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## Importance of Portfolio Building for University Students

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# Importance of Portfolio Building for University Students

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Zoë Lauer is an honors program May 2018 graduate with a major in Apparel Merchandising & Product Development and a minor in Journalism. Casandra Cox, the faculty mentor, is an Instructor in the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology program.

## Importance of portfolio building for students with creative majors

### *Meet the Student-Author*



**Zoe Lauer**

I am from Frisco, Texas and graduated from Wake-land High School in 2014. In May 2018, I graduated from the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences in the School of Human Environmental Sciences with a degree in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development and a minor in Journalism. I graduated Magna Cum Laude with a 3.78 GPA. I served on the Executive Council of Zeta Tau Alpha as Panhellenic Delegate. In the summer of 2016, I studied abroad in Milan, Italy at Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti. In August 2017, I went on a study tour to Las Vegas to see the MAGIC tradeshow, the largest tradeshow in the world. I interned at Riffraff in Fayetteville, Arkansas as a creative intern as well Mizzen+Main in Dallas as a marketing intern.

I am thankful for the help from my mentor, Casandra Cox, with my thesis. She was with me every step of the way from the creative process to research. I would also like to thank my committee members Stephanie Hubert, Lance Cheramie, and Dr. Laurie Apple.

### *Research at a Glance*

- Portfolio building is necessary for creative majors, including apparel merchandising and product development; graphic design; architecture; interior design; and elementary education, who want to enter into their industry.
- Quality photography and editing creates a more professional looking portfolio which is a necessity for creative employment.
- E-portfolios are becoming a staple for many universities and employers, with classes being taught specifically in e-portfolio building and sections of job applications specifically for attaching an e-portfolio link.



Zoe at Lake Como, Italy, during a study abroad summer 2016 trip, class weekend getaway.

# Importance of portfolio building for students with creative majors

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*Zoë Lauer\* and Casandra Cox†*

## Abstract

A portfolio showcases work samples that may include visual and auditory content. Portfolios are becoming a priority for graduates entering creative career fields. Electronic portfolios or e-portfolios are on the rise due to advancements in technology. These e-portfolios give students and graduates the ability to showcase and highlight specific attributes they have acquired inside and outside the classroom in one place. Electronic-portfolios give employers the opportunity to view a potential employment candidate's skills, experience, and creativity in one place. Portfolios and e-portfolios can also be used inside of the classroom to assign grades and determine how the curriculum is being used by students. This creative project provided portfolio work samples from a project-based upper level Apparel Merchandising and Product Development (AMPD) course. Photographs were taken during the Futuristic Floral Fashion Show in April 2017, which is an annual event of the Apparel Program of the University of Arkansas, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences to showcase the work of students. Photos were edited and distributed to students. It is recommended that final garment photography become a part of the AMPD program's annual fashion show because a photograph can showcase a student's abilities in a way words cannot. Early emphasis on portfolio building paired with formal portfolio building through coursework is essential for creative majors.

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\* Zoe Lauer is an honors program May 2018 graduate with a major in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development and a minor in Journalism.

† Casandra Cox, the faculty mentor, is an Instructor in the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology program.

## Introduction

Portfolio building has become a staple for creative majors wanting to enter into creative careers. Yao et al. (2008) define a portfolio as “a systematic and purposeful collection of work samples that document student achievement or progress over time”. Millennials are facing a higher unemployment rate than other generations, and need to differentiate themselves from other potential employees. One solution is to create online portfolios (Keist and Bruer, 2016). Portfolios are important for students entering creative career fields such as Apparel Merchandising and Product Development (AMPD).

The AMPD students gain jobs after graduation “through internship placements, career development center on-campus interviews, networking with AMPD advisory board, [and] networking with alums” (K. Smith, pers. comm., 2017). The graduate school and employment average placement rate is 95% for AMPD at the University of Arkansas (Career Development Center, 2017; AMPD, 2017). Career options for AMPD graduates include buying and merchandising, brand management, technical design, quality assurance, retail or wholesale management, textiles, product development, and computer-aided design (CAD) specialization (AMPD, 2017).

Ball et al. (2010) examined more than 3500 graduates from creative degree programs from 26 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Based on the study, “just over half the graduates (52%) felt their courses had prepared them very or fairly well for the world of work. Respondents would have liked a better appreciation of what creative employment would be like, improved understanding of client needs, training in IT/software, business skills and the practicalities of working freelance” (Ball et al., 2010). More than four out of five graduates had at one point in their college career participated in shows or exhibitions of their work, self or peer evaluations, teamwork, and teachings by experts in their field of study. The respondents rated most of their course activities as very useful. Respondents considered “Personal and Professional Development (PPD), teamwork and teaching by practitioners as the most useful in relation to their careers” (Ball et al., 2010).

According to Keist and Bruer (2016), the academic content that Apparel Merchandising majors have to get them ready for the industry includes the courses they have taken and how they apply them to the fashion industry, any class projects they may have had that could have been presented by PowerPoint presentations, Word documents, or photography and visual displays, as well as organization events or certification programs. Due to the skills acquired, graduates from creative degree programs placed themselves at the lead for commencing changes in

the creative jobs sector. Graduates who are able to adapt easily to changing situations and continue learning allow themselves to fit into modern creative careers (Ball et al., 2010). Due to an increase in competency-based curriculum for college students, portfolios, specifically e-portfolios, have grown in use for students in higher education (Ward and Moser, 2008). According to Rhodes (2011), e-portfolios not only allow professors to collect assigned student work, e-portfolios also allow students to present accomplishments outside of the classroom allowing university faculty and internship and career supervisors to assess the student or graduate’s accomplishments.

The creative industry, specifically in apparel, is a difficult industry in which to gain employment after graduation. Ball et al. (2010) found that when it comes to obtaining a career in fashion or in another creative industry, self-confidence and self-management were the most important skills for potential employees. Many apparel graduates gain entry into the fashion industry through unpaid internships or voluntary positions where they gain valuable experience that they cannot obtain in the classroom (Ball et al., 2010). Students share industry experiences “from internships and employment, writing samples, and links to personal blogs” to gain entry into a career in the industry (Keist and Bruer, 2016).

With technology advancing, many believe the best kind of portfolio for students to create is an electronic portfolio or an e-portfolio. Abrami and Barrett (2005) define an electronic portfolio as “a digital container capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, video and sound”. According to Miller and Morgaine (2009), a well-done e-portfolio is an amazing tool for universities. Electronic-portfolios accurately display student learning and promote deeper learning and education. “Forty percent of campuses of all types – large and small, public and private, research and liberal arts, and community colleges—recently reported using student e-portfolios” (Rhodes, 2011).

Portfolios can be shared with human resource managers who can view work samples relating to the position in one place. Universities can also use portfolios to assess their students learning and reflection through the student’s work (Ward and Moser, 2008). “Portfolios are viewed as a way of determining not just how much students know, but also how they are able to apply and use what they know” (Whitworth et al., 2011). According to Black and Cloud (2009), a portfolio serves a creative student the same way a thesis proposal serves a research student. An online portfolio heightens the information from a student’s resume. Unlike a resume, a student’s personality, skills, and experience are presented creatively in an online portfolio (Keist and Bruer, 2016).

Keist and Bruer (2016) suggest the following for qual-

ity portfolios: keeping a professional URL using one's full name, keep the portfolio simple and readable, use a monochromatic color scheme and an easy-to-read, professional font. Additionally, include pictures of your work, update constantly, connect your email and social media accounts, avoid using large group photos, and keep everything appropriate and professional (Keist and Bruer, 2016). An apparel merchandising student's portfolio may include a student's biography, a description of a concept or theme, photographs or designs, garments, exhibitions, and projects (Black and Cloud, 2009). Ward and Moser (2008) believe "students can create e-portfolio artifacts from video/audio streaming of their presentations, examples of their writing, or demonstrated competencies in specific professional/regulatory standards for viewing by faculty and potential employers". Ward and Moser (2008) surveyed companies to determine if e-portfolios would be utilized in the future and what type of information employers would find valuable in a student's e-portfolio. Responses revealed that 56% of respondents said they planned to use e-portfolios in the future. Items described as valuable for inclusion in e-portfolios by the percentage of employer respondents are as follows: 93% valued resumes and references, 39% valued written work, 37% valued projects, 33% presentations, 23% lesson plans, 7% case studies, and 6% valued artistic performances (Ward and Moser, 2008).

The purpose of this creative project was to document AMPD junior and senior students' garment creation in the AMPD 4063 Advanced Apparel Production course for integration into their professional portfolios. The project included photographing and editing students' progress as the garments were created. The finished garments modeled at the 2017 Enclothe Fashion Show for program stakeholders, potential employers, and the public were also photographed for inclusion in the portfolios.

## Materials and Methods

The need for quality portfolios in creative careers has increased in recent years and helps students get ahead of their competition when applying for jobs. Portfolio content is particularly important and must be of high quality. The following outlines this project's process of creating high quality content for AMPD students to add to their creative portfolios.

The AMPD students at the University of Arkansas participated in the spring 2017 AMPD Futuristic Floral Fashion Show event. The purpose of the fashion show event was to push students to create a garment on a deadline and showcase their design and development skills. Participation in the fashion show and the garment creation process are resume and portfolio builders. Design

and production of garments, showcased in the AMPD fashion show, occurred during enrollment in Advanced Apparel Production during the spring 2017 semester.

Prior approval was secured from the fashion show directors as well as the AMPD Advanced Apparel Production instructor, Stephanie Hubert, to take photographs. Phase One included photographing student work during classes, back stage at the fashion show and models after the show. Phase Two included identifying images appropriate for professional portfolio use and editing those images. Phase Three included securing contact information and distributing the edited, professional portfolio-ready images.

### Phase One: Photographing Work

- Photographs were taken during the Advanced Apparel Production class time while students were working on their garments.
- Photographs were taken backstage prior to the Futuristic Floral Fashion Show.
- Staged photographs were taken after the fashion show of the models wearing the garments in front of a backdrop.
- Approximately 90 photographs were captured during the 16-week course and the fashion show event.

### Phase Two: Editing

- Staged fashion show photos were edited for use in student portfolios.
- Edits improved digital image quality and made enhancements to demonstrate professionalism and editing skills.
- Adobe® Photoshop® Creative Cloud was used and each photo was edited individually.
- Common edits that were used were brightness/contrast, vibrance, hue/saturation, and the healing brush tool to diminish any face shine.
- Multiple editing layers were created and the model was selected and made specifically brighter than the background so the garment would "pop".
- Each image required between 10 to 20 minutes of editing time.

### Phase Three: Distribution

- Edited photos of the garments were sent to respective student designers and creators.
- Any feedback was unsolicited.

- Backstage and classroom photos were edited and sent to Ms. Hubert to promote the 2018 Fashion Show.

## Results and Discussion

This project was developed out of experiences in the AMPD program and AMPD students' interests in building a professional portfolio along with experiences with photo shoots and editing. Common edits that were used were brightness/contrast, vibrance, hue/saturation, and the healing brush tool to diminish any face shine (Figs. 1-3). Before (Figs. 1A, 2A, and 3A) and after (Figs. 1B, 2B, and 3B) photos illustrate the improvement in quality result-

ing from editing. Allowing AMPD students to have edited, quality photos of garments they created enhances their portfolios which should aid them when applying for internships and jobs (Keist and Bruer, 2016). It also provided a strong body of work for the primary author to include in a portfolio, and provided a service to the AMPD students that had not occurred previously. Through review of literature, it became clear that the inclusion of quality work is a key element for portfolio creation, and portfolios are key in demonstrating skills for those in creative careers as they seek employment opportunities (Keist and Bruer, 2016; Miller and Morgaine, 2009; Ward and Moser, 2008).

When attempting to take photographs of the models after the show, obstacles were faced. Many people were



**Fig. 1.** Photo taken at the Futuristic Floral Fashion Show event in spring 2017, which is an annual event of the Apparel Merchandising and Product Development Program of the University of Arkansas Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences. (A, left) shows photo before and (B, right) shows photo after editing with PhotoShop to improve quality for electronic portfolio use.



in a hurry to leave, were overwhelmed by the fashion show process, or were trying to connect with family and friends who came to support them, and models did not come to the photo area for me to photograph them wearing the garments. Thus, only 18 of the 75 garments in the show were photographed. As an AMPD student having a garment modeled in the show, I had to balance fashion show and photography responsibilities. Once editing of the photos began, it took multiple attempts to figure out the best process to edit the photographs to highlight the garment as the focal point. Expertise of the co-author, Ms. Cox, who instructs the graphic design course, was instrumental in discovering how to best make the models and garments stand out. The final images demonstrate growth in editing skills (Figs. 1B, 2B, and 3B).

## Conclusions

Allowing AMPD students the opportunity to have quality photos taken of their garments benefited them when creating or updating their professional portfolios. However, after the fashion show, students were so focused on being finished that they did not think about photographing their garments on their model to add to their portfolios. The AMPD Fashion Show should hire someone or ask a skilled student to take photographs of the models in the garments after every show in front of a professional background in addition to action and candid photographs during the show. This would add value to the student's experience in the AMPD program as they would have quality documentation of real work to include in e-portfolios.



**Fig. 2.** Photo taken at the Futuristic Floral Fashion Show event in spring 2017, which is an annual event of the Apparel Merchandising and Product Development Program of the University of Arkansas Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences. (A, left) shows photo before and (B, right) shows photo after editing with Adobe PhotoShop to improve quality for electronic portfolio use.



The edited, quality photographs of the designed garments are imperative for student portfolio building. Portfolio building should become a larger part of the University of Arkansas AMPD curriculum, specifically e-portfolio building. Currently, AMPD students only have to create a portfolio in their pre-internship and graphic design classes. Portfolio building, specifically e-portfolio building, should be a major component of AMPD curriculum. Electronic-portfolio development should be introduced to students early in their college careers so they understand the significance and future impact of the portfolio. Students should be briefed their freshman year on the importance of building an e-portfolio within their major and it should be revisited throughout their academic

program. This would allow students to keep records of all projects created in and outside of the classroom. Properly documenting these projects from start to finish is a key component of a quality portfolio because it demonstrates the learning and developmental process. Five of the students who received edited photographs provided positive feedback through their unsolicited correspondence. Many online job applications provide a place to link an online portfolio; thus, educating students about this aspect of the job search process may help improve placement rates in the fashion industry in positions that the literature identifies as difficult to obtain. Moreover, it could help students maintain a competitive edge over other apparel programs across the nation.



**Fig. 3.** Photo taken at the Futuristic Floral Fashion Show event in spring 2017, which is an annual event of the Apparel Merchandising and Product Development Program of the University of Arkansas Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences. (A, left) shows photo before and (B, right) shows photo after editing with PhotoShop to improve quality for electronic portfolio use.

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