

Illinois University Council for Career and Technical Education  
Awards for Innovation Proposal

**A Clear Definition of Appropriate Professional Dress for Teachers**

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a. **The strand addressed by the proposal**

Southern Illinois University's Fashion Design and Merchandising Program and Department of Workforce Education and Development (WED) partnered to address the strand of professional development for CTE pre-service and beginning teachers. Professional development was defined as activities that promote acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits (e.g., personal qualities) that enhance teachers' performance. The objective of this proposal is to develop, present, and disseminate a research data-based professional development seminar to enhance teacher performance.

b. **Rationale for the project**

Teachers' appropriate, professional appearance is an ongoing topic of concern for the profession. "Professional attitudes and behaviors ... are critical to the survival and enhancement of professions and professionals" (Hammer, 2000, p. 462). This topic is particularly pertinent for CTE teachers whose focus on the technical component of their work may cause conflict with standard requirements for professional dress. In an analysis of teacher dress codes (n = 103), 55 dress codes specified that teachers should dress professionally and 78 specified that teachers should dress appropriately (Freeburg & Workman, 2008). In many cases, no examples were given of what constituted professional or appropriate dress leading researchers to conclude that wording of the dress codes was vague. There is need for a clear definition of appropriate professional dress for teachers that can be included in training for pre-service and beginning teachers.

An online survey was developed to collect data from members of the Illinois Association of School Boards. School board members and superintendents were chosen because of their role in determining dress code policies for teachers. Their opinions will allow researchers to define appropriate professional dress for teachers in different contexts such as CTE, PE, Art, English, or History. The survey consisted of pictures of teachers dressed in a variety of outfits. Participants were asked to evaluate on a 6-point scale how the teacher's dress fits into the categories of appropriate, inappropriate, professional, not professional: 6 = fully in (the category); 5 = mostly but not fully in; 4 = more or less in; 3 = more or less out; 2 = mostly but not fully out; 1 = fully out.

## **The Objectives and Deliverables**

Following is a summary of the objectives, sub-objectives and deliverables for the project.

c. **Objectives of the project**

Project objectives are as follows:

- a. Develop a research data-based professional development seminar.
  - i. Analyze responses to an email survey of members of the Illinois Association of School Boards regarding appropriate professional dress.
  - ii. Prepare research data-based seminar content, learning activities, and handout materials.
- b. Deliver a research data-based professional development seminar.
  - i. Deliver seminar to pre-service and beginning teachers.

- ii. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation depicting appropriate professional and inappropriate unprofessional dress for dissemination through web-based resources.
- c. Disseminate research data by submitting one manuscript to a professional journal and one presentation proposal to a national conference.
- d. Provide an undergraduate student with an opportunity to assist in the research and development of a professional development seminar to pre-service and beginning teachers, specifically CTE teachers.

**d. How the project would improve and positively impact CTE in Illinois**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) has a strong technical, applied curriculum. A clear definition of appropriate dress will be beneficial to CTE teachers whose focus on the technical applied components of their work may require dress that is inconsistent with the popular notion of professional dress. For example, when FCS teachers are demonstrating food preparation, a washable garment may be appropriate rather than a tailored wool suit. When a technology education teacher is demonstrating how to service a car engine, wearing a tie (although professional) may actually be a safety hazard.

The dissemination of these materials throughout Illinois will ensure the availability of quality materials that are aligned with the interests of the teaching profession including educators and school boards in helping pre-service and beginning teachers be better prepared for their positions.

**e. Deliverable products that stemmed from funding of this project**

Deliverable products were: (a) a data-based professional development seminar for pre-service and beginning teachers, specifically CTE teachers, to promote understanding of appropriate professional dress for teachers; (b) a session at the 2009 Connections Conference to report on the outcomes of the project; (c) a manuscript submitted to a CTE research-based journal; and (d) a proposal accepted for presentation at a national meeting.

(a) Professional Development Seminar – The purpose of the seminar is to develop knowledge of teacher candidates about dressing professionally and thus being well-prepared to represent their schools in an appropriate professional manner. Researchers collected data via an online survey from school board members, superintendents, and principals of schools that are members of the Illinois Association of School Boards. Researchers analyzed the data to develop a clear definition of appropriate professional dress for teachers. Results of the data analysis were used to develop the seminar content.

*A virtual professional development seminar was prepared and posted on a web-site. Superintendents from Illinois schools were emailed a link to the virtual professional development seminar that included a PowerPoint presentation with voice-over. The link for the seminar is <http://voicethread.com/share/530924/>*

(b) Delivery of a session at the 2009 Connections Conference (March 25-26) in Springfield that will report on the outcomes of the project.

*A session was presented at the 2009 Connections Conference.*

(c) A manuscript submitted to a CTE research-based journal.

*The manuscript is in process.*

(d) A proposal submitted for presentation at a national meeting.

*An abstract was submitted to International Textile and Apparel Association for presentation at the 2009 meeting in Seattle, Washington.*

### **References**

Freeburg, B. W., & Workman, J. E. (2008). Results from Illinois University Council for Career and Technical Education 2007-2008 Awards for Innovation Project.

Hammer, D. P. (2000). Professional attitudes and behaviors: The "A's and B's" of professionalism. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 64, 455-464.