What can I do with a major in apparel design or merchandising?

Some students are fascinated by clothing, accessory, or shoe design and plan to earn a degree that will allow them to work for clothing designers or manufacturers, retailers, theater or dance companies, or as an independent fashion designer. These students may choose to study apparel design. Other students are more interested in sales and marketing of clothing and accessories; these students often choose to study apparel merchandising. Other names for these fields of study may include “fashion,” “textile,” or “fiber” in their titles, so students looking for universities offering these programs should use multiple search terms to find all possible programs.

How can I prepare at Seattle Central for a major in apparel design or merchandising?

For most majors, earning an associate degree before transfer is the best course of action. For majors related to art or design, however, sometimes the large number of specific studio classes required for the major means that students are better off transferring to the university or art school that offers their program before earning an associate degree. Whether a student decides to transfer to a traditional university or an art school to earn a bachelor’s degree, the student should contact the potential transfer schools early on to find out what classes are required for the major, which classes can be transferred from Seattle Central, and when would be the best time to transfer.

Depending on the specifics of the programs they plan to apply to, students planning to major in apparel design often take general education courses at Seattle Central, as well as possibly art history, drawing, accounting, or economics. Students interested in apparel merchandising often take general education courses as well as some business classes such as economics or accounting. The courses required – and accepted as transfer credit - vary greatly depending on the transfer school, so it is STRONGLY recommended that students work with advisors at the universities or art schools where they are considering transferring to ensure they take the appropriate classes to be prepared to enter the major when they transfer.

Students planning to major in apparel design or merchandising should consider working toward the Associate of Arts – DTA, but may choose to transfer before earning the degree depending on the program requirements at their transfer university or art school.
Tips for Success as an Apparel Design or Merchandising Major

- Majors in apparel design and merchandising can require many specific classes that are not offered at Seattle Central. Even if they are offered, some universities or art schools may not accept them. These majors also may require fewer general education credits than many majors. Talk with admissions staff at your potential transfer schools early to find out what classes to take at Seattle Central that will transfer and how many credits you should ideally earn here before transferring.

- Make sure to search for your intended major using a variety of search terms, including “apparel,” “textile,” and “fashion,” as well as “design” or “merchandising.” You may miss out on some programs if your search terms are too narrow.

- Check both university admission and graduation requirements at your preferred transfer university as a guide to choosing your classes. Some universities, for example, may require a year of foreign language as a graduation requirement. It may be much easier (and cheaper!) to meet that requirement at Seattle Central rather than waiting until later.

Programs offered by public and private non-profit universities in Washington State:

- Central Washington University: Apparel, Textiles, and Merchandising
- Seattle Pacific University: Clothing and Textiles Major with Emphasis in Apparel Design or Emphasis in Fashion Merchandising
- Washington State University: Apparel Design, Merchandising, and Textiles Major; specializations within the major include Apparel Design and Merchandising

Next Steps:

- Research art schools as well as traditional universities that you are interested in attending. Contact advisors at those schools to find out their admission requirements, how many general education and studio credits they would accept from Seattle Central, and when would be the best time to apply to transfer.

- Meet with an advisor to discuss prerequisites and plan what classes you need to take in the next quarter or two.

- Explore the professional organizations in your area of interest for more information about education and career options.