I had the opportunity to explore the Textiles and Apparel (TAPP) program, here at the University of Northern Iowa, as part of the monthly STEM Chat. The first thing that came into my mind, and many others when they hear textiles and apparel, is fashion or Tyra Banks. I thought TAPP dealt with more fashion runway styles and just designing clothes but it is much more than that. I like to think of TAPP as a hidden gem within UNI. The TAPP program focuses on a combination of creative techniques and business knowledge experiences. Students are learning how to test and design apparel by using different color and pattern theories and learning how to market and use software beneficial to their career.

UNI TAPP has their own National Science Foundation funded lab which they use to test their materials. This laboratory will even conduct textile testing for industrial clients for a reasonable fee. The lab contains machines that test the durability, safety, and comfort of fabrics. Another machine tests how long different fabrics can hold color. We were shown how they test the durability of socks and if you are looking for a gift to give someone, Fox socks are the way to go. UNI students discovered these socks were so durable, they wore down the machine.

As well as being exposed to a top-notch lab and being prepared for the real world experience, students who have graduated from TAPP at UNI work in a variety of positions all over the world. Even current students in the TAPP program have the opportunity to intern with the biggest name brands all over the world, including Tommy Hilfiger, Cabela’s, Kohl’s, and American Eagle.

Before going on the tour of TAPP, I was curious how this had anything to do with STEM. How does fashion play a role in STEM? But after experiencing the tour and hearing about the different stories of girls coming in ‘fashion light’ and turning into material scientists, EVERYTHING within the TAPP lab and classroom is STEM. The testing and designing of materials, the use of different lights to see how fabric will fade or not, and the use of different pattern and color theories, all of these are STEM skills.

I know one thing for sure, had I discovered this gem myself five years ago, there would be no hesitation about joining the TAPP program. The work they are doing is absolutely amazing and if you haven’t seen the place, you need to check it out for yourself!

-Stefani Keller, UNI STEM Program Associate, Communications

The TAPP material science lab is located on the second floor of Latham Hall.

Contact: Dr. Mitchell Strauss, Current Program Coordinator

Telephone: 319-273-2702
Email: Mitchell.Strauss@uni.edu