

Expectation of 'Glamorous' courses and the society of the spectacle

Sue Alston, Natalie Brown
London College of Fashion

This research explores widening participation students joining a glamorous fashion course and coming to terms with a gap between contemporary representations of this world and the reality of learning fashion design. The study is framed by theoretical understanding of the position in HE of widening participation students (Archer et al.2003), student retention (Yorke and Longden 2004), student conceptions of learning in the subject (Drew et al20002) and, more widely, the society of the spectacle (Debord 1967).

Fashion Portfolio is an FE course that recruits non-traditional students who have little experience of learning fashion design. The course has 220 learners with 84% of learners expressing high satisfaction in the Student Satisfaction Survey last year.

We are carrying out a longitudinal study over a complete academic year of a group of 81 Home/ European students who applied for the course to starting in September 2007. We are exploring the reality gap between expectations of learning a 'glamorous' subject and the actuality of learning fashion design. Additionally we are also researching what strategies students adopt to overcome their personal challenges compared with students who withdraw.

We made a number of interventions from initial interview stage until after completion. The WP students in this cohort achieved as good progression as the traditional students.

Presenters

Sue Alston (MA Fashion Communications, LCF) is the Course Director and Media and Communications Programme Leader for Fashion Portfolio.

Natalie Brown (currently studying MA Digital Fashion, LCF) is the Design Programme Leader for Fashion Portfolio.