HI 451/WS 451: Fashion as History

College of Arts and Sciences, Boston University
226 Bay State Road, Rm. 504
Fall 2018, Mondays 2:30-5:15

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Office Hours: Mondays 5-6pm; Wednesdays 9-11am; and by appointment.

Course Description:

This upper-level colloquium will treat clothing and other products of material culture as historical documents. A three-piece suit, a Georgian silk dress, a Victorian corset, a ready-to-wear skirt, a t-shirt from the Gap – all offer a useful lens into the culture, politics, and economics of particular times and places. Beginning in the 17th century and ranging across the globe (though concentrating primarily on developments in the West), this seminar will begin to explore what clothing can tell us about trade and commerce, empire, gender, sexuality, class, race, industry, revolution, nation-building, identity politics and globalization. The goal of this seminar, however, is not just to understand fashion as a “window” onto the past. Rather, we will aim simultaneously to see fashion, and material culture more generally, as playing a fundamental role in the shaping of that past. Requirements for this course will include: weekly response papers (1-2 pages), a research proposal (3-5 pages), and a research paper on a topic chosen by the student (12-15 pages). For the final paper, students will visit local fashion museums and collections, including the Massachusetts Historical Society, and choose an item of clothing, footwear or fashion-related accessory on which to focus their research.
Course Texts (required):


In addition to the above texts, many primary and secondary sources will be posted online and on a class Blackboard Learn web site.

Course Requirements:

- **Attendance.** Course attendance is required. See Class Attendance Policy.
- **Class Participation.** As this is a seminar, it is absolutely essential that you come to class ready to discuss the required readings and other relevant course materials. To help you with this, I will be requiring you to write 1-2 pp. response papers on designated week’s reading. I will read these responses carefully, and they will be graded. In addition to completing these writing assignments, I encourage you to take an active approach to learning. Make sure to take notes while you prepare for class, and ask yourself questions. Why do you think that a particular reading has been assigned? What are its main ideas and concepts? If you find a reading dull, why? What about it seems strange or difficult to understand? Asking yourself these kinds of questions will help you to participate more effectively in class discussion.
- **Writing Assignments.** In addition to the weekly critical reflections, you will be required to write a research paper, 12-15 pages in length. I will circulate more information about the research paper well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown:

- Class Participation and Attendance (including field trips): 25%
- Weekly Response Papers (1-2 pages): 35%
- Research Proposal (3-5 pages): 5%
- Research Paper (12-15 pages): 35%

Format for Research Paper and Response Papers:

All papers (including drafts) must:

- Be typed/word-processed. Handwritten work is not acceptable;
- Be double-spaced in 12 pt. font;
- Be spell-checked – spelling errors are not acceptable;
- Be grammar-checked to the best of your ability – we will review grammar conventions throughout the semester; and
- Include your name, a title, the course title, assignment, page numbers, and the date.
Late Assignments:

Please contact me well in advance of an assignment’s due date if you think that you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline. All papers submitted late without my permission will automatically be marked down one half grade per day.

Attendance Policy:

Class attendance is required. Please notify me in advance (if possible) if you know that you will need to be absent from class. Under no circumstances will a student who misses more than three classes pass this course. Those who have more than 1 unexcused absence will see this reflected in their class participation grade.

Plagiarism Policy:

This course is designed to encourage critical thinking and writing. In order to become critical thinkers and writers, you must complete all stages of the work yourself: taking the words of others, or presenting the ideas of others as your own not only prohibits you from learning the skills of academic research, it also is a violation of the University's Code of Academic Integrity: https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/. The minimum penalty for such offenses is to fail the assignment; the more common penalty is to fail the course. If you ever have questions about how to cite a source (be it a text, website or person), please contact me. I’m more than happy to help answer your questions – that’s what I’m here for. We will regularly review the University's plagiarism policy.

Special Circumstances:

If you have a disability registered with Disability Support Services or some other special circumstance that might affect your work this semester, please let me know both verbally and in writing as soon as possible, so I can make appropriate accommodations.

Course Schedule

UNIT ONE: COURSE FOUNDATIONS

September 10: Introductory: What is fashion? What can it tell us about the present? About the past?/Introduction to the Research Paper and Process

Reading:


September 17: The Stakes of Fashion

Screening and discussion of The True Cost (documentary)
UNIT TWO: FASHION AND GLOBALIZATION

September 24: Cotton and Globalization*

Reading:


In-class slideshow on Fashion from Nature exhibit at the Victoria & Albert Museum

* Response Paper due

October 1: Fashion and the Making of Empire*

Reading:


* Response Paper due

UNIT THREE: FASHION AND THE POLITICAL

October 9 [substitute Monday]: Fashion and Revolution*

Reading:


*Response Paper due

October 15: Fashion and Nation/Writing the History of Material Culture*

Reading:

• Excerpts from Irene Guenther, Nazi ‘Chic’?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich (Bloomsbury, 2004), Chapters 1, 4, 5 and 8 (e-book, available via Mugar Library website)
• History and Material Culture: A student’s guide to approaching alternative sources, ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2009), Introduction and Ch. 1, 1-46

* Response Paper due

October 22: Research 101/Mugar Library Orientation/Database and Secondary Source Share

October 29: Massachusetts Historical Society trip (details TBD)

UNIT FOUR: FASHION AND GENDER

November 5: Men in Suits*

Reading:

• Ann Hollander, Sex and Suits (New York: Knopf, 1994), Chapters 1 and 2 [on Blackboard Learn]

*Response paper due

November 12: Fashion as Liberation? Women, Clothing and Agency/Research project share and discussion of developing good research questions*

Reading:

• “Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform” web site, at: http://dressreform.tripod.com/
• Valerie Steele, The Corset: A Cultural History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), Chapters 1 and 2, pp.1-65 [on Blackboard Learn]

*Response paper due/Item Share

UNIT FIVE: FASHION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

November 19: Fashion and the Making of Subcultures/Research and Writing Workshop I (organizing research/developing an argument/formation of research groups)*

Reading:

- Dick Hebdige, Subculture: the meaning of style (New York: Routledge, 1979), Intro and Ch. 1, 1-19 [on Blackboard Learn]
- In-class screening and discussion of Paris is Burning (1990)

*Research proposal due at start of class

November 26: Fashion, Race and Social Resistance/Secondary Source share/Research and Writing Workshop II (sustaining scholarly arguments/engaging with secondary literature)*

Reading:


*Research Paper thesis statements and outlines due at start of class

UNIT SIX: SELLING FASHION

December 3: Making the Model: A Discussion with Sociologist Ashley Mears/Research Paper Workshop*

Reading:

- Ashley Mears, Pricing Beauty, Chapters 1, 4 and 5

*Research Paper drafts due to working groups at the start of class
UNIT SEVEN: THE RESEARCH PAPER AND COURSE CONCLUSIONS

December 10: Research Paper Reflections/Course Conclusions

**Research Papers due at start of class on December 10, unless other arrangements have been made in writing**