

Careers

Design

THROUGHOUT THE ROOM, STUDENTS cluster around a rainbow of shimmering party dresses, aiming pins into fabric. "Angle the pins," the instructor directs. "That will give you better control over the fabric." After the instructor demonstrates on one ice-blue dress, students remove their pins and restock them, frowning in concentration.

The scene is a design school lab, and the students, aspiring fashion designers, placing pins just right may seem tedious, yet this is the grounding that future designers need. During their training, students will learn to drape fabric on dress forms and fit garments. They will master working with fabrics of all types, from slippery silks to heavy denims. As they study the history of fashion, they'll see how styles have changed.

Eventually, as graduates, the students will be ready to work in the fashion industry. There, they will select fabrics, cut out patterns, and stitch seams. If dreams come true, they may someday see their own designs in shops and stores throughout the country.

Part of a design student's study involves making patterns and samples. Here the student outlines her pattern on fabric. Instead of pins, how is the pattern held in place?

IS THIS FIELD FOR YOU?

How many of these statements apply to you? If most do, you might be a budding fashion designer.

- I like to shop for clothing.
- I like to read fashion magazines and articles.
- New fashion designs catch my eye.
- I have strong opinions about clothing styles.
- I notice the colors around me.
- I have a knack for putting outfits together.
- People often compliment me on my clothing.
- I enjoy working with fabric.
- I have a talent for sketching.



Education and Training

Most design students complete a three- or four-year program in fashion design, but a two-year degree is also available. Core classes include sketching, computer graphics, draping, pattern making, and sewing skills. Some students explore the specialty of costume design. Studies also include the social and psychological importance of clothes and fashion.

Working with established designers is an exciting feature in some top schools. Senior students might stage a fashion show that is judged and attended by professional designers. This contact is an advantage as new graduates start a career. Some schools provide opportunities for study in foreign countries.

Competition for admission to design schools is stiff. Since directors look for creative portfolios, art classes are good preparation. A few exceptionally talented individuals earn internships to fashion houses on their portfolios alone.

Possible Career Paths

"Working your way up" is the typical route for success in fashion design. An intern may pick up pins and put away supplies, but experience can lead to becoming a sketcher, sample maker or design assistant. These jobs, which don't always require additional education, can be satisfying careers in themselves or steps to other positions.

Designers who achieve fame and fortune are rare, but they offer inspiration. As a sales rep for a neckwear company, Ralph Lauren sold his modest tie collection to a New York City department store. Today, his Polo empire includes a vast line of clothing, luggage, cologne, home decorations—and ties.

An original, appealing idea is no guarantee of success. Aspiring designers may work many years before getting a chance to present original designs. Some sell clothing in their own boutique, hoping to break into larger markets and move closer to recognition.

Today's fashion designers learn to use such technology as CAD systems to make designing faster and easier.

THE SKILLS YOU NEED

What skills will help you in the design field? Whether a first-year fashion design student or an established professional, you'll need to demonstrate the following skills and qualities:

- A "passion for fashion"
- Communication
- Creativity
- Design knowledge
- Artistic ability
- Sewing skills
- Teamwork
- Strong work ethic



Choosing a Design Career

ACCESSORIES DESIGNER APPAREL DESIGNER APPAREL STYLIST
DESIGN ASSOCIATE FABRIC DESIGNER FABRIC LIBRARIAN
FABRIC STYLIST SKETCHER TEXTILE COLORIST

Apparel Designer —

A line of clothing starts with a designer, who decides on each garment's style, fabric, and ornamentation. Inspiration may come from travels, a movie, an art exhibit, or the work of other designers.

Design success depends on having an understanding of fabrics and styling techniques, as well as input from other professionals: colorists, market experts, and, sometimes, a team of assistants. Many apparel designers specialize in one type of clothing, such as sportswear, swimwear, lingerie, bridal gowns, or children's clothes.

While creativity is a large part of a designer's job, so is self-discipline. Developing fresh, new ideas while working against deadlines can be challenging. Computer graphics can create a virtual sample of the finished design faster than an actual sample can be produced. Computer-aided design (CAD) skills are essential in today's market.

Twice a year or more, top designers must produce a collection of 50-70 items, then submit it for critique by reporters, retailers, and the buying public. Economic trends, constant competition, and the unpredictable tastes of fashion experts and shoppers add to the challenge of a designer's work.

Apparel Stylist —

That "designer" outfit in the store window may not be quite what it seems. It could be the work of an inventive apparel stylist. A stylist creates moderately priced adaptations of expensive designer originals.

Ideally, adaptations are not simply inexpensive copies. Rather, the stylist modifies the basic style to produce clothes that are fashionable, as well as affordable, to more people. Suppose the original design includes a lined silk jacket with 12 mother-of-pearl buttons. The stylist's version might have a lined rayon jacket with 12 acrylic buttons. Besides economy, an apparel stylist must also think about how the garment will fit the image of the company and the overall clothing line.

Fabric Associate —

Fabric design staffs need people to carry out daily tasks and manage data. As the design department creates fabric patterns, design associates record instructions that the production department will need. Associates store and update electronic files in the firm's fabric pattern library.

As the production of a new fabric begins, design associates scan artwork into the computer, translating images into digital data. They also prepare the pattern printout, which serves as a sample of the actual fabric. During the design process, associates may also help fabric pattern, using computer-aided design (CAD) programs.

Fabric Designer —

Without fabric, an apparel designer wouldn't get very far. Fabric designers try to predict what fibers, textures, and colors will be popular and then design suitable fabrics. These professionals are not only creative artists, but they're also technical experts and merchandisers. They may work closely with the textile company's research and development (R&D) department on weaves, knits, patterns, prints, and colors.

While working out their ideas on computer, fabric designers experiment with different yarns, textures, and color combinations. Once a design is approved, they transmit it directly from their computer to the computer at the fabric mill for production. Since new fabrics often inspire clothing designs, a fabric designer's work may influence fashion trends.

CAREER APPLICATIONS

1. **Creating adaptations.** Find photographs of three different high-fashion garments. For each one, describe in writing what you would do to create an adaptation. Include references to the elements and principles of design.
2. **FCCLA.** Research a fashion design career that interests you and plan an illustrated talk on that career. Include a job description, the skills, personal qualities, and education needed; salary range; and job market outlook. Use charts, photographs, or other helpful visuals to clarify your information and add interest to your presentation.
3. **Professionalism.** You're an assistant designer who is asked by a head designer to train some sketchers for a presentation. You realize that some of the designs are identical to those done by another assistant who recently left the company. What is a professional approach to this situation?

Choosing the right colors for garments is part of an apparel designer's job. Why do you think clothing colors change as new fashion lines are developed?

