

Trends in Textiles and Clothing Education--U.S. Colleges and Universities

by

Dr. Carol L. Warfield, Ctext FTI

**Professor and Head, Department of Consumer Affairs
School of Human Sciences, Auburn University, Alabama, USA**

The challenges facing Textiles and Clothing programs in U.S. colleges and universities are causing profound changes in program structure, program content, and program delivery. Many of the issues, e.g., accountability, demographics, restructuring, technology, teamwork, and globalization, are common to most university programs. This paper will focus on the impact which these issues are having on textiles and clothing education in U. S. colleges and universities. Trends resulting from these impacts will be discussed.

Emphasis on accountability means that textiles and clothing programs must demonstrate increasingly effective and efficient use of resources. A challenge is to find objective measures by which to justify our programs, both internally and externally. Doing more with less becomes "normal." Successful grantsmanship becomes a necessity.

Restructuring is taking place throughout the university system, often in the name of cost-cutting and accountability. Textiles and clothing programs are often among the units involved in the restructuring. This frequently results in reduced identity, or even program loss, for textiles and clothing. Developing a focus and building upon special strengths becomes essential.

Demographics indicate a changing composition of the student body. Are textiles and clothing programs able to meet the program needs of a more mature, diverse student body, many of whom are working while enrolled in school? Can program delivery meet the needs of students who cannot attend a traditional classroom on a regular basis?

The increasingly rapid pace of technological innovation poses a two-fold challenge for textiles and clothing programs. If students are to have a competitive edge in the job market, faculty must be equipped to use technological innovations in their teaching and research. However, maintaining "up-to-date" technology becomes a very difficult challenge, one that is most often met through successful grantsmanship and/or industrial partnerships.

Team work, essential in business and industry, is an integral part of the learning experience in an increasing number of textiles and clothing programs. Developing effective approaches to teaching and evaluating team work remain a challenge to textiles and clothing educators. Teams of textiles and clothing faculty (both on campus and across campuses), become increasingly important in building a critical mass for successful research programs. Such teams provide important faculty development and mentoring benefits for junior level faculty.

Globalization poses special challenges for U.S. textiles and clothing programs. With steadily increasing import competition and domestic firms engaging in off-shore production, graduates of textiles and clothing programs must be prepared to work in a global economy. Can the U.S. programs adapt in order to meet the changing market demands for personnel?

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Accountability:

- **Justification of programs and costs**
 - **Mission**
 - **Centrality**
 - **Uniqueness**
 - **Demonstrated efficiency and effectiveness**

- **Strategic planning**
 - **Focus**
 - **Become advocate for program**
 - **Develop support base**

- **Documentation**
 - **Develop base line data**
 - **Develop objective measures**
 - **Benchmark**

- **Grantsmanship**

Restructuring:

- **Reasons**
 - **Fit**
 - **Identity**
 - **Cost**
 - **Opportunities**

- **Impact on Textiles and Clothing Programs**
 - **Elimination**
 - **Consolidation**
 - **Loss of identity**

- **Strategies for success**

Program Characteristics:

- Student characteristics
- Employment opportunities
- Enrollment trends
- Program size and comprehensiveness
- Faculty composition

Technology:

- Faculty development
- Student competency
- Equipment/software/infrastructure
- Resources/partnerships
- Delivery of information

Team Work:

- Students
 - Teaching approaches
 - Evaluation
 - Incentives
- Faculty
 - Training
 - Evaluation
 - Incentives
- Composition of teams
- Accountability

Globalization:

- State of domestic industry
 - Import competition
 - Increased productivity
 - Job loss
 - Different type of job
- Consolidation
- Market vs. manufacturing oriented
- Consumer-led

- Impact on Textiles and Clothing programs
 - Impact on faculty
 - Impact on students
 - Impact on curriculum

Summary & Implications:

- Strategic planning
 - ID mission
 - Track, benchmark, and promote programs
 - Develop support system
 - Proactive positioning
 - Larger, more specialized, better quality programs
- Professional development
 - Faculty qualifications
 - Mentoring
 - Grantsmanship
 - Technology
 - Teamwork
 - Globalization
- Partnerships
 - Develop industry contacts
 - Develop cross campus contacts
 - Develop multi-university contacts
 - Advisory boards
- Students
 - Recruit
 - Retain
 - Placement
 - Alumni relations