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## **BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA: DESTINATION MATERNITY & UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

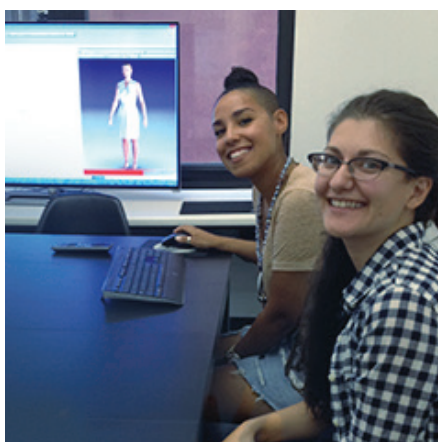
As brands are adopting innovative technology more into their workflow, they are seeking to acquire the best talent, with the right skills and knowledge, to join their teams. One way of achieving this is for brands to work directly with schools through internships or research projects that mutually benefit academia and the industry.

It's not just about preparing students to excel, but to collaborate, develop best practices, and incorporate technology more into the curriculum to help future designers get the knowledge they need to be employed. An example of this is the collaboration between Destination Maternity, the world's leading designer and retailer of maternity apparel, and the University of Delaware's fashion and textile program.

*"My goal is to get my students jobs and be successful in the industry," says Kelly Cobb, Assistant Professor, Fashion & Apparel Studies at University of Delaware.*

*"The industry is really looking for students with on the ground projects, and the training in our product development studio is the best - it's second only to an internship."*

Working with pregnant bodies and avatars can be a challenge, so Destination Maternity collaborated with students from University of Delaware to fine tune avatars to make them look and measure like a physical fit model. Students worked on-site at Destination Maternity and in the Fashion and Apparel Studies CAD lab to alter skin color, fashion stance, and hair to mimic three Destination Maternity fit models.





*"The students got so close to one of the models making it look the same way and creating the same virtual fit. She was dressed, measured, looked the same way. It was like apples to apples," says Mari Kowalski, Sr. Manager Fabric/Garment Testing & International Labeling at Destination Maternity. The result was an archive of user-ready avatars pre-set with base garments such as leggings or skirts.*

*"We are always learning and I'd like to say collaboration is a benefit to both industry and schools," says Cobb. "The industry gets useful burst of innovation and fertile testing ground, while students get the technical knowledge to excel."*

University of Delaware and Destination Maternity also worked together to customize a fabric library for virtual prototyping by narrowing the drape and texture of a "hatchi" knit sweater. *"I deal a lot with fabric libraries and testing and the biggest challenge was having the fabric close enough to the drape," says Kowalski, "but Optitex has gotten much closer to the real thing."*



Working with avatars also means it's possible to test out fabric, side shearings, work on pleating, and draping before cutting any fabric. By seeing it all on screen first, it gives them the tools to see exactly where they should be placed in order to submit a better piece back - without needing multiple iterations. *"What we saw on screen, is what we saw when they cut the sample," says Kowalski. "It was pretty much 99% accuracy."*

Bridging the gap between industry and academia is vital to ensure students are getting the right tools to succeed. It's crucial to be in tune with the industry's technology developments and to continue learning. If the industry is moving towards 3D, digital printing and even smart fabrics, than the schools will need to adapt a curriculum to be more hands-on to provide the talent and skills to be employable.

