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What Should I Wear Today?

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ABSTRACT

My honors thesis is a creative non-fiction project of a collection of essays that explore my participation in the fast fashion industry in two ways. The first is my involvement as an employee of a large, fast fashion retailer named Urban Outfitters, and the second is my long-term consumer relationship with various other retailers. The essays begin at a point of realization and follow the growth of my understanding and knowledge of the structure of the fast fashion industry to the point where my perception on the ethics of fashion, style, retail, customer service, and manufacturing have dramatically changed.

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Introduction

My closet is an abyss infinitely empty, and I try to obsessively fill it with clothes in a desperate attempt to make it feel complete. I tell myself just one more tank top, one more pair of jeans, one more blouse and I'll be done. It's a delusion I can't shake. I already have twenty tank tops, nine pairs of jeans, thirteen blouses, but I know I can fit more, buy more, own more. At times, I slip out of this mindset for a quick moment and ask myself what I am doing. Don't I have enough? Yes, of course I do. If I stopped doing my laundry, I would have an estimated month and a half before I needed to wash any garments.

I pull open my closet and the values induced by the fashion industry become clear in the many clothes draped on hangers and folded and stacked on shelves. There are wardrobe basics that can be mixed and matched with almost anything: blue jeans, black jeans, a second pair of black jeans but with rips in the legs, four pairs of black non-denim pants with varying fabrics and styles, several patterned pants with bright colors or vibrant patterns to make any outfit more eye-catching, three maxi skirts with drastically different fabrics and colors and cuts, six pairs of sweatpants, some lounge and others acceptable for public appearances, three pairs of leggings that serve simultaneously as loungewear and exercise apparel. The shirts include twenty crop tops organized into piles of casualwear and partywear and miscellaneous, twelve long-sleeve tops on hangers with the casual ones further back in the closet and the professional attire arranged closer to the front, two towering stacks of my fifteen sweatshirts because I frequently convince myself a sweatshirt is different enough from my others that I can purchase it. There are also the eight dresses hung on one hanger because they are all strappy cocktail-style dresses, two

long sleeve dresses on respective hangers, seven jackets and coats that all have different styles and purposes, nine oversized t-shirts, various athletic gear, although I don't regularly exercise enough to own them, and a comparably small but important collection of college spirit wear for football games during the fall semester. I don't have a problem. Well, maybe I do. After all, that's what a person with a problem would try to convince themselves to believe. I love fashion, I do. But maybe, I began to subscribe like a worshipper in church but to a false deity instead of the proper god. I became indoctrinated into a system of insidious consumption to fill a void that is designed to never be filled.

For much of my life, I believed fashion to be one thing: the clothes one chooses to wear on their back. During middle school and high school, I understood fashion to be what the local mall offered in their handful of stores. Then, I learned fashion isn't the piles of clothes folded on display tables at the local mall, that is retail. Retail isn't the designs presented by supermodels on a runway in a prestigious city at the start of each season, that is fashion. Trendy isn't the ability to construct an outfit with creative and unique structure, that is style. Style isn't the outfit seen on a mannequin only to see it on a classmate days later, that is trendy. I learned these distinctions only after my indoctrination into the lifestyle of overconsumption. With this awareness, I decided to take a close look at my own habits, my own clothing, my fashion taste, my relationship to the fashion industry and fashion retailers to understand how I became a cog in the machine.

In an attempt to investigate my ideological stance toward fashion I catalogued my closet. My employment as Sales Associate at Urban Outfitters (UO) for one year and five months influenced this decision because my job taught me how to view clothes in a material, capitalistic manner, rather than simply as avenues and opportunities of self-expression. I tracked clothing

items I wore for fourteen days to determine what items are my favorite, and what brands I wear most often. For example, my track log revealed I used a gray t-shirt formerly owned by my dad as a lounge shirt for seven days. During his annual process of spring-cleaning, he leaves a pile of old t-shirts on the guest bed for my sister and me to sift through before he donates the remaining, rejected shirts. The shirt I took one year was an XL, 100 percent cotton, light gray, slightly pilled, arguably stretched out from its original shape, men's t-shirt. The front of the shirt presents the words, "The Strongest Will Survive," in faded red ink with lines in the same ink creating a border around the quote. The back of the shirt shows an image of a man surrounded by thin, elliptical, red lines reminiscent of the outdated atom model popular mid-twentieth century. I often slip this shirt on when I come home from class, while I'm doing homework, when I'm dressed for bed. My reasons for loving this shirt are simple: it's old and comfy; its design is plain but attractive, and it's a piece of home while I'm at college four hours north. Throw in the facts that it was free and second-hand to complete the list.

However, the track log revealed that many of my day-to-day items were products of fast fashion. When I say fast fashion, I mean the heavily industrialized process of quickly creating garments for large retail corporations in weeks-long production cycles at the lowest costs possible. The first week of my track log recorded that I wore at least one item from my employer, UO, every day of that seven-day period. Day one, I wore a plain black crop top with a scoop-shaped neckline. Day two, stretchy black pants with flared legs. Day three, the same pants as day two. Day four, loose jean shorts in an A-line style. Day five, oversized t-shirt of a blue and gray tie-dyed fabric with an image of several gray tigers printed on its face. Day six, another oversized t-shirt in a tan color with a hippie design commemorating Woodstock of 1969 on its face. Day seven, a green tank top made of sweater material. Urban Outfitters provides an

employee discount to use which, very plainly stated in the results of the tracklog, I've used many times over the seventeen months I've worked there. But now, I needed to start asking myself whether I bought clothes from UO because I needed them or because I wanted them and could, thanks to the lowered cost.

A tag often ignored on my clothes is the laundering guideline tag hidden on an interior seam. On this small tag, one side includes information about proper laundering procedure. The other side, the location of production. Take, for example, the black stretchy pants with flared legs from Urban Outfitters. The tag reads, "Made in UK," slightly faded from my several wears and washes. All the way from the UK. Pull another tag out of an item of clothing, and it reads, "Made in India." Another, "Made in Vietnam." Another, "Made in Bangladesh." Much further than the UK. As I read the many labels, I wondered; how do these clothes reach the Urban Outfitters store located in State College when they are produced so far from Pennsylvania? What goes into the process? Who makes the clothes? I am the consumer, the retail employee, the fashionista, the researcher. Who, then, is the manufacturer? Who is my other half in the sale of fast fashion?

My project follows other investigations into fast fashion, executed as works of literary journalism. Examples of works that inspired my own are Elizabeth Cline's *Over-Dressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Fashion* and Lucy Siegle's *Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?* Another influence on my project was Barabara Ehrenreich's *Nickle and Dimed*, however she investigates what it is like to live by being employed in a low-wage position in the United States. The first two investigations pursue the idea that fast fashion is damaging to both the labor force of many countries and the environmental health of the world. Ehrenreich's discussion on the gap between practical living standards and actual offered wages inspired the consideration of how fast fashion

exasperates these economic issues for both shopper and worker. Although my writing discusses similar themes of labor exploitation, overconsumption by consumers, and the need for a reformed fashion industry, my self-reflective project investigates how I, as both consumer and retail employee, have contributed to the success and perseverance of the fast fashion industry. Additionally, I identify the simultaneous negative affects my contribution has caused upon myself and others. The essays within this project explore my integration into the fast fashion cycle along with my ideological transformation after becoming more aware of the issues of the industry. The advantage of using a personal narrative is so I can address the issue that consumers don't see the people behind the production of a \$5 t-shirt; they only see the object and their own gain. Through my personal experience, I aim to place the focus back on the people.

From my work on this project, I've spent hours dedicated to internally analyzing how I arrived at the point of indoctrination and how I released myself from it. After writing these essays, I've discovered the difficulty of going against the mainstream understandings of shopping when the alternative options of thrifting, renting, borrowing, and other methods of obtaining clothes are crushed under successful capitalist corporate giants. Additionally, I've come to recognize that ethical forms of shopping cannot thrive when free market competition means profit at any cost, resulting in the exploitation of employees at all stages within a company. I cannot say I have an answer to the monstrous dilemma that is the fast fashion industry, but I hope that my project expresses and inspires an awareness in its readers to be more careful with how they spend their money and more thoughtful about what that payment supports.

Inquiry: Confessions of a Shop-aholic

My twinge of appreciation for fashion blossomed into full-on devotion one afternoon in high school. I just returned home from school, dropped my backpack against the wall beside the dining table, and slid my feet across the hardwood to begin my afternoon routine. This consisted of picking up the landline, dialing my mom's work number, and having a catch-up conversation as I dressed down into lounge clothes. Once these steps were complete, I situated myself on the couch in the living room with my laptop across my legs and a blanket around my body. I opened YouTube to mindlessly view some videos to pass the next few hours before I reminded myself of the homework I needed to complete.

I watched nothing important enough to remember, that is until a video popped up in the recommended column titled, "30 BACK TO SCHOOL OUTFITS (yes it's that time of year I'm so sorry)," by BestDressed. I had never heard of this creator, but nonetheless I clicked the video because her blunt title led me to believe she might be fun to watch. And my assumption was correct. BestDressed, or Ashley, was a young woman who lived in Los Angeles at the time and made fashion and style videos in her free time from pursuing a college degree in film. She expertly combined creative imagination, pessimistic humor, and snarky social commentary into one video that was simply about stylish outfits for school. Outfit after outfit and joke after joke, I became more and more entranced. For hours, I watched her videos on how to revive thrifted clothes, how to "thrift-flip" garments into new and trendy pieces, how to style for the seasons, how to apartment hunt in New York City, what love is like as a 20-something-year-old, and what fashion week looks like as an invitee. I felt that, through the screen, she somehow bore witness to my love of fashion and said to me directly that it was okay if I cared about my appearance and wanted to curate it to my liking.

Every day for school I tried to dress as if I were prepared for the day. For me, that meant putting a basic makeup look on and wearing an outfit that did not include loungewear. On my own time, I consumed fashion-oriented media, such as *America's Next Top Model* or *Project Runway*, but the catty competition of these reality shows overtook the art form of the fashion that they presented. I enjoyed fashion for the invention, the self-expression, the lack of convention. I watched that video by BestDressed and felt that she shared that same appreciation for fashion. In short, I found another style enthusiast to share my love.

Eventually, the internet caught up with me and her subscriber amount on YouTube skyrocketed into the millions. Yet, with great social media success comes lots of unwarranted opinions. After watching her videos for a few years, her uploads dwindled to none after a stalker found her New York apartment, and hundreds of thousands of people online who shamed her for saying she felt lonely and wanted to see her friends during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The backlash was unequal to the number of comments she received at best, but she nonetheless dropped YouTube as one of her major forms of income. I still follow her on Instagram and appreciate the innovative outfits she curates, the poses she takes, and the ultimate creativity of her entire profile. But, as a years-long fan, I feel nostalgic for her videos that taught my high-school self what fashion really meant. Her videos explored countless technical features and visionary efforts of the curation of an outfit. Without judgement or lofty language, she taught about color theory and why certain vibrancies or saturations or tones complemented or contrasted another, and she taught about the value of a flattering silhouette, and about the differences between low-quality and high-quality fabrics, and about the chaos and frenzy of fashion week each year, and about the levels of fashion and why consumers should buy based on the process of production. She was my fashion mentor, and I was her eager, yet ignorant, pupil.

Although I am a stranger to her, I felt we mirrored the classic relationship in *The Devil Wears Prada*: Ashley as the ruthless yet honest fashion titan, Miranda Priestly, and me as the fresh-faced and naïve assistant to her, Andrea Sachs. But, that's where the parallel drops off. In the movie, Andrea leaves Miranda once she finds her love of fashion and personal style but rejects the cold and self-preserving nature of high fashion that Miranda has spearheaded for decades. Instead, Ashley followed Andrea's steps and I had yet to learn that lesson and still marched forward in hopes of staking a spot in the fashion industry for myself however I found fit.

Throughout my four years in college, I found other fashion channels to fill Ashley's absence as well as bolster my education in the field. I discovered several fashion history and outfit analysis channels, like Mina Le and ModernGurlz. Mina Le dedicates her videos to exploring the history of fashion through the decades and analyzing how the media and Hollywood represent these styles. As said in the name, ModernGurlz performs similar critiques but on contemporary styles in media. I imagine my discovery of these channels to be like my finding of BestDressed in high school. I came back to my dorm or apartment, dropped my backpack recklessly against the desk leg, haphazardly threw on an old t-shirt most likely stolen from my dad along with a pair of sweat shorts and fuzzy socks, unzipped my backpack to yank out my laptop, and plopped my body down on my bed to peruse YouTube until I had to return to the real world.

I like to see this afterschool routine I created as another form of education. I attend my classes during the day for my bachelor's degree, return home, and begin my night classes for fashion. I spent countless hours of my free time relentlessly clicking video after video about whatever fashion subgenre was offered. Instead of notes, I retained the detailed commentary on

the different parts of the fashion industry. For example, I know that it is a common occurrence for high-end designers to replicate aspects of their competitors' collections to seem equally as innovative that season or on-trend with the industry's expectations. I also know that the famous Victoria's Secret Annual Fashion Show was canceled due to the owner's prejudiced comments about women's bodies and the supermodels' refusal to continue working with the company. The most important piece of information I learned from these video creators is that the industry is oversaturated with fast fashion companies that produce an excess of low-quality garments on the backs of employees that are offensively underpaid. Yet, this fact did not take hold until the latter half of my education, until my junior year.

Prior to college, my access to fashion was subjected to the whims of my local mall, Fair Oaks Mall. It housed the only brands I was aware of at that age, the brands that would determine whether I was stylish in the eyes of my peers. My mom was strict about when she would take my sister and me to shop for new clothes. We were limited to back-to-school shopping and holiday shopping. We had our regular itinerary when we hit the stores: American Eagle, PacSun, Forever 21, Francesca's, Macy's, and Altar'd State. Sometimes, we could convince my mom to enter Hollister or Abercrombie & Fitch, but she lasted only so long before the stench of the cologne forced her back out. My sister and I were determined to enter those two stores, specifically because at the time they were the marks of paramount style to others our ages. In the meantime, my shopping remained at Forever 21, American Eagle, and PacSun. My favorite then, and even now, was PacSun for its casual, cute, coastal aesthetic that seemed complementary to my personality. I aspired to look like that commercialized lifestyle for years; I wanted to become the laidback, always relaxed, never-too-concerned-with-their-appearance teenager. I kid myself

because, frankly, I was the opposite of that store's vibe. However, that was the appeal. Through clothes, I thought I could become whoever I desired to be.

Early on in college, I started to become more conscious of what my clothes said about my person. I had to consider the different styles dedicated to different aspects of my day, like class, dinner with friends, the party scene, and other moments. I followed the trend of the other college students, mountain-locked in State College, and explored online shopping for the first time. No longer was I limited to the selection that Fair Oaks had to offer, but also no longer was I constrained to shopping trips at specific times of the year. Instead, I could open my laptop, click around on the trackpad for a moment or so, find myself on one of thousands of online retail sites, enter my card information, and wait three to seven business days for a little plastic bag to be placed in my mailbox. I expanded my options of what to buy and thus expanded my wardrobe immensely. I shopped Amazon for the inexpensive prices. I shopped Princess Polly for partywear. I shopped Urban Outfitters for unique staple pieces. I shopped Zara for business casual attire. PacSun was for comfy casual clothes. Asos was for shoes. Topshop was for winter items (I thought an English-based brand would know cold better than other brands). Shein was for when I spent my entire paycheck on food but wanted to do some simple retail therapy. There were dozens of others unknown to me at the start of college. I had encountered my newest obsession.

I received my first Princess Polly order on June 29, 2020. Deep into the pandemic, I had two party tops ordered to my childhood home that sits four hours south of State College. I was nowhere near the place where I could wear these tops, but I placed the order nonetheless. One top was the size and shape of a handkerchief with a cowl neckline and two long strings that hold the fabric against the chest and are tied in the back. The second top was a black tank made of

faux satin material with a line of hook-and-eye closures down the front for extra flare. Upon arrival to my porch, I grabbed the package, tore it open, and immediately tried on the tops. I stood in front of my parents' full-length mirror and snapped photos of the tops on my body and sent them to my friends. I probably wrote some caption about how I was excited to wear these to a frat. None of us knew when the next chance of that would be, but they enthusiastically agreed to my idea anyways. I never deleted these photos from my photo album. The snapshots of my first time ever wearing those tops remains documented. This was a momentous point in my pursuit of style, and I was sure to never forget it.

During the time of the pandemic, I placed dozens of online orders. Here is a list of some items that I purchased around the same time as the Princess Polly tops: black cargo pants with a sewn-on buckle as the belt from Zumies, a burnt-orange colored tank top with a twist feature right at the chest from Urban Outfitters (my second-ever purchase from this store because it was out of my budget until they hired me), a rich and vibrant purple colored Champion men's hoodie, a silver chain belt, an oversized lilac sweatshirt with a Picasso-inspired design printed on the face of it from PacSun, light blue mid-rise cuffed sweatpants from Brandy Melville, black flare pants with hip cutouts and bejeweled ribbons of fabric to fill the empty space from an independent seller on Etsy, cat-eye sunglasses with tortoise shell patterning, acid wash mom-style denim shorts also from PacSun, a cowl neck slip dress with black and brown marbling as the fabric, and more. I had nowhere to go with nothing to do, so I thought to myself that if I couldn't control where I could go or what I could do then I would control what I could wear when the time came.

My junior year of college, now back in State College after the pandemic abated slightly, I moved into a new apartment for the academic year, which was decked out with a walk-in closet. The closet at my childhood home was a shelf with a single metal bar just under it, and my

shopping obsession resulted in the entire rack full of clothes and the drawers of my dresser filled with so many clothes that the drawers had to be yanked rather than rolled out of their cavities. As my parents helped me carry my belongings from the car and into the apartment, we investigated the closet almost immediately. Some of my excitement was dampened when we pulled open the door and the small space reeked of fruity pebbles and stale weed. The previous tenants used the walk-in closet as their smoking spot, and the building managers thought a solid Glade Air freshener would resolve the stench. The situation with the smell took a few days to remove, but my roommate and I were able to successfully move into the closet. As I unpacked my suitcase, which was neatly packed with clothes rolled up like hotel towels placed on a bed to save space, I delegated which items were to be hung in the closet and which were to be placed in my dresser. As a person who appreciates fashion, one of the most vital aspects of owning lots of clothes is proper placement and care. Nothing should be too crowded, too cramped, too messy because that runs the risk of moisture buildup, chronic wrinkles, and forgotten garments.

At that point, I had worked in retail for a handful of months, starting May of 2021, which only exasperated my spending habits toward clothes. However, the work and the emphasis on aesthetic and display within a store taught me a few things that I implemented into my wardrobe. My personal wardrobe started to act like a pseudo-store. Most retailers have specialized products they offer but they largely have a diverse collection of garments to be accessible to more consumers. I would analyze my wardrobe, investigate whether a certain type of garment or color or textile was missing to complete the collection. I would identify one more thing to round out the aesthetic and hunt for the perfect piece. But, as the retail theory invaded my wardrobe, I came to a junction once I moved into that apartment with the walk-in closet. I simply had too many clothes. I ran out of hangers, I filled all five drawers of the dresser, I bought and filled baskets to

the brim to sit on the shelf in the closet, and I still had clothes without homes. As I stood in my apartment bedroom with clothes sprawled all over the carpet floor, I finally realized I had a problem. Almost without notice, I had succumbed to the seduction of retail and my closet suffered for it.

Investigation: A Segment of Retail History

As a 21-year-old college student, I am the target demographic for Urban Outfitters in terms of both customer and employee. I wasn't a frequent customer of the franchise up until they hired me in May of 2021. Their clothes were far too out of my price range so I often just browsed their online site, screenshotting listings of items that I thought I could save up my money for to one day buy. As I searched for a part-time job for the summer during the spring semester of my sophomore year, Urban Outfitters wasn't a consideration in my mind. Yet, I saw the job listing and applied even though I thought my chances were slim. The closest location from my house is about a 30-minute drive, so I rarely visited the store in person. However, when I did, the employees were threateningly cool. Every single one of them had their unique style, inspired aesthetic, and aura of confidence that scared me away from asking a simple question, like where the fitting rooms were located. To say the least, they intimidated me. Yet, the next thing I knew, I was hired to become one of them. To be considered stylish, trendy, and capable enough to work at Urban Outfitters was the highest compliment I had gotten, I thought.

What enticed me to work at this retailer was the laidback workplace, the fellow young adults who serve as the employee base, and the discounted access to trendy and stylish clothing. My coworkers and I thoroughly take advantage of this access. Urban Outfitters has constructed a reputation for always being on-trend and therefore the reputation transfers to their customers when they wear their clothes. Couple this aspect with the employee discount and the wardrobes of the employees slowly morph into miniature versions of the stock offered at one of the store locations. Consequently, my fellow sales associates and I become walking advertisements during our shifts and outside of working hours. When looking at the details of the two-week track log I created, the data reveals that I wore at least one Urban Outfitters garment for 11 out of the 14

recorded days. Before accepting the job, my wardrobe consisted of a collection of fast fashion retail brands. Most likely, large portions were purchased from PacSun or American Eagle. However, no one brand trumped the wardrobe. I realized that, at some point in the months I've worked for the brand, I relinquished my pursuit of a personal style for the easy access to discounted clothes. Now, I have become absorbed into the advertising and marketing scheme for Urban Outfitters, modeling the clothes in front of my peers daily and always commenting on how substantial my discount is, yet I'm only ever paid at the level of Sales Associate.

After only one summer of working for the retailer, the façade of an easy-going workplace dissipated into the reality of the business. For example, our success as a Sales Associate is measured by the number of customers we enroll in the rewards program. To be a satisfactory employee, the minimum percentage of transactions one must complete with the rewards account attached is 70 percent. The range changes at times during the year as it increases to 80 percent during the holiday season and it decreases to 60 percent for the first few months of the year. Through our match rates, or the percentage of sales completed with rewards accounts attached under one's employee identification number, the company can quantify and track the specific store's customer service performance. This enables the store managers to initiate a competition among the associates by posting our match rates on the wall just above the table where the daily schedule sits. The employees who are under the minimum percentage are highlighted in neon yellow. To the managers, a little friendly competition and slight public shaming are the perfect motivators.

Without other incentives, the associates view this push to attach rewards as redundant and annoying. Yet, the brand sees this as one aspect of the function of customer service within the stores. In addition to the rewards accounts, the store managers push associates to initiate

conversation with each customer, greet every person who walks through the front door, say farewell to each person who leaves the store, and always be available for any inquiry made by a customer. The incentive for the store managers to stress this sort of customer service is their annual bonuses; the more profit made in-store, the bigger the bonus at the end of the fiscal year. For associates, our efforts go directly toward the size of that bonus. When the customer base is made of our peers and demographic, we associates clash with managerial and corporate expectations since we recognize that these heckling tactics no longer work.

At the birth of department stores, the competition between retailers came from the value of experience rather than the variety of product offered. Only a handful of retailers existed at such a sizeable level. Less competition meant much of the same product being sold. Consumers chose from what was on the shelf, what was in the catalogue, what could be mail-ordered. Customer service and a manufactured experience sold the items, not the uniqueness of the product. Therefore, customer service in retail has been a longstanding technique to attract more customers and make more sales and generate greater profit. In attempts to understand why Urban Outfitters' customer service techniques felt outdated and ineffective, I researched the history of the service in Western retail. Before the rise of online retails, companies needed interpersonal methods to establish a lasting relationship between brand and customer. Often, the solution was to provide a unique experience of a sort. Much of my own shopping experience was before the internet, which meant in malls or in shopping centers.

Located in these retail hubs were a variety of brands designed to attract all demographics of customers. Abercrombie, for example, attempted to seduce specifically young women shoppers into their stores through the use of conventionally attractive models who were plastered against the walls in black-and-white imaging or who actually stood shirtless or scantily dressed

in swimwear at the entrance of the store. This became such a phenomenon that customers would pose with the models for photos as if they were A-list celebrities doing a meet-and-greet in a suburban shopping mall. Although Abercrombie was not one of my top picks for brands, the advertising attempt was successful at enticing many of my peers in middle school and high school to enter the stores and become dedicated shoppers of the brand. The real-life model campaign was short-lived but nonetheless proved that shocking advertisement or seductive marketing was confidently effective.

Yet, before the rise of extreme campaigning, the methods for customer attraction typically revolved around a provided experience coupled with devoted customer service rather than curated aesthetic or product. Department stores ran fast fashion for some decades as they were the singular hubs of women's fashion. One store would offer all the latest trends in accessories, footwear, eyewear, cosmetics, fragrances, and clothing. The concept of the department store began in Europe and, after great success, migrated over to the United States where it became a cultural phenomenon. By the 1960s, three of the largest department chains of Macy's, Hudson's, and Marshall Field were household staples. Another notable department store was Nordstrom, a higher-end store that crafted a legacy of customer service previously unheard of in the industry. The company places emphasis on valuing their employees' opinions and choices, thus instilling confidence at all levels of employment and management within the company. By doing so, the employees feel at liberty to perform their responsibilities with ownership, confidence, and care. By empowering all employees to feel influential in the business, Nordstrom cultivates an entrepreneurial spirit rather than making them feel like a cog in a retail monolith. In turn, the customers receive an enthusiastic customer service experience and a deep devotion to their inquiries and concerns, while the company is more likely to have

higher sales. When customer service is done right, the employees benefit along with the company.

Julie Musselman, a Philadelphia-based Nordstrom Personal Shopper of some ten years, shared testimony with me of the glory of the retailer's customer service structure. Formerly a designer, Julie attended several fashion shows in major cities, such as Paris and New York City, as part of her job to stay knowledgeable of what was fashionable. Although having grown up creating garments of conservative design due to her town's religious traditionalism, her adventuresome spirit brought her to Moore College of Art and Design where she began her career in fashion. She took up the position of Personal Shopper in the latter part of her career where she interacted with all sorts of customers, even men who were interested in cross-dressing when such a thing was still incredibly taboo. Her job in this position was to assist any customer in their shopping experience, from finding the perfect heels for an evening event to curating an entire wardrobe for the upcoming season. Her efforts were so valued and notable that customers would take time to contact her manager and rain praises of her customer service. Here are a handful of examples below, along with her manager's responses:

Letter from John Goesling to John Whitacre, Nordstrom Chairman (September 1996):

Julie Musselman in Personal Touch answered my telephone call. After giving her a list of pieces from several magazines, she asked me some basic questions on size, etc. and said she would get back to me before shipping. As promised, Julie called with her findings and alternatives she created for items which were not available.

Well, when the boxes arrived, I immediately thought how foolish this was because no one could match size, taste and a host of other subtle factors based on a telephone call. I was astonished. First, everything fit. Second, her choices incredibly appealed to my tastes and needs.

The clothes she sent can go from day to evening, the fabrics are suitable for different climates and the pieces mix & match for business travel and weekends.

Letter from Denille Girardat, Store Manager, to Julia J. Philipp (September 2000):

It was with sheer pride I read your letter about Julie Musselman, our Personal Touch Manager. I was so pleased to hear how Julie illustrated such ownership. She is to be commended for her sense of urgency in putting together many winter outfits for you, despite the current season we were in. Julie is a special person and extends herself by making her customers feel special.

Julie is the epitome of what Nordstrom is all about: service.

Letter from Denille Girardat, Store Manager, to Mary Beth Marshaw (September 2000):

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughtful comments with us regarding Julie Musselman, our Personal Touch Manager.

Nordstrom has always believed in serving the customer quality service, first and foremost. We trust our employees to always use their best judgement and common courtesy while assisting their customers. Julie has shown you this with her wonderful manner.

Although I have not personally experienced this level of customer service, to this day Nordstrom still offers this deeply personalized and trustworthy shopping experience. However, the rise of online shopping and subsequent greater access to choices and competitive pricing began the decline of unique in-store service. With e-commerce, customers review competing companies and price independently and shop without the rhetoric of employees in-store. From their couch with a blanket over their lap, they click the trackpad on their laptop and swipe the pointer finger around on the touch screen to peruse the thousands of garments available for purchase. The absence of cost to rent a storefront also means more money to produce items to be

sold. More items to be sold means more profit, so long as the retailer can prove to the customer why their items are more suitable for the consumer than the competitors. After decades of reign over the middle-class shopping experience by department stores, their customer demographic sacrificed experiential shopping for the mass market cash grab of fast fashion retail.

As I studied abroad in Florence, Italy, during the summer of 2022, I learned in one of my courses how experiential shopping has become synonymous with high-end designer brands. Since Penn State offers few, if any, fashion courses, I was thrilled to see in the offered summer course list, “Business 410: Sustainability in the Fashion Industry.” At this point in my pursuit of understanding the fashion industry, I wanted to advance my position from employee or customer to educated critic. Due to the six-week timeframe for the study abroad experience, our classes were twice a week with 3.5 hour-long lectures. On the first day of class our professor, a native Italian and master of the classic and elegant style that characterizes much of Italian fashion, lectured on the structure of the entire fashion industry. He identified it as the fashion pyramid, a visual representation of the layout of fashion categories based on the prestige of the brand, targeted customer demographics, and methods of production. Imagine a triangle separated into five sections, the most prestigious with the smallest audience at the very top and the less distinguishable with greater audience at the very bottom. In short, production determines value, value determines price, and price determines the customer base of a brand.

Tier 1: Haute Couture

The ultimate designer brands. Most often French brands as they were the birth of high fashion. Garments are produced bespoke, meaning handmade by artisans at the request and/or approval of the designer. Very expensive.

Tier 2: Ready-to-Wear

Equal to tier 1 in terms of creativity and quality. Bespoke production is replaced with industrial production. Teams of garment producers create a set number of each garment in the collection to be distributed to a small number of stores. Around the same price range as the first tier.

Tier 3: Diffusion

Decreased quality due to more flexible industrialized production processes. Greater production levels means greater access to customer economic demographics. Brands at this level are often associated with brands of the first or second tiers. The goal is to attract more customers and create brand loyalty so that they will climb up the tiers out of desire for the prestige of the brand.

Tier 4: Bridge

Brands that are in between high-end and general market. Heavily industrialized process. Employs techniques and aesthetics that distinguish garments from mass produced items, but do not replicate higher-end garments in terms of creativity or quality.

Tier 5: Mass Market

Entirely industrialized process. The company values greater production levels over quality or artistry. Brands at this level are hard to distinguish from one another based on the offered product. Competitive pricing is used to draw in customers.

Once I learned this information, Urban Outfitters made much more sense to me in their business activities. The company expected their associates to replicate a cheaper version of customer service that is provided at the higher tiers. Through department stores, the middle class had access to authentic service, but e-commerce and the rise of the mass market stripped away that opportunity. To regain that experience, a consumer must dole out the money for a garment

with the price tag stamped at thousands of dollars. The Haute Couture and Ready-to-Wear designers acknowledge the value associated with the creation of a relationship with their customers as they still employ personal shoppers, offer beverages and snacks, and address one customer at a time. Rather than a mass market brand, such as Urban Outfitters, investing in genuine service to their customers, they will continue to hound their employees to feign interest for the sake of more profit.

Inventory: Cashwrap

My innocent enthusiasm for joining the retail sector as a Sales Associate for Urban Outfitters soon morphed into a feeling of resentment as the months went on. I began working at a location back home but transferred to the State College store during the semester. At the new store, the managers held a fall orientation to remind the employees of the requirements and guidelines of the location specific to their staff of mostly part-time employees who were simultaneously full-time college students. I've attended two of these orientations now, and the most recent one was a moment of realization for myself. They held it on a Sunday evening just after the store closed and I was assigned a closing shift for the store, although I made it clear to my managers that I was unavailable to work on Sundays.

Already in an irritated mood and hungry for dinner, I stood in the semi-circle of my group for the orientation activities, giving little to no attention to the scenario my manager, Lina, was reading off. We were split into four groups to be joined with a manager who had their respective activities to complete with us. Lina had a handful of scenario cards that focused on challenging customer service situations. I stood only a few people away from Lina, staring right at her as if I was intently listening to the conversation, but my eyes were glazed and dry and I could feel the hunger building in my stomach. We were just next to the table where we place newly arrived items, and I was leaning up against the table leg. I have stood countless hours behind that table, unwrapping the plastic from the clothes, and chirping out greetings to the customers walking through the front door.

Emily, the Store Manager, shifted herself next to Lina as she wrapped up our conversation of the last scenario. In a pocket of silence, Lina joked, "We should've printed off more scenarios." Emily snagged the opening and popped herself into our conversation. I had

crawled through this orientation last fall, so I put my active listening on pause as Lina addressed the group. That was, until Emily said to the circle in her cheery sing-song voice, “You guys don’t have to rely on the typical service questions like ‘how are you’ and ‘do you need help finding anything.’ Try making the conversation more personal, you know? Compliment something they’re wearing or even ask if there’s an event they are shopping for. Find a connection and work off that. Once they understand that you’re a person and not a random employee, they’re more likely to ask for your assistance and we’re more likely to make a sale. So, don’t be scared to talk to people!” The new hires nodded their heads emphatically. I internally shook mine in disbelief.

Maybe I’ve become a cynic, but Emily’s advice rung hollow based on the poor and demoralizing customer service interactions in my work experience. To work at a store where their main demographic is college students means that the methods of customer service the managers ask from us fall far short. The students come in with their friends, their significant others, their parents, and their parents’ credit cards, and they see us as fellow students with no authority on the sales floor or behind the cash register. It’s best to leave them alone. Emily has worked at this location for eight years, so she knows the customer trends. To say that we have influence as Sales Associates on the outcomes of the customers’ decisions is false advertising.

The purpose of retail is to sell clothes. I know this and so do the new hires and so do my managers. Every shift, I clock in and go to my designated station each hour, whether that be in the fitting room or on the sales floor or at cashwrap (the retail term for checkout). I push the smile onto my face and act my most bubbly and friendly self for several consecutive hours for the purpose of witnessing the customer swipe their little plastic card or hand over a wad of cash across the counter. I know my job. However, the expectation to falsify a connection with a customer for the sake of profit is deceiving. Emily wants us to push ourselves, for the sake of

company profit, onto customers who glare in response, act as if we never spoke in the first place, or disrespect our physical boundaries. As she spoke this mantra to our group, I resolved to myself that I would no longer manipulate customers into hashing out personal details of their lives for them to buy a dress priced at \$79.00 or patterned pants priced at \$59.00. No matter how much Emily expects me to, I would not compromise a customer's inherent privacy for Urban Outfitters' capital gain.

This stance may seem drastic, but Urban Outfitters presents a less profit-oriented image when one goes through their hiring process. A year before Emily, Kat was my store manager at the first Urban Outfitters I was employed at back home in Virginia. Kat helped me transfer to the store Emily runs in State College at the end of the summer. My interview with Kat was online, and I sat in the bedroom of my sophomore year apartment while still at school. Two other women and I sat on Zoom with Kat for about an hour and took turns responding with our curated answers to her questions. We spoke the same buzzwords, but carefully enough so our answers were not copies of another interviewee's. We used key words like considerate, empathetic, attentive, detail-oriented, enthusiastic, and so on to show we knew what customer service meant and required.

After questions and a few scenario situations, Kat said, "Alright, so now we're going to do a little activity. I want you all to spend the next five minutes curating an outfit of a shirt, a pair of pants, footwear, and an accessory item from the Urban Outfitters website for this description of a typical customer." The customer, a mom shopping for her teenage son, was searching for a birthday outfit that highlighted his interests in rock bands, skateboarding, and hip hop. I thought to myself, "easy enough." I got the job, along with one other woman from the interview. Working at UO, I hoped to help people buy clothes that expressed their style, just as

the activity in the interview asked of us. That's what I searched for when I shopped for clothes, so that's what I expected of the position as Sales Associate. Of course, I knew that was not my sole purpose, but I expected it to be the priority. In the State College store, they ran things differently than Kat, who was a manager keen on smooth-running of the store rather than hawk-eye-monitoring of daily sales. Every night after the store closes, we stand in a group so the remaining manager can read off our sales amount from the day. They say, "We made X amount of money today in sales, but last year we made Y amount." Either we celebrate half-heartedly for an increase in sales, or we feign disappointment for a decrease.

I am one year and five months into my Sales Associate position; Emily is eight years into working for Urban Outfitters. I wait around for the next customer to ask me a question, like "Do you think this top is flattering or do you like the other one I tried on before this?" Emily works to ensure the store profit exceeds the previous year's numbers so her bonus at the end of the year has a few more dollars added to it. As an associate, I don't receive a bonus. Instead, I receive my wage of \$10.42 an hour. It is a major political argument for what minimum wage should be. Some believe \$7.25 per hour is still a livable wage. Others believe \$15.00 per hour should be the new wage to match the years of inflation currently unaccounted for. As a company marketed to be trendy, hipster, and progressive, UO pays their Sales Associates \$10.42 per hour. Better than many other fast fashion companies, but not top dollar.

I don't often buy clothes from Urban Outfitters anymore, although I did almost once a week when I first started the job; when I do, I am reminded just how much money I've contributed back to the company as a customer. One afternoon recently, I was buying a new outfit for my friend's sorority formal that evening. She told me it was country themed, and I knew just the thing to wear: a blue-and-white plaid romper with delicate button detailing on the

chest from Urban Outfitters. Lina was checking out my purchase and I inserted my debit card into the reader as I stared at the \$35.00 charge on the screen. I thought, thank god for the employee discount, knowing that my bank account would suffer from this unnecessary purchase if I paid full price.

As an associate, we receive about six 60 percent discounts per month to use in transactions on select apparel while other-branded items at 40 percent off anytime, such as Levi's or Adidas or The North Face. The company believes that their employees will be more reputable and trustworthy if they always stay on trend and fashionable. My purchasing of their clothes is partly for that reason, and mostly to quell my desire to own another garment since I cannot get rid of the desire until I buy whatever it is that I want. I would estimate now that 50 percent of my heaping wardrobe contains the small fabric tag at the neckline with the black embroidered words of "Urban Outfitters" upon it. By wearing clothes of my trendy employer, does that mean I am considered fashionable? If so, why do I still buy more, consume more, own more clothes?

As Lina was placing the romper into a bag, Emily came up beside me and asked if I was working that upcoming weekend. I answered that I was scheduled on Saturday. She smiled, said she'd see me then, and that I should remember it is Parents' Weekend at Penn State. I couldn't tell if Emily was warning me about the impending chaos or just making small talk. I plastered a smile on my face in response and let out a farewell. That weekend was, like all other Parents' Weekends, was a whirlwind of customers the entire day. As I was one of the more senior associates, I manned cashwrap my entire shift. That Saturday, I went through my cashier script most likely over one hundred times in a six-hour shift. I would start by yelling, "I can help the next customer over here!" with my right hand shot up into the air to grab the waiting customer's

attention. Then, I would initiate the conversation with “Did you find everything okay today?” followed by “Do you have an Urban Rewards account?” and concluded with “Your total is [insert number displayed on screen]. Are you paying with cash or card?” The script varies between customer interactions but generally the routine is similar, and I stick to my script. If anything, the outcome is always the same: Urban Outfitters made money meanwhile my mouth turns numb by the time my shift is up and I earned the same amount of money in that shift to buy a single garment sold in that store.

Interlude

10 percent off your first purchase if you sign up for the rewards account. Get a \$5.00 off coupon if you spend enough money at the store. 50 percent off items already discounted because we thought those pants would become a trend, but we thought wrong. We can sell it to you at this price because we'll still make profit, somehow. Make sure to come back to the store in two weeks because we get at least twenty boxes of new shipment daily. Of course, the garment will last you through the fashion season. Just don't wash it that often because the seams might come loose and the hem could fray. It will be out of style by the time that happens, anyway. Also, we will have newer, better, money-saving deals by the time you come back to shop again. It can't hurt to browse the selection, right?

Look at our new environmentally conscious clothesline; the tag says 25 percent recycled cotton but don't ask where the other 75 percent comes from. Look at our new vintage-inspired clothesline; we call it vintage because there's no copyright on those garments. We just released a new seasonal collection that looks very editorial. Yes, it was just seen on the high fashion runways, but the silhouette is slightly more fitted so the designer can't sue us. Plus, it would be financially preferable to pay the fines than pay for the design. Buy from our basics collection; each garment is priced between \$5.00 and \$10.00 because customers won't pay our competitors' prices.

Trust us, we're not fast fashion; we know that's a bad term commercially and reputably. We're a multinational corporation. No, we don't oversee the businesses that manufacture our items. Yes, we follow labor laws. All our employees get paid minimum wage (well, minimum wage for their country that may or may not have established labor laws). We protect our employees. Don't investigate the garment factories, though. No, we had no idea that the

employees were being immensely underpaid and worked for almost twenty hours a day every day of the week. We would never force employees to work 48-hour shifts. That would be barbaric. No, we had no idea that children were working on our garments (of course, we can't oversee outsourced production where children sit on dirt floors from dawn until after dusk sewing sequins onto blouses).

Why, yes, all our garments are handmade. Well, we don't hire tailors or artisans or designers. We use an assembly line approach, so employees are specialized in one aspect of garment production. They could attend a garment workshop, but we don't need them to be educated to make our clothes. In fact, we don't want them to know how to make an entire garment because that's too risky. Most of our employees are women, so you could say we are a progressive company. It's not because of their nimble fingers that sew quicker than men's. That's also not the reason children are used in the garment industry. Yes, many of our managers and overseers of factories are men. They do not use their social and physical strengths as intimidation tactics or methods of abuse toward employees. They absolutely do not do that.

Our employees receive ample breaktime during the day. Two ten-minute breaks if you ask the managers. You're not allowed to interview our employees. We provide rentable living spaces near the factories for easy access to work. We ask for rent every two weeks. If you can't pay it with your wage from the factory, then you should get another job. It's not our problem if we don't pay you enough. The company that contracted with us to make their clothes shorted us in the contract. They said that we were in charge of the Cut-Make-and-Trim segment of the supply chain, meaning where the raw fiber becomes fabric, and the fabric becomes garments. Apparently, the company was only in charge of the Freight-on-Board costs, meaning the cost from when the garment leaves a factory to when it becomes a manufactured, sellable product in

another location. The company says they only pay for the clothing, not the cost to employ people to make the garments. No matter, us subcontractors will make the clothes so long as the company pays the money promised in our contract together. Some companies don't pay if they think the quality isn't up to standard. Others, though, they don't mind if the sewing is haphazard. They know it will sell regardless.

Unfortunately, one of our factories did burn down. The cause was faulty electricity. Of course, our buildings were up to safety standards even if the electricity was not. So what if some of the surviving employees claim the fire escape was blocked or locked or whatever. We had a fire escape so you can't charge us for negligence. We honor the employees who were killed in such a tragic accident. Don't investigate our other factories; I promise they are safe just like this one was. No, they don't really report on these accidents anymore in global news. Well, factory fires just happen a lot nowadays. Garment employees dying by fire just isn't interesting anymore. Garment employees are always protected from danger. No, exposure to the chemicals, like the ones used to dye the fabrics, were in no way related to their untimely and mysterious deaths. Stop asking questions.

How dare people call our factories forms of involuntary servitude. We would never confiscate government forms of ID as manipulation. We would never exploit populations of immigrants for underpaid labor. How cruel do you think we are? Look, we make clothes to fulfill western demand. It's not our fault. Blame them, not us. We just make the clothes. We don't sell them. You should look at the companies that contract us instead. What about Zara? Or H&M? Or Forever 21? Or Mango? The Gap? Old Navy? TJ Maxx? Marshall's? Nordstrom Rack? Saks Off Fifth Avenue? Bloomingdale's? Macy's? JC Penney? Walmart? Target? Topshop? Asos? Primark? PacSun? American Eagle? Abercrombie? Hollister? Cotton On? Madewell? Garage?

Levi's? LuluLemon? Express? Guess? Fashion Nova? Romwe? Uniqlo? Princess Polly? Pretty Little Thing? BooHoo? Victoria's Secret? Pink? Aerie? Aritzia? Shein? Free People? Anthropologie? Urban Outfitters?

Don't blame the company. What about the consumers? They buy our products. We just offer items for purchase. Honestly, the consumers should take better care of their clothes so they shouldn't need to buy as much. Wait, please keep buying from us because we are driven by profit. Sure, we don't make the best quality clothing, but it's not like we lie to consumers about our products. They know what they're buying.

Don't blame the consumers. Everyone should have the privilege of personal style. We just want to look fashionable, trendy, confident. We just want to fit in. What's wrong with wanting to present your best self through the clothes on your body? Nothing, right?

Conclusion

After writing this project, I don't have a comprehensible answer or solution to the plague of fast fashion. I don't intend to criticize consumers on their purchases. As I write this, my three most recent clothing purchases were from Urban Outfitters. I don't aim to preach morality when my own actions are morally suspect. It is also important to note that many aspects of a person's situation determine where they shop. I don't expect a complete overhaul of their shopping habits after reading the information in this project. Instead, I ask readers to consider where they will spend their money in the future. Will it be for a new evening dress, although there are several options in your wardrobe already? Will it be for a pair of jean shorts sold at \$10.00 each, although it is logical to assume that no garment can be made ethically for that little a price? Will it be at a global retailer, or will you spend your money at alternative locations, such as thrift stores, consignment stores, online second-hand sellers, or independent sellers? Where will your money go, to the overbearing corporations or the individuals who labored to make the clothes you wear, keep, and care for? Your money expresses what you value. What do you choose to value in this world?

As I write this conclusion, I have been working at Urban Outfitters for one year and 10 months. During almost two years with the company, I have received a pay increase from \$12.50 to \$15.00 per hour, and a pay decrease once I began work at the State College store to a wage of \$10.42 per hour. This decrease was determined at the whim of the company, who believed that the assumed lower economic living standard in Pennsylvania was reason to lower my wage. The only way for an employee with UO to get a pay raise is to take on a managerial position.

Within the past month, UO made alterations to the managerial structure used at all store locations to cut costs after decreased profits in the previous fiscal year. At my store, rumor had it that the corporate panel hosted an online call with all store managers across the United States to notify them of the new structure. Before I explain the change, it is important that I identify the original hierarchy. At the top is the Store Manager. This person is the only salaried employee in the store, while other managers who hold more specific responsibilities, such as Visual & Display, receive the highest hourly wage in the store. The next position is the Key Holders. Although these people are not considered managers, they still hold responsibilities similar to that of a manager, such as opening and closing the store, directing sales associates, and overseeing the daily functions of the store during active hours. This role is offered at full-time and part-time, both being hourly wages. The lowest position at a store is that of Sales Associate. The people in this role receive the lowest hourly wage in the store and are responsible for the smaller tasks that enable the store to function.

The new structure allows for the roles of Store Manager and other manager titles. However, the full-time Key Holders were demoted to part-time positions and the part-time Key Holders were demoted to a new role titled Specialists. This means that the former full-time and part-time Key Holders were all forced to accept a cut in hours or quit. Corporate allowed the store managers 24 hours to notify their employees, then another 24 hours for the employees to make their decisions. One week later, the new structure took effect. At my store, all affected employees accepted the demotions. Some are now seeking new jobs, while others who are students are waiting to graduate before they quit. Although I was not affected as a Sales Associate, this decision inspired my plan to quit after I finish my senior year. I will be in State

College for another academic year to complete my master's degree, but I will no longer work for Urban Outfitters.

When I first began working for the retailer, I enjoyed the work, the community, the lighthearted atmosphere around selling clothes. After COVID infection rates dropped, customers returned to stores in tsunami waves. Stores were understaffed and overrun. The work turned from casual to frenzied in a matter of weeks. Stressed store managers demanded more dedication, quicker work performance, and greater sales. With the growing economic disparities in the United States, this boom soon flatlined. The heightened sales plateaued, and Urban Outfitters chose to protect profit over personnel. This isn't shocking. I cannot say for certain how Urban Outfitters has treated their employees over the course of the retailer's history. However, I can say that, from my experience, they disregard employee satisfaction, fair treatment and opportunities, and employee retainment to perpetuate a false reputation to conserve their corporate profit.

The parent company of Urban Outfitters, URBN, is not the only franchise to act this way. There are hundreds of fast fashion retailers based in the United States, as well as dozens of others in countries across the globe. Countries that are not home to these retailers become sources of production. Other countries process the waste of the industry, sifting through mountains of discarded clothing items that crumbled beneath the hands of the buyer and were tossed in the trash. I've been on both ends of the business: the consumer who reluctantly tosses the garment for something new and fresh and interesting, and the employee pushing the casual rhetoric to customers that the new trends are definitely worth it, even if they will be the old trends after three weeks. I've been complicit in both ways, and so have many others. After a journey that has lasted many years of my life and has only recently come to a head with the management overhaul at Urban Outfitters, I've decided to support the protection of the people.

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ACADEMIC VITA

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University
College of Liberal Arts
Bachelor of English
Enhanced Minor in Italian
Master of English with Non-fiction Creative Writing Concentration
Study Abroad with International Studies Institute
University Park, PA
May 2023 (Anticipated)
Dean's List
May 2024 (Anticipated)
Florence, Italy / May 2022 to July 2022

- Practiced Italian language while experiencing the culture, manners, and values of Italy over six-week academic course schedule

HONORS

Schreyer Honors College
Paterno Fellows (College of Liberal Arts Honors)
2020 to Present
2019 to Present

- Honors program including advanced academic coursework, undergraduate thesis, leadership and civic engagement, and construction of a global perspective
- Honors program including advanced academic coursework, thesis, study abroad and/or internship, ethics study, and leadership/service commitment

ENGLISH RELATED EXPERIENCES

Penn State Learning Center
Peer Writing Tutor / Peer Writing Coordinator
University Park, PA
January 2021 to Present / August 2022
to Present

- Advise a body of 40,000 undergraduates on academic, creative, and digital writing projects across disciplines
- Produce and sustain a supportive environment for professional instruction within 30-minute appointment slots
- Facilitate communication between managers and employees through various media, and direct projects, workshops, and presentations to enhance community engagement as Peer Writing Coordinator

Digital English Studio at Penn State
Social Media Intern
University Park, PA
January 2022 to May 2022

- Collaborated with supervisor and fellow interns to publish regularly scheduled and professional social media posts across several media platforms with unified color palette and creative visual aesthetic
- Managed upcoming and new social media campaigns, and hosted booth to advertise the English major to students

WORK EXPERIENCE

Urban Outfitters
Sales Associate
McLean, VA and State College, PA
May 2021 to Present

- Collaborate with over 30 fellow employees for efficient customer service and style instruction to large urban population
- Manage customer inquiries, maintain merchandise displays, and resolve customer-company conflict
- Authorize cash and card transactions totaling thousands of dollars' profit each shift, and promote company rewards program for an average of 60 percent sign-up rate per month

SKILLS

Software: Microsoft (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, One Drive), Adobe (Photoshop, Illustrator)
Social Media: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr, Squarespace, WordPress, Wix.Com, Canva,
Google Applications (Drive, Docs, Slides, Sheets, Gmail)
Foreign Language: Italian (Intermediate)