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Making the most of duct tape

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Two to four rolls of duct tape, a pair of scissors, a turtleneck, a pair of shorts and a human body.

These were all the supplies needed as students suited in a turtleneck and shorts began wrapping each other in duct tape.

The University of Northern Iowa's Textiles and Apparel (TAA) students gathered in their studio, located in Room 251 of Latham Hall to make duct tape mannequins.



“I really enjoy teaching and sharing information,” said Dr. Theresa Winge, assistant professor of the textiles and apparel program. “A duct tape mannequin project does not fit neatly into one of my classes, and I can see the value it would have to fashion design students. Therefore, a breakout session/seminar seems the most appropriate setting for creating duct tape mannequins with students.”

The evening began with a demonstration by Dr. Winge of the duct taping technique on a student, clothed in a turtleneck and shorts to protect areas of the body that the tape might touch. Winge wrapped the duct tape over the shoulders and around the breast of the student to create a bra-like support. She then continued wrapping under the chest and over the shoulders, adding layers to the tape. Once the students witnessed the taping they began unrolling the tape on their partners.

As the bust began to take shape, students had to be careful not to tape the body too hard as it would cause the natural shape to be disconfigured. The professor also advised them that if the tape were too loose the mannequin would not be a replica of the student's body.

"I felt like a fat guy in a little coat," said Brianna Smith, junior TAA major.

Other students agree to feeling as though their body was being sucked in and it was difficult to move.

"The most challenging part of creating a duct tape mannequin was the physical energy needed to complete it," said Winge. "It takes between three and five hours to complete, and during that time you are either being wrapped in duct tape or wrapping someone in duct tape, followed by stuffing the form with newspaper, fabric or plastic bags. I think the students who participated can attest to the fact that they were physically exhausted after the process."

After the bodice was constructed, students moved down the body with the tape. The best technique was to flow with the curves of the body, not forcing the tape to go directions it shouldn't. Soon students had duct tape down to the legs. The next challenge was to feel comfortable enough with their partner to put the tape between the legs, and wrap it around the buttocks.

“Students usually find it challenging to put tape on intimate areas of another student,” Winge said. “This challenge is easily overcome. Students help each other out until the first layer of duct tape is all in place.”

Eventually a good portion of the body was covered in duct tape, varying in colors from silver to purple to red. The next step was to tape the neck and arms. Once the full figure was finished, the students proceeded to smooth out the tape with another layer of the sticky stuff, making sure there were no bubbles or missed sections.

Finally, it was time for the form to be cut from its host. The challenge was to cut only the duct tape, not skin or undergarments.

“My favorite part was when it was being cut off,” said Jenny Broek. “It took a lot longer than I thought. I thought it was going to take two hours at most.”

The night was not over yet; students still needed to stuff their mannequins to hold the shape. The process was very slow as students smashed old newspapers into balls and stuffed them inside the newly formed mannequins.

“It reminded me of My Buddy and Kid Sister,” said Smith, as she began to recite the song.

After an hour of stuffing, the mannequins began to fill up and hold their shape, due to the packed newspaper. Students taped up the backs of the mannequins as the newspaper packed into the body crevices. Once students reached the neck, a sturdy hanger was inserted so it could hang from a pole while the designer worked on garments. The remainder of the neck was stuffed and taped shut.

Many of the students agreed the duct taping was a good compromise to purchasing a dress form for \$175 – \$450. They also enjoyed the fact the dress form would allow them to make garments in their own size.

“It was really fun TAPP [Textiles and Apparel Association] social,” said Natalie Wendt, who was often referred to as looking like a superhero during the process. “I feel I could teach people to do it in the future. I can always look back on it and have a good laugh.”

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