

STUDENT-INITIATED PROPOSAL FOR BIPOC-POSITIVE CHANGES IN THE RISD APPAREL DESIGN DEPARTMENT

Version 1.4

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Amendments made in this version:

**Current faculty and staff names have been removed.*

1. I. Faculty: removal of: *"Currently the apparel department is seeking to fill three vacant positions. These positions must be given to Black and/or Indigenous candidates."*, as the positions have already been filled.
2. I. Faculty: added clause: *"As a more immediate way to bring in more professional, diverse BIPOC voices outside of hiring strategies, bring in more guest lecturers often, to cover global topics that can be incorporated into History of Dress, Design Studios, etc."*
 - a. *Invite and collaborate with professionals from other universities, schools, and institutions as guest lecturers with specialties in global fashion and textile history, especially BIPOC individuals. The RISD Museum has proved to have a great network for this."*
3. I. Faculty: changed and added to clause: *"The next several hires of the department should be BIPOC, working towards a goal of BIPOC faculty taking up 50% of the faculty body, with respect to hiring contracts and processes."*
 - a. *The next couple full-time faculty hires must go to a black and/or indigenous designer.*
 - b. *New faculty hires should be comprehensive and experienced in globally diverse apparel and textile knowledge (regardless of their ethnicity)."*
4. II.1 History of Dress: added clause: *"Working with the student task force and the instructor to restructure the History of Dress curriculum to adequately incorporate BIPOC cultures and history equally with white, euro-centric fashion history, as long as BIPOC and global narratives are not just a tangent."*
5. II.1 History of Dress: added clause: *"Possible development of an elective liberal class dedicated to critical object study and analysis with the RISD Museum Costume and Textiles Department (possibly instructed by Laurie Brewer), heavily focusing on global,*

cultural, social, and economic histories and influences behind a diverse range of clothing.”

6. II.1 History of Dress: added sub-clause: *“Alternatively instead of focusing on regions, the class could be structured around common themes and different examples from around the world that fit into those thematic narratives (example: dress for rebellion).”*
7. II.2 Design: added to clause: *“(Initiate frequent visits to the RISD Museum’s Costume and Textiles Department to observe up-close and engage with clothing, textiles, and materials from BIPOC cultures, in conjunction with American/European objects.) Furthermore, Design studio courses (as well as technical) should not only just pay visits, but actively form a strong relationship with the Museum to incorporate more object/artifact observance, analysis, and critical thinking into the curriculum. Staff at the Museum have already expressed interest and commitment to working with Apparel students.*
 - a. *Schedule studio courses to align with the open hours/availability of the Costume and Textiles Department. Overlapping of hours and not permitting students to visit the Museum during working hours of the class are strong opposing actions to our mission.*
 - b. *Show students the importance of placing an object/garment into historical context; illustrate complex and nuanced cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and implications that lie deep beneath the surface.”*

PREFACE - DECLARATION OF INTENT

The purpose of this proposal is to give voice and direction to the students of the RISD Apparel Design Department, both current and past, in their desire to combat racism within the department, and in particular its anti-black and anti-indigenous attitude. Written based on feedback collected from the student body, this proposal will outline, in sections based on topic, areas in Apparel that have proven to be problematic and in urgent need of change, followed with **clear short-term and long-term** (though we must stress need for change is extremely urgent) actions the department can implement to begin to become globally aware and actively anti-racist.

Racism is rampant throughout the fashion industry and it exists on many levels: the exploitation of people of color’s labor and environmental destruction of their homes, the racist imagery and iconography that continuously resurfaces on the runway, the appropriation of the artwork and culture of marginalized people to generate profit without credit or respect, the perpetuation and expectation of the colonized to fit a certain palatable aesthetic, the continued exclusion of BIPOC from high-level positions within the industry, and the worship of unrealistic western beauty standards that incites mental and emotional trauma for BIPOC.

For too long the RISD Apparel Department has excused racist policies and actions citing that this is the “industry standard” and they are merely preparing the students for it. It is time that this sentiment is re-evaluated. We, as representatives of the entire apparel student body, demand more—to no longer be cogs in this self-perpetuating system of oppression. It is imperative that, as we attend an institution that should be more than adequately preparing us to revolutionize industry, we should be educated on issues of social and environmental justice and be treated equally and respectfully.

Though tangible actions can be taken to begin creating a truly anti-racist department, such as changes in curriculum and the development of workshops and trainings, the work does not end there. **Those who desire change must be prepared to be self-aware, to admit their wrongness, to actively change, and to do the work in order to educate themselves. As members of a world-renowned fine arts institution that provides an open space for a diversity of voices, this school needs strong and active allies—those of us who do not experience direct racism and discrimination have the privilege of decidedly educating ourselves. Through this proposal, we as past and present students of the RISD Apparel Design Department are calling for momentous changes within our department—it is not enough to make a few rules and alter parts of the curriculum; true change for a wholly anti-racist education starts on an individual level of self-awareness and continued commitment to action.**

Direct quotations from students:

“I walked into RISD Apparel knowing that the way I was born, my values, my culture, my religion, my appearance, and my voice were going to be challenged beyond belief, yet I had full confidence that my natural talent, heart and soul would trump it all. However, it felt like an uphill battle throughout my whole time attempting to prove myself and my work. That I am worthy, that I am deserving, and that I am talented. I believe their approach in a ‘tear you down, then build you up’ is an abusive mentality and creates holes in the system. It leaves gaps that are wide open for a certain type of student to be targeted more than others; and the ones who fall victim to such oppression will be seen as “weak.” The ambiance of the whole first semester in apparel is to **“weed out the weak,”** but how can the weak be selected based on their disposition rather than the meritocracy of their work? **How is it that each year a promising student drops out of the major, and they ALWAYS happen to be black or a person of color?** You can never say you gave these students a chance.”

“I haven’t necessarily felt fully supported my time here and often wonder if my physical identity and background have factored into my experience...Though I am proud of myself I feel like I’ve haven’t been fully supported, given enough credit when due, and then lack motivation and energy to continue with my everything. **Apparel needs to believe more in us. I just want to be trusted, believed in, and heard.**”

“As a black man I had to reconsider my decision in Apparel because of the countless horror stories that I felt would hinder my abilities, destroy my skill sets and affect my success moving forward through the world. The trauma was already hard to bear, seeing my friend who’s black get sexually harassed and have to work in a professional setting with prejudice behavior. Teachers saying inappropriate remarks in student reviews and in front of the class to tear down their confidence, **which would indeed make RISD responsible for ruining another Black/ student of colors life.”**

“The dept. would benefit by paying close attention to present shifts in the industry and really harnessing these changes in its own teaching of apparel. If a small wave is made by big brands, we need to make it a huge wave for us. This is what young designers will grab hold of and make waves with: the social changes; Not just the latest drawstring trend, cuff, collar or buttonhole, though material is extremely important still...So it's about working both sides... socially aware and technically aware. Neither is inherently exclusive, but the shifts we are experienced are highlighting the absolute importance of changing ignorant ways....With so much importance placed on aesthetic design in our department and all of art school, not enough time goes into the political, social, cultural message and place that the design has.”

“Furthermore I know the risd apparel design teachers advocate for our work to be strong in meaning and concept. With this in mind there have been various lessons and even clubs surrounding the topic of sustainable fashion. However, this is not the only issue we need to learn about when discussing fashion. I think we should have conversations about various ways the fashion industry needs positive change and this heavily includes topics of race.”

I. Faculty and Administrators

Based on the feedback from the student survey, it is clear that students are **frustrated and disheartened by the lack of BIPOC faculty, administration, and staff members in this department.** The overall consensus is that professors and administrators have been **ignorant, or have displayed racially-charged behaviors**; therefore, there is an urgent need for improvement in staff and individual, and active change amongst faculty members. However this alone will not be enough, and as the department moves forward the make-up of the faculty and staff body must be re-evaluated.

Students have also been exposed to tension between faculty members—there should not exist conflict between professors, let alone should students be aware of it. **As we address in our solutions, faculty members need to be active in being transparent with each other, hosting productive meetings on the formation of curriculum through frequent meetings.**

Direct quotations from Students

"In the classroom, **critiques and in my final grade narratives the remarks said about not only my work but my character were highly inappropriate.** Professors feel entitled to flex belittling, inconsistent language but are protected enough by the institution that these narratives are reflected on the student. Through conversations with my peers, graduates, community fellows, all fell within the same line, yet conversations with a select few teachers made me doubt myself and skillset, and feel horrible as a black woman who is not only a designer learning apparel but an established fine artist in my area. The discrepancy is too large to ignore."

"As much as current faculty try to understand students who come from non-white cultures, one only knows one's own culture best. **Thus, the only way to mitigate this issue, and to attract a more diverse student group, is to hire BIPOC.**"

"Given that the apparel department has the opportunity to hire new faculty in the coming year, it is necessary to hire new individuals who can broaden and enrich the learning experience of students through their own diverse experiences. "

"During I believe it was the end of my sophomore year the department needed to hire a new full time faculty. There was a black femme candidate. She was amazing and had done work with traditional Africana textiles and knew a lot about craft. But I think at that time all the students were infatuated with Niel [sic] (previous department head)... I guess it's just sad because I think in that situation the students were perpetuating racism in prioritizing the fashion illustration European style 'teaching' or whatever that Niel [sic] represented [Outside note: Neil demonstrated lack of technical skill] over someone who had clearly such unique and deeply researched apparel field experience"

"I don't doubt that our faculty does not try their best to do [support us] but I think further steps, active efforts need to be taken to propel the future of the department and support of its bipoc students. **It is cultural literacy, it's taking time for us to explain, it is knowing that we are trying, it's considering every circumstance even if you feel like it's not an issue.** Believe us please."

"This year I feel as though the zoom we had on cultural appropriation was frustrating because [faculty] should have been actively participating as he is someone that would benefit from speaking and learning about cultural appropriation however instead he was seemingly on his phone a majority of the zoom while everyone else spoke one by one."

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- As a more immediate way to bring in more professional, diverse BIPOC voices outside of hiring strategies, bring in more **guest lecturers** often, to cover global topics that can be incorporated into History of Dress, Design Studios, etc.

- Invite and collaborate with professionals from other universities, schools, and institutions as guest lecturers with specialties in global fashion and textile history, especially BIPOC individuals. The RISD Museum has proved to have a great network for this.
- **Faculty and administrators are required to educate themselves on anti-racism.** A fully anti-racist and globally inclusive education cannot be realized at RISD until faculty members educate themselves and each other. Below are several proposed strategies for how to execute this and establish a system of accountability. However ultimately it is the responsibility of the department to ensure the education of its faculty.
 - Create a required reading list (White Fragility by Robin Diangelo, How to Be An Anti-racist by Ibram X. Kendi, The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Beloved by Toni Morrison, etc.) and incorporate monthly discussions of the books into faculty meetings. These discussions should be moderated by someone from SEI or another appropriate individual.
 - Collaborate with SEI to host workshops on anti-racism with faculty across RISD. These workshops will be mandatory.
 - Bias and sensitivity training may be an option, however based on feedback from SEI this is a costly solution that is ineffective.
- **Clear communication across staff through weekly and monthly meetings to touch-base on curriculum and lesson plans,** especially to ensure euro-centric content is not the main focus, and that BIPOC aspects of apparel and fashion are equally taught. A formal meeting with all faculty members will be held at the beginning of every term, followed with **at least 2 meetings**, again with all members, **per month**.
- Faculty members who cannot see themselves aligning with this initiative, and are not willing to put in the work to educate themselves on these issues **should reevaluate their position within RISD and the Apparel Design Department.**

Long term:

- **The next several hires of the department should be BIPOC, working towards a goal of BIPOC faculty taking up 50% of the faculty body, with respect to hiring contracts and processes.** This takes into consideration full-time faculty: at least one-third to one-half of the full-time faculty body needs to be BIPOC. This will also work in tandem with proposed changes in curriculum, the following section.
 - Of this 50% **at least 30%** of the professors should be either Black or Indigenous.
 - Black and Indigenous professors should continue to be **at least 30%** of the full-time faculty.

- The feedback students give on the applicants presentations will be taken seriously and weigh heavily in deciding factors. In particular the feedback of BIPOC students.
- The next couple full-time faculty hires must go to a black and/or indigenous designer.
- New faculty hires should be comprehensive and experienced in globally diverse apparel and textile knowledge (regardless of their ethnicity).
- **The Apparel faculty should equally support BIPOC students.**
 - Becoming or providing mentors in the fashion industry for BIPOC students.

II. Curriculum changes

This section will be divided into main areas/courses of our curriculum, and their respective issues that need to be addressed, along with proposed solutions.

II.1 History of Dress

Overall, students are disappointed that they are not receiving a more globally diverse, and well-rounded curriculum when it comes to learning the history of fashion. Many feel that though the content *History of Dress* covers is extremely euro-centric. However, there is significant potential for positive growth in developing future lesson plans, as every ethnicity, continent, and country all have rich histories of their respective fashions, and **there is an abundance of BIPOC designers, past and present, to learn about.**

Direct quotations from students

“I do remember a large class discussion in which a well known white male designer had copied a traditional African accessory. [Faculty] opened this discussion up to the class, asking if it was appropriation or appreciation. I remained silent because I believe in non- black people doing the work, if ya’ll are so woke speak up right now. One of the students in my class defended his actions, saying that she didn’t see a problem with it, that it’s just fashion, it’s just for fun. Another one of my classmates said that it was cultural appropriation, that black culture is often appropriated and they receive no credit. The other student said “I just don’t think it’s that serious” and the class continued on. [Faculty] didn’t explain anything, educate the student or check her ignorance and the rest of my classmates remained silent. This department needs to check its faculty, guest critics and students. My classmates will become the future leaders of this industry and the faculty are allowing them to enter the industry with the same mindset they came into RISD with. It is a severely irresponsible decision to make.”

“As a black woman I was graded harsher than my white counterparts. An area that I excelled in was writing, yet I was manipulated into believing that I was once again, not good enough.”

"I have noticed that there seems to still be a lack of diversity when teaching fashion history. This is especially noteworthy because RISD (especially during the freshmen year history courses) seems to pride themselves in a more diverse art history teachings when in fact there is very little representation aside from how white and European artists have taken and appropriated the works of POC. I would just really like to see time being made for a true in-depth fashion history course."

"I've experienced a lack of diversity in the lectures we have received on influential designers. With some exceptions, there's been a focus being on European, Japanese and American designers who are either white or of Asian descent."

"To understand clothing as a universal need, we need to examine it outside of 'western high fashion' by looking at designers/functional garments from other parts of the world."

"History of dress taught by [faculty] exposed many of the industries exploitative issues and were then taught to us in a lense that softened the blow of problematic appropriation of cultures that uplift European influences and denounces all of the others that were stolen. These other cultures were also robbed of the opportunities to be understood and taught in the classroom, leading us with an incomplete picture of the past."

"The fact that the only three POC mentioned in history of dress and design are Japanese designers does NOT count as diversity—it is basically just the department's fetish. Please stop using my culture to continue to perpetuate anti-blackness in this department."

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- **Incorporation of historic black American designers into the curriculum.** For example: Steven Burrows, Anne Lowe, and Patrick Kelly.
- **Incorporation of contemporary BIPOC designers into the curriculum.** For example: Kerby Jean Raymonds, Virgil Abloh, Martine Rose, and Telfar Clemens.
- The above changes can be rigorously established through setting up a set of lectures specifically highlighting BIPOC designers and creatives, instead of simply adding them as tangents to their white counterparts.
- Work with the RISD Museum's Costume and Textiles Department to reinforce these lectures with visits to see clothing, textiles, and materials from BIPOC cultures and designers in person (see more in "Design").
- Working with the student task force and the instructor to restructure the *History of Dress* curriculum to adequately incorporate BIPOC cultures and history equally with white, euro-centric fashion history, as long as BIPOC and global narratives are not just a tangent.

- In conjunction with the course *Topics of Fashion Theory, History of Dress* should heavily address (the roots of) cultural appropriation, stealing, marginalization, and colonization—its history and current presence in the fashion industry. This work can be accomplished through assigned literary readings, in-class discussions with appropriate guest moderators/lecturers, and writing assignments.
 - This class should reference what cultural trends were stolen and explain how they looked before they were watered down. It's not enough to say cultural appropriation exists but how it works, how the ideas are stolen, how high fashion companies change the names of items that are prevalent in marginalized communities, explain the financial gain these companies receive while BIPOC designers are struggling to make ends meet, etc.
 - Given the class's current focus on the US and western Europe cultural appropriation of black and indigenous culture in fashion should be a primary focus as the appropriation of these two cultures is rampant in the fashion industry.
 - This work will also require the professor to educate themselves on the history of marginalized communities outside of their approximation to fashion and how they are treated by the societies they live and how cultural appropriation is theft of intellectual property and labor that perpetuates systems of abuse.

Long-term:

- Development of a year-long *History of Dress* course: allowing more adequate, equivalent amounts of time for BIPOC fashion history education, and the application of what the class currently does for western fashion—placing clothes in social context—for other regions around the world. Although it is impossible to cover every culture in depth, it's imperative to provide an equal survey of each region, similar to the attention *History of Dress* currently pays to the history of fashion in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States to represent the west.
 - Alternatively instead of focusing on regions, the class could be structured around common themes and different examples from around the world that fit into those thematic narratives (example: dress for rebellion).
- Development of additional liberal requirements that focus specifically on the history of apparel, fashion, and textiles of various cultures and practices (e.g. every student must take at least 3 liberal courses pertinent to global fashion).
- Development of a liberal elective/seminar course that focuses entirely on BIPOC fashion history and design, which should include content on colonization and cultural appropriation. The faculty who teaches this course needs to be BIPOC.
- Possible development of an elective liberal class dedicated to critical object study and analysis with the RISD Museum Costume and Textiles Department (possibly

instructed by Laurie Brewer), heavily focusing on global, cultural, social, and economic histories and influences behind a diverse range of clothing.

II.2 Design

The general consensus amongst students surrounding Design courses within our curriculum is that **they do not address BIPOC cultures, styles, histories, and designers enough**. The courses often focus on western design and ideals, and some course content in the past had proven to be downright ignorant. For a course that is supposed to provide students with the most information, inspiration, and thoughtfulness, it severely lacks a diversity in cultural content. **Students have had experiences with Design professors who have ignorantly assigned projects that clearly condone cultural appropriation, as well as instances where professors and critics who have deemed any use of BIPOC culture-inspired design as costume-like**. One instance where a student's work in [faculty]'s design class clearly resembled a racist narrative (Hottentot Venus) was not called out by the professor and rather it was used as an example of the best work.

A specific Design course students highlighted in the survey is the class that uses subcultures as prompts for the semester. Students felt that the content of this course needs to get at how to treat subcultures, especially those from BIPOC communities, with more respect. Through their faculty and peers, students need to be given holistic guidance on how to research cultures that are not theirs, as well as how to not only avoid appropriation, but advocate against it.

Direct quotations from Students

"I, a black woman, was told in my final critique that I did not do enough with Hip Hop and Punk. My white classmates received praise for their interpretation of Hip Hop culture as I was told to go back to the drawing board and do more research as if I didn't have a direct connection with Hip Hop culture growing up in Brooklyn my whole life. I created looks that were a different interpretation of streetwear and Brooklyn culture and I was being told to make things more literal with props like hoodies or timbs to make it more apparent that I took inspiration from Hip Hop. I have heard this comment before during the crits of the seniors that came before me. Comments like "I wish you roughed them up more and put them in brand new timbs, something to tell me this is really about black culture" or "I know the dashiki is traditional, but is it necessary to tell this story of the progression of African American fashion?" Like come on.

While I discussed the inspiration images I gathered for my subcultures, I was asked to explain the 400 year head start that white people have financially and educate my teacher and my classmates on why Black rappers portray large amounts of wealth in their music videos and dress the way they do."

“While the junior subcultures assignment accessed some periods within black history, exposure to this learning was resigned to those students who drew these periods from that.”

“Junior year I had to create a collection based on Sukeban and Hip Hop subcultures. **I felt uncomfortable taking inspiration from randomly selected subcultures, and I didn’t feel as though research and respect was important in this project. It was not really talked about.**”

“In Junior year we were assigned to create looks based off two subcultures that were given to us at random. I don’t think learning to draw from other cultures for inspiration is bad, however if you are going to do it there is a proper way--involving research into the subculture and history of cultural appropriation. I tried so hard to do this research but neither [faculty] or [faculty] were interested in supporting it--instead choosing to focus just on visual elements of the subcultures as a source of inspiration, which is basically cultural appropriation 101. How are we supposed to create work that isn’t appropriation if we are basically given no support in doing so? **Students should educate themselves but so should faculty--and it is difficult for students to give space to educate themselves when their professors are just pushing and pushing them to only look at the visuals.**”

“I think it’s definitely a step in the right direction to not assign a whole semester based in a general culture or region and REQUIRE students to PULL FROM THAT CULTURE’S IMAGERY OR ELSE THEIR GRADE WILL SUFFER...Like there is a respectful way to learn the art history of a certain culture, and understand silhouette, but it feels like that’s something that fits more into History of Dress”

“It was in my sophomore year that [faculty] introduced a Native American project, the intent to use Native American culture to fuel/leap off of, some of us found this problematic and handled it in various ways...A lot of people haven’t heard of this incident but it’s something that was extremely eye opening for me. Basically [faculty] caught wind of a report to the Provost about this and he and our Studio teacher at the time [faculty] (thank heavens u didn’t have her) organized I believe it was a meeting on a Saturday to address this and talk about cultural appropriation. Everyone except about 3 people in my year did not show up (including one of the two who reported [faculty]). Along with our teachers they also brought in a lady from the Museum to talk to us about cultural appropriation (she made some valid points tbh but in general I did not agree with the baseline that it is an American concept and that [faculty] also only meant for us to use it as inspo and not direct copying (although he did say direct copying for muslins would help your technical skills)

And then they opened up for general comments and discussion and I still remember to this day what was said from my white classmates, also the only sentiments and comments voiced were from white students besides one black student and myself (because I really couldn’t sit there and let her be the only POC to speak out because I went in prepared to not say anything but

was one of only two people to speak against the rest) but some of the things said as I can recall were as follows:

'I just think it's funny how like the person who made all of this happen, hasn't like said anything and is just sitting here silent'

'I don't give a fuck who my work offends, I am a designer....'

'I agree, I really don't care it is my prerogative as a designer to do and make whatever I want no matter who I offend...'

'You know, *sniffle* this whole thing has been so hard for me. I've literally been attacked by people when I go to brown asking me how "cultural appropriation" class has been going...'

And I remember I was lit so gobsmacked the lack of empathy shown, the ignorance, and esp the last remark because they made it about themselves instead of who cultural appropriation actually affected."

"The sophomore focus of "identity" in design often made students feel categorized or minimized into very specific parts of their identity such as race."

"There has been situations especially sophomore year where I feel as though [faculty] did not handle material or student work with respect and consideration on the topic of cultural appropriation."

"In my final crit, [faculty] asked me to explain what I thought cultural appropriation is. I did so patiently, despite the fact this was a question he should have asked me at the beginning of the process not at the end given that it was an important aspect of my work in understanding what it means to borrow from your own culture when you have been displaced from it by geographical location--i.e what it means to be the descendant of an immigrant and how you relate to your ancestral homeland. I told him a clear example of cultural appropriation is the use of the headdress by non-native people, a well documented example of cultural appropriation. **He told me that I was close-minded for thinking this and then went into a very angry rant completely shutting down all conversation. I left that crit feeling scared to be in this department."**

"The fact that the only three POC mentioned in history of dress and design are Japanese designers does NOT count as diversity--it is basically just the department's fetish. Please stop using my culture to continue to perpetuate anti-blackness in this department."

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- **Bring in guest critics and lecturers to the class who are better able to speak to the topics that different students may be exploring.** Have professors engage with said guest critics and lecturers outside of class to better understand how they can incorporate their areas of expertise into the Design curriculum.

- Set weekly/monthly coursework schedules that implement a variety of global voices throughout the semester. **Host objective, informational lectures on BIPOC fashion history, silhouettes, making methods, designers, etc., providing students with multi-faceted knowledge and inspiration that will guide their process and making.** If the professor feels they are unable to host these lectures, invite guest lecturers. Assign required readings and viewings of relevant and necessary resources and include follow-up assignments to allow students to demonstrate critical thinking.
- **In conjunction with LAEL liberals, educate students on colonization, cultural appropriation, and stereotyping**—should students choose to work with BIPOC cultures that may not be theirs, guide them in understanding how to create well-researched work that fights against cultural appropriation.
- **Initiate frequent visits to the RISD Museum’s Costume and Textiles Department to observe up-close and engage with clothing, textiles, and materials from BIPOC cultures, in conjunction with American/European objects.** Furthermore, Design studio courses (as well as technical) should not only just pay visits, but actively form a strong relationship with the Museum to incorporate more object/artifact observance, analysis, and critical thinking into the curriculum. Staff at the Museum have already expressed interest and commitment to working with Apparel students.
 - Schedule studio courses to align with the open hours/availability of the Costume and Textiles Department. Overlapping of hours and not permitting students to visit the Museum during working hours of the class are strong opposing actions to our mission.
 - Show students the importance of placing an object/garment into historical context; illustrate complex and nuanced cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and implications that lie deep beneath the surface.
- Put together a comprehensive collection of BIPOC apparel, fashion, and textiles books, articles, videos, documentaries, etc. through the RISD Library, accessible for students within a certain class, or for Apparel students at large.
- Junior Design class (in particular):
 - Introduce the concept of cultural appropriation early into the subculture assignment. Assign readings and host a productive workshop (which can be led by any educator with BIPOC-centered educational experience).
 - Allow students and faculty to hold each other accountable throughout the process—learning how to take inspiration from different cultures is important as a designer, but knowing how to facilitate these conversations productively and positively is even more necessary.

Long term*:

- Full incorporation of at least 50% BIPOC-based education into every Design semester course by the next year.

- Ability to show clear evidence of positive, BIPOC-inclusive changes in students' work and critical thinking processes once curriculum is significantly developed over the next several semesters.

* We see little long-term solutions for this category, as it is easy and fast to implement change in curriculum for Apparel design courses.

II.3 Technical Courses

Students recognize that across all three years of the Apparel Design studio curriculum, **there is a significant lack in educating diverse forms of making and construction methods, as well as very little consideration given to whom we're making it for.**

Direct quotations from students

"Include curriculum on design for all body types and needs. Too much of the time we are solely designing for sample size, excluding a majority of the real-world population and perpetuating the ideal image of the white, overtly skinny model."

"As much as we emphasize the everlasting quality of apparel in the department as opposed to fashion, almost all of the designers professors spoke about in class were western whites from the last century. **To understand clothing as a universal need, we need to examine it outside of 'western high fashion' by looking at designers/functional garments from other parts of the world"**

"My first semester in Apparel Design, our studio professor told us that we have to start learning patterning and construction techniques with a women's industry size 8. She specifically said we can complain and discuss body types, sizes, and gender, but this is just how it is. Perhaps that is how the industry is structured, but why not encourage and guide us to challenge that?"

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- **Introduce and incorporate specific non-western and non-euro centric techniques of making from various regions of the BIPOC world as adjunct assignments for 6-credit studio courses.**
- Have students participate in active studies and projects on various making methods from different cultures (while maintaining an awareness of cultural appropriation).
- **Include the instruction of patterning and construction techniques specific for a variety of body types that range above a size 8 dress form, perhaps following the tutorials for the basic sloper (for both sexes).**

- Faculty must challenge themselves, and in turn the students, the implications of words like “curvy” and “plus-sized” within our practice in RISD and in the fashion industry as a whole (especially because diversity of body shapes are closely linked with heritage and ethnicity).
- Similar to the one of the points made above in the “Design” curriculum section, organize a collection of resources (through the RISD Library and Museum) for various apparel and textile construction and making methods throughout the world, specifically highlighting those of BIPOC descent.
- Purchase more dress forms that vary in body size and type. If there are no realistic/diverse dress forms available for purchase, instruct students on how to alter dress forms (e.g. padding) so that they accurately represent the bodies the student would like to use as models.

Long term:

- Develop alternative courses that can be taken (either during the semester or during wintersession) that focus on techniques of making that are outside the western canon. This step will work in tandem with hiring additional faculty members who have skills that reflect this need, as well as BIPOC-centered changes in Apparel liberal courses.

III. Critiques

In every end-of-semester critique, **students have observed a clear, blatant lack of BIPOC guest critics** - students feel as though they see the same type of critic over and over again. In the past years, **many critics have expressed a lack of adequate worldly knowledge in being able to critique BIPOC students' work when it comes to their identities**. Students with culturally-based work have experienced very little feedback that speaks to the core of their heritage and identities, and instead are met with ignorance, stereotyping-like comments, or simply a complete lack of response. As similarly outlined in the “Design” curriculum section, several students have also experienced critiques on their culturally-based projects with feedback that their work is “costume-like”.

Direct quotations from students

“It’s a long journey for us to finally get to hiring a full time black faculty but at the very least bringing in guest critics or mentors should require less administrative effort. Jamall Osterholm. Christopher John Rogers. Kerby Jean Raymond. “

“We have called for an increased range of diversity amongst visiting critics for the past three years the class of 2020 studied in RISD Apparel, and yet each panel of critics

remained predominantly white, and showed little diversity in terms of culture, or experience. Critics calling non-western clothing costumes has become troubling and common.”

“The world on the whole doesn’t support such racist ideas as it did half a century ago, and neither should the fashion/design world....industry acceptance/perpetuation of cultural appropriation is an excuse I heard from [professors and visiting critics] of why it was okay for the RISD apparel dept to sanction the use of iconography from marginalized peoples”

“If the critics aren’t all white, there’s one token black critic. I find myself trying to engage with them more as they are usually the closest we get to diversity throughout the year. I find that when explaining my identity based work critics use words like “cool” or “different” to explain my work as if they are afraid to have a genuine discussion with me, and perhaps they are. Maybe because they don’t want to say the wrong thing or they don’t care. The designers of color are out there, there are no more excuses. RISD has the name and the money to bring creatives of color, at this point we believe you’re actively trying to keep things white and exclusive.”

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- Ask students to propose critics they would like to bring that can best speak to the work. Following that, faculty and students should have a discussion together as to who to bring in, whether they be RISD faculty from other departments, or seasoned industry experts.
 - Special focus should be the opinions of our department’s BIPOC students, as they are not the majority of the student body within Apparel.
- **By the next end-of-semester critique (Fall 2020), BIPOC guest critics (with experience in BIPOC fashion/education) must be at least 50% of those attending.** This should become the standard for every following critique in the department.
- Open critiques up to student and peer input—currently, the student body is more diverse than the faculty, and students do have the ability to provide valuable and culturally-relevant input, based on their own experiences.
- Faculty and the department head should open themselves up for a follow-up conversation with students, BIPOC especially, in case any student feels the need to express that the critique they received is inadequate, ignorant, and biased. In turn, faculty members should host another discussion (perhaps with the student’s peers and professors) about the student’s work so that they may get the proper and necessary feedback their projects call for.

Long term:

- Develop strong relationships with BIPOC designers who are defying the narrative of the traditional apparel practice in order to have a diverse network of potential

guest critics who can become regular voices at critiques, and possibly in the future, Apparel faculty members.

IV. Educational Transparency

From various student testimonials, we've discovered that academic grading for Black and indigenous students is often indefensible, and the grade change appeal process is often manipulated to the detriment of the student. **There is little transparency in the grading process across Apparel Design studios, and students are often not held to the same standard.** In addition, on multiple occasions, professors have expressed they grade according to "European" standards, which should be completely irrelevant, as we are an institution based in America. As a result, the GPAs of students are significantly lowered, and become extremely hard to raise.

Direct quotations from students

"The lack of transparency in grading has negatively impacted my success, education, and health. I walked into Apparel with a 3.9 gpa which quickly plummeted to a 3.5 in one semester. Now, I am in jeopardy of being unable to participate in opportunities that I so rightfully deserve, ones that I would have been able to succeed and lead in, if this trend continues, it will emulate that of a downward spiral. **The system is designed such that I will always be declining, which leads me to seriously reconsider a future somewhere else that I am treated with respect. Unfortunately, this is the narrative for black artists and designers at RISD.**"

"As a black woman I was graded harsher than my white counterparts [in History of Dress]. An area that I excelled in was writing, yet I was manipulated into believing that I was once again, not good enough."

"BIPOC are not "heard" in this institution, not excluding the Apparel Department. Though faculty may believe they are being fair and grade without bias but at the end of the day what is lacking in the general knowledge of and application to teaching is cultural literacy and acknowledging behaviors and beliefs toward or in relation to black and brown students... I have found talking to other people who look like me that they have faced similar if not identical experiences to mine. We as black and brown students do not have an agenda, we are just trying to learn and receive equal help and guidance among our peers. Fact check this but the average black students gpa is allegedly 3.25- I heard this while in a black student alliance meeting at the end of the year before lockdown. Whether this number is accurate or not the similarity in experience between other bipoc I talk to is not a coincidence. We need more support, understanding, and consideration. Though I have felt that my experience here was a case by case issue solely responsible for my own shortcomings but through speaking to other people with similar backgrounds that I am not alone and my "lackluster " performance is not a me problem but something that is an issue of discrimination rooted in the foundation of America and that bleeds

into contemporary classrooms and communities such as RISD that causes black and brown students not to be supported as much as their peers, criticized more harshly which therefore creates a toxic situation and space that we are then still expected to grow in and excel.”

Proposed solutions

Short term:

- **Release to all students their grade evaluation sheet (a detailed rubric broken down into categories) in full every semester, to provide transparency and ensure there are no discrepancies due to implicit racial bias.** This grading rubric should be presented at the beginning of the semester alongside each course’s syllabus.
- **Include tangible rubrics to syllabi to make abundantly clear the ways work is evaluated** (e.g. number of looks, content on presentation boards/sketchbook). Continue to follow-through and remind students throughout the semester.
- **Schedule in advance grade change appeals meetings so students do not face the added labor of coordinating between professors.**
- **Develop a transparent and open environment and relationship between faculty members and students.** Students should be aware, through the syllabi and introductory class to the course, what will be taught. Should students pose suggestions (especially if they call for greater BIPOC inclusivity), faculty members must hear them out, and work out any necessary additions and/or adjustments.
- Similar to solutions stated in the “Faculty” section, **faculty members must also be transparent with each other on what they plan to teach every semester** (through frequent weekly/monthly meetings with each other). Faculty members must also open themselves up for discussion on what should be taught and how.
- Potentially establish an online portal (such a moodle, or canvas) where students can have easy access to the grades and feedback for each assignment so that they can address problems or potential instances of race-based bias earlier instead of after the course has ended.

Long term:

- Faculty and administrators should actively track the academic performances of Black students compared to the department’s non-black students to observe over time if any racial bias in grading and evaluation has occurred.

CONCLUSION - ACCOUNTABILITY

The students of RISD apparel know and understand the above demands best, as they are the result of years of inherited passion and frustration. As authors and editors of this

proposal, we aim to establish a student task force which will serve as direct points of contact for the faculty, reinforcing and insisting upon these demands as time elapses. A distinction between the student representative and the student task force is necessary: while the student representative speaks to and on behalf of RISDs undergraduate body of students, the student task force (which can include the student representative) speaks to the apparel faculty on behalf of apparel students and with these demands in mind. The student task force will frequently report to SEI throughout each academic year to hold the Apparel Design Department accountable, and to receive guidance if needed.

This is not the only structure that must form. In addition, faculty should establish a system of accountability within themselves in conjunction with the Department Head as the authoritative figure. The faculty should constantly revisit this proposal and review these terms every semester to ensure these statements will be upheld and the culture of accountability on these issues does not die down. The faculty must release statements to the Apparel student body on what they have and have not yet accomplished. These reports should be sent out every few months detailing what faculty members are doing, reading, learning and even their shortcomings. Transparency is necessary. Note that **these demands are not out of nowhere, and they will not disappear.**

If for any reason the faculty and staff of the RISD Apparel Design Department cannot meet these demands and solutions stated in this proposal, an active discussion needs to be held between the student task force and the faculty body to make adjustments and amendments that we as a whole body see fit, though we do not wish to significantly compromise any of our terms.

Starting in 2020, the student task force (as part of the collective student body), will be active in holding the faculty, staff, and students accountable, and will seek to measure and record progressive change.

As representatives on behalf of the RISD Apparel Design student body, this document formally declares our intent for change.

We thank our current RISD Apparel Design Department's faculty members and administration for their reception towards our demands as stated in this proposal. Additionally, a special thank you to Matthew Shenoda at SEI for supporting us and all of RISD.