

Classroom focus: French fashion history

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“Many students come to French and francophone studies because they’re attracted to French fashion as mediated through American magazines and blog culture, yet rarely get to study the history of fashion or key theoretical texts on the subjects,” says Kristin Adele Okoli, Mellon Fellow who is teaching at Tulane University. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

As an undergraduate at Tulane University, [Kristin Adele Okoli](#) found that fashion history and theory tend to be trivialized in comparison to other art forms, and neglected in academia. Now as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities, teaching in the Department of French and Italian, she is bringing fashion into the

classroom with her course, French Fashion: History and Theory.

Students who are taking this semester's course are learning about the history of fashionable dress in a broad historical and social context.

"These discussions are apt and relevant, given the ubiquity of fashion in our daily lives," Okoli said, adding that students "rarely get to study the history of fashion or key theoretical texts on the subject."

She intends to help students "cultivate a theoretical framework with which to explore the functions and meanings of fashion," as well as understand fashion's place in important historical events and the reasons behind its marginalization as an academic topic of study.

To complement course content and bring related discourse to the community, Okoli organized a guest speaker series in partnership with [New Orleans Fashion Week](#), held March 21-28.

She arranged for Madison Moore, a renowned public intellectual and fashion blogger from London, to discuss his current book project, ["The Theory of the Fabulous Class,"](#) on Thursday (March 26) at 5 p.m. at Gravier Street Social, 523 Gravier St.

Okoli returned to Tulane in part due to the rich cultural history of New Orleans and its connections to her interests in Louisiana, Haitian and Caribbean literature as well as popular music and performance in French and Creole. She is currently expanding her dissertation on mapping "la Belle Cr ole" or the beautiful Creole woman through a variety of cultural arenas in France, Louisiana and Haiti from the late 1600s to the 21st century.

She also plans to teach a French senior-level undergraduate and graduate-level course on 19th-Century Louisiana: Francophone Literature and Culture in the fall, studying Louisiana's diverse heritage.

Hannah Dean is a sophomore majoring in Latin American studies and political science at Tulane University.

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