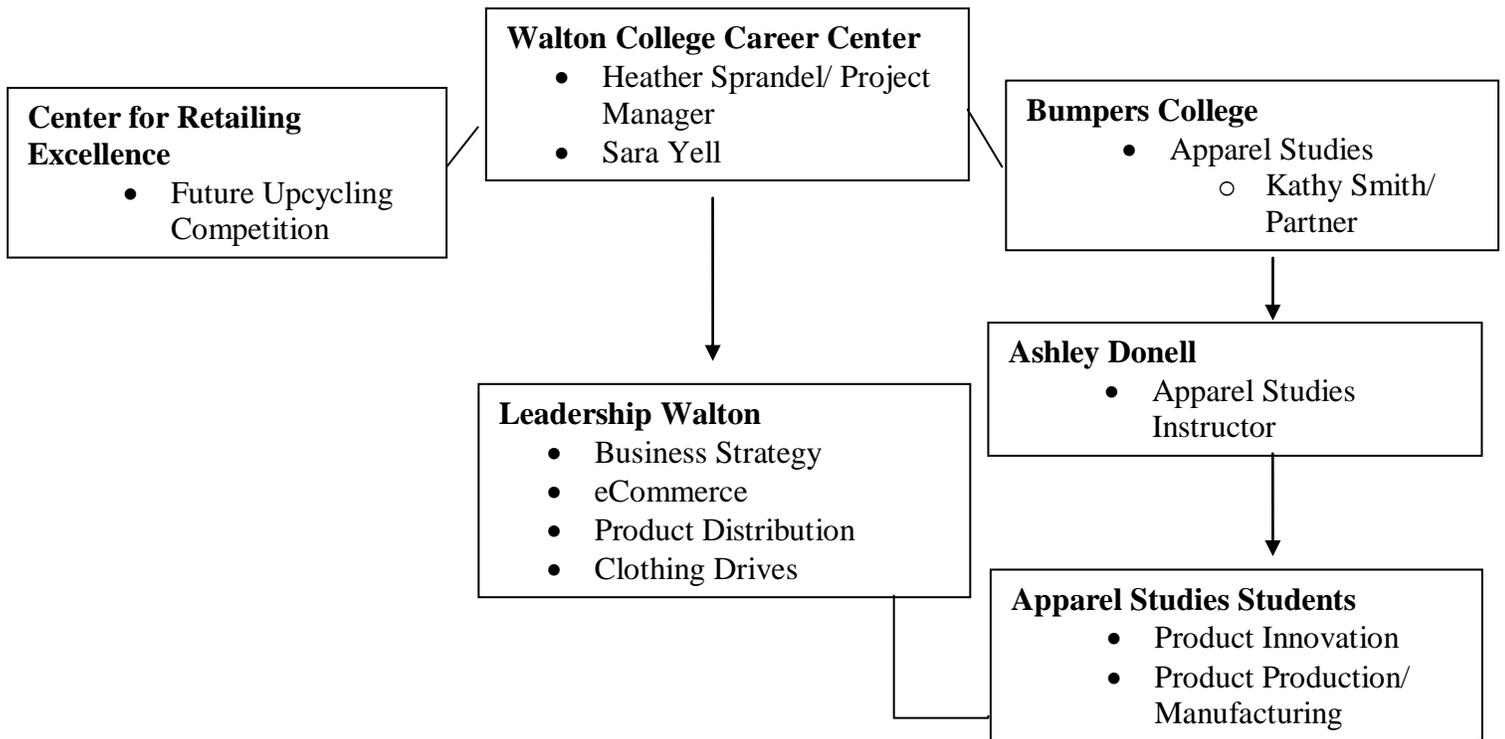
- Program Board Members
  - Apparel Studies Students

The Bumpers College incorporates certain elements such as Apparel Production, Fashion Merchandising, Computer Aided Design (CAD), Textiles, History & Contemporary Apparel and internship. These students use a variety of skills to produce an innovative assortment of upcycled products.

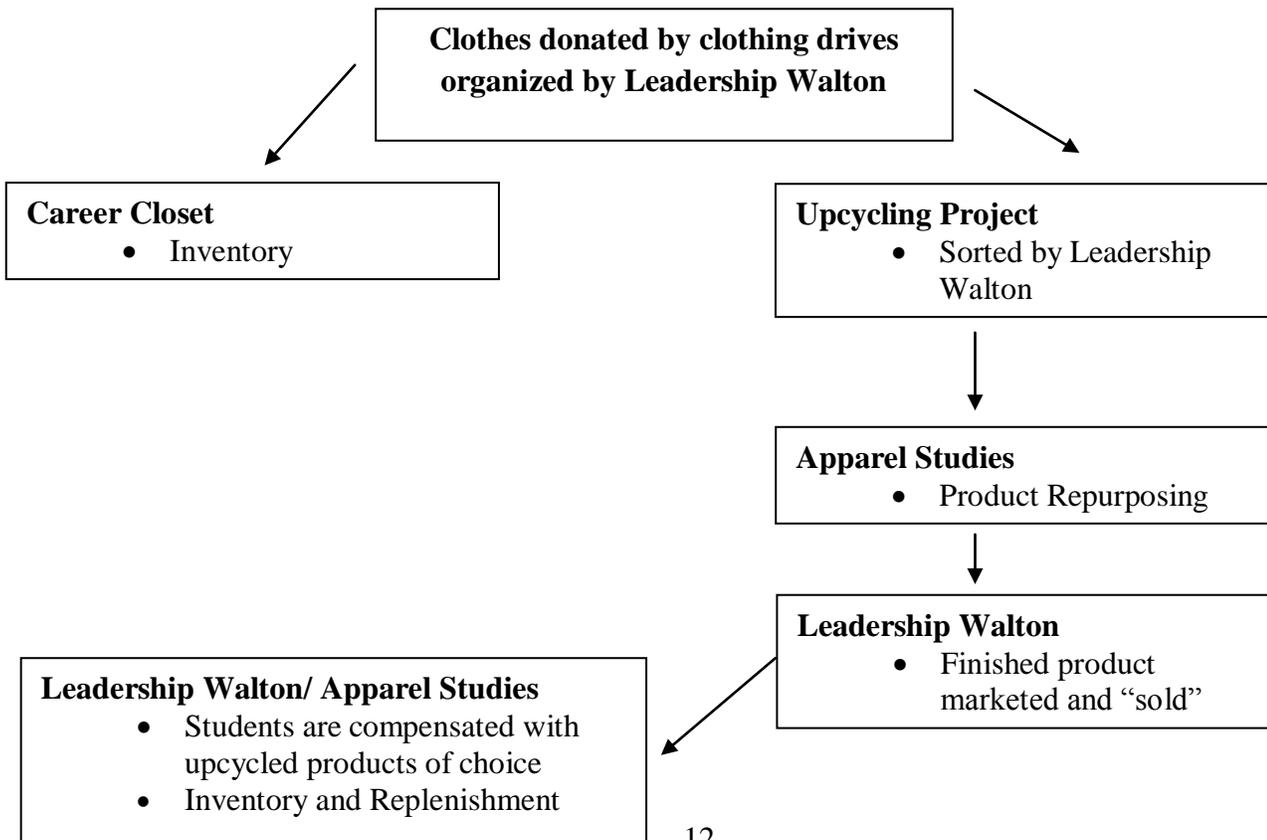
- Leadership Walton Participants

These scholars are part of a professional development program that provides both challenges and experiences that prepare them for a successful career.

**Organizational Chart (Figure 1)**



**Flow of Operations (Figure 2)**



## **Marketing & Sales Strategy**

The market that the Career Closet Upcycling Program hopes to reach immediately is made up of many different groups within the Fayetteville community. The largest of these groups are within the University of Arkansas as in-state students, out-of-state students and international students.

In the future we hope to extend the reach of our sustainable product to an audience that appreciates both a green and fashionable lifestyle. “Textile recycling companies earn profits of \$700 million every year by reselling 2 1/2 billion pounds of this waste. The majority, 35 percent, is sold as used clothing, while 33 percent is broken down into fibers for remanufacturing, 25 percent is turned into rags and wiping cloths and 7 percent goes into landfills” (<http://www.livestrong.com/article/148364-facts-about-recycling-clothes/>). We want to reach this wider market of people who consciously search for sustainable clothing in thrift stores and other places that have the same philosophy. The products made will attract people of many different tastes. Products like scarves, ties and bags are a common sight in this community. The philosophy of this program will add to the appeal of our original products.

Presently, getting the product to the customer will be as simple as gathering them up and bringing them across campus. All operations from production to sale will be located at the University of Arkansas.

## **Merit System**

Sale of the merchandise will be based not on cash but on merit. This non-profit operation seeks to invest in the success of the students at this university. In keeping with that mission, we will award Career Closet Credits to the other Leadership Walton and Apparel Studies students that show initiative through academics and extracurricular activities. When a student is awarded enough credits, then he or she can “buy” a product from the Career Closet Upcycling Program. We believe that this program will encourage students across campus to invest in their education while deepening their understanding of sustainability. Leadership Walton students will act as allocators for these credits as student submit them. The submitting student will sent the information for the activity he or she completes to one of the reviewing students. The reviewer will then confirm the validity of the activity and allocate the credit. The revision process will take place through Blackboard. This system provides the technology to track and monitor this system of credit-based commerce. Students will need to acquire 5 credits in order to buy one item. Opportunities to earn credits will be valued from 1 to 5 points. This program will be launched officially in Spring 2013.

## **Financial Management**

The Upcycling Program itself has no costs. The materials are donated by way of clothing drives, and the labor is free through Apparel Studies class projects and through Leadership Walton students who will handle certain aspects of the business such as building the website and marketing.

However, in the future, our vision is to use the Retail Sustainability Competition to bring this project more visibility and a deeper impact. A competition hosted by the Sam M. Walton College of Business Career Center's Career Closet Upcycling Project will require capital as estimated as the following:

- Graduate Assistant Salary to manage the competition for 15 months = \$12,000 and summer pay = \$4,445, total = \$16,445.
- Location Rental = \$2,000
- Marketing/Advertising = \$250
- Cash Prizes = \$5,000
- Judges' Meals = \$1,500
- Supplies = \$500
- Trophies = \$650
- Parking = \$500
  - Total Cost Estimate for Competition = \$26,845

Possible revenue generation will originate from charging each team or individual student \$250 for competition registration. We hope to have 10 to 15 teams participate producing \$2,500 to \$3,750 in revenue. Partnerships with other groups on and around campus, such as the Center for Retailing Excellence National Retail Federation Student Association, would help to curb some of these costs and extend the reach of the program.

## **Competition Description**

With environmental disasters, an economical crisis, mass production of many goods and overconsumption, the time has come to examine what is going into our trash bins. There are many different reasons to look more closely at what we throw away. In order to realize the impact we have as citizens on the environmental situation, let us question our habits and find out what choices we can make to change this impact. We should know for what our trash is used and why it ended up in the bin in the first place. This experimental project will be in place to challenge ourselves with making the worthless valuable. With time, we believe we can take existing knowledge and develop new techniques with unexpected materials to create a green economy.

A Green Economy can be defined as “an economy that results in improved human well-being and reduced inequalities over the long term, while not exposing future generations to significant environmental risks and ecological scarcities”

(<http://africa.unwto.org/en/event/seminar-how-sustainable-tourism-can-benefit-and-contribute-emerging-green-economy-africa>). In this day and age, being concerned about the environment is nothing new. The general public has accepted that we are standing at a crossroads, and in order for people to maintain their current standard of living, major changes will have to take place in how we do things like raising food, utilizing energy, consuming products and thinking about our waste.

Upcycling is a fresh concept and solution for the many environmental dilemmas the earth now faces. The idea of taking garbage and reimagining its significance is a really new idea. The materials are free and abundant while there are hypothetically no unhealthy side effects for the earth. Basically, upcycling is the practice of “taking something that is disposable and transforming it into something of greater use and value”

(<http://vintageclothing.about.com/od/glossary/g/upcycling.htm>). Upcycling refers to “reusing an object in a new way without degrading the material it is made from, as opposed to recycling which generally involves breaking down the original material and making it into something else, using more energy” (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/10/01/us-trends-upcycling-life-greenbiz-idUSTRE5903MN20091001?feedType=RSS>). Upcycling reduces the consumption of new raw materials when creating new products by using materials that already exist. This reduction in the use of new raw materials can result in a reduction of energy usage, air pollution, water pollution and even greenhouse gas emissions. In the end, “If upcycling is going to become mainstream, then the corporate world needs to see that it can be profitable”

(<http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/10/01/us-trends-upcycling-life-greenbiz-idUSTRE5903MN20091001?feedType=RSS>).

## **Retail Upcycling Competition**

One potential phase of this project would be to collaboratively create a nationally recognized collegiate student upcycling competition. Collaborative partners would include but not be limited to Leadership Walton, the University of Arkansas Chapter of the National Retail Federation Student Association and the University of Arkansas Apparel Studies Student Association.

The basic competition requirement of competing teams would be to create an upcycled product in one or more of these suggested categories: textiles, plastic, metal, and mixed materials. Competing teams could have any mix of majors and could be made up of undergraduate students, graduate students or both. Teams would submit an “Intent to Complete” form and would remit a registration fee of \$250. Competitors would be able to use any source, such as an established student organization, for the funding of this registration fee.

Judges for each competitive round would be solicited volunteers from academia, business and industry. Judging criteria would be centered around a rubric that focuses on the following suggested categories:

1. Creative design elements

2. Feasibility of production in either mass market retail or specialty market retail
3. Sales potential demonstrated by consumer insights and supported by projections
4. Innovative use of materials

Competition deliverables would include prototype products and a modified format business plan including:

1. Executive Summary
2. Product Summary including sources of materials to be upcycled
3. Market Analysis
4. Sales Projections

Each team would present a 15 minute product demonstration including details of their business plan. Winning teams would then be rewarded and recognized with cash prizes and trophies.

## **Appendix**

### **Research/ Survey Notes**

2/29/12: Visit to Apparel Studies class

With the help of Sara Yell, Brian McCaster explained the project to the students. Ashley Donell provided a handout to her class which described their role in manufacturing using the upcycled materials.

After the program was explained, Sara and Brian asked the class about how to market the products to students. Through this process, we discovered that the students liked the idea of the merit-based system for “buying” upcycled products.

4/5/12 and 4/10/12: Meeting with the NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION STUDENT ASSOCIATION (NRFSA)

Brian McCaster met with the leadership team where he explained the program and asked the group about the future of the project and how the team felt about a possible partnership in the future. During this meeting the members decided that the best format for a partnership would be a fundraiser. The idea works very well with the vision to turn this program into a nationally recognized competition.

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