

By Jim Cox

Connecting Career Image and Reality: Cosmetology Gets a Makeover

STUDENTS EARNING A COSMETOLOGY LICENSE TODAY MUST COMPLETE A CURRICULUM THAT INCLUDES A SOLID CORE OF ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY AND EVEN ELECTRICITY.



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CHANCES ARE BETTER THAN AVERAGE THAT IF YOU ASKED SOMEONE IN A CROWD TO DESCRIBE THE STUDY OF COSMETOLOGY, their definition would not include physiology, chemistry and other science terminology. Rather, you'd be more likely to hear stereotypical descriptions of students wearing pink smocks and learning to roll perm rods onto mannequin heads. Like many career and technical education areas of study, cosmetology has suffered an image crisis. Perhaps the worst blow came from the 1978 movie classic "Grease," which featured high school slacker Frenchie as a beauty school dropout.

Flash forward three decades and the study of cosmetology is far removed from movie scenes of bubble-style hairdryers and beehive 'dos. Health, technology and even heightened interest in the environment have all made the study of cosmetology much more a science. Students earning a cosmetology license today must complete a curriculum that includes a solid core of anatomy, physiology, chemistry and even electricity. High-tech coloring procedures demand a solid understanding of math and measurement metrics. Additionally, as interest in green and sustainable lifestyles continues to grow, more cosmetology schools are considering life science as part of their curriculums.

Changing Perceptions Through Collaboration

While the coursework covered in today's cosmetology programs contains significant science and technology content, the

industry still suffers from a "pink-collar" image. The American Association of Cosmetology Schools (AACS), the industry advocate for careers in beauty, represents more than 800 member beauty schools throughout the nation and is committed to changing the perception of careers in beauty. From therapeutic massage and electrolysis to laser skin treatments, today's beauty jobs demand an understanding of science and math; being an artisan is not enough to succeed in today's beauty industry.

Many students enrolling in beauty school are surprised by the diversity of study areas covered in the cosmetology curriculum. In order to provide prospective students with a better understanding of the skills required and opportunities available with a cosmetology degree, AACS partnered with the Girl Scout Council of Central Indiana to offer a science-driven learning experience. The Technology Advancing Girl Scouts (TAGS) program was a weeklong learning experience that introduced middle-school-age girls to applied science in a number of careers ranging from robotics and aviation to cosmetology. AACS worked with the Girl Scouts of Central Indiana to incorporate a cosmetology curriculum into the summer TAGS camp held at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. Throughout the week the girls participated in science education activities that included computers, aviation and advanced mechanics. They also learned about the science that underlies the study of cosmetology.

AACS partnered with Christina and

Cosmetology students provide hands-on application of their curriculum and cultivate conversation skills during complimentary massages provided at the Girl Scout Leadership Institute after party.



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Company Education Center, a cosmetology school located near Purdue University. Instructors from the school conducted a three-hour workshop that introduced girls to the study of cosmetology and to the breadth of careers that cosmetology training prepares them to enter. The center's director of education, Tera Butz, discussed some of the science skills that TAGS participants developed during the cosmetology workshop. Anatomy was featured along with its role in makeup application, haircutting, color and texture treatments.

"It is important to have a solid working knowledge of the bone structure of the feet, hands, face and head while working on clients, whether it is styling or applying makeup," Butz said. "We also work with muscle groups when we incorporate massage technique into manicure and pedicure procedures."

While many people picture electricity as confined to a blow dryer or flat iron in the salon environment, an understanding of electricity is important with many of the technology-assisted skin devices used by estheticians for facial treatments.

"The growth of day spas in particular has introduced new high-tech technolo-

gies that demand science curriculum," Butz noted.

Making Instruction Come to Life

As educators know, instruction is most beneficial when it is coupled with hands-on application. After learning about the curriculum, viewing some of the learning resources, and learning about the science involved in ingredients, participants in the TAGS program had an opportunity to apply the principles learned. Each Girl Scout created her own exfoliating shimmer lotion and lip gloss. While mixing their treatments, the Scouts learned that a study of cosmetology could also lead them to other careers. "An understanding of cosmetology is useful in occupations outside the traditional beauty environment," Butz said.

Broadening the Message

Feedback from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Girl Scouts Program Director Cate Lane noted that in their evaluations, many of the Girl Scouts indicated that cosmetology was their "favorite" part of the weeklong program. The positive response encouraged the Girl Scouts of Central Indiana to include

AACS in programming for its Girl Scout Leadership Institute. The Institute convened more than 1,500 girls from around the globe for a two-day event focused on healthy lifestyles and leadership. During the event, instructors from five cosmetology schools in Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky led workshops that demonstrated the link between health and hair, skin and nail care. Student volunteers from participating cosmetology schools provided complimentary hair styling, manicures and seated massages to Girl Scouts and their adult chaperones.

Butz was quick to note that while technology was at the forefront at the workshops, cosmetology instructors and students should not lose sight of core skills necessary for a successful career. "Most importantly, good communication skills are required to succeed," she said. "Understanding the client's needs is as important as having the skill to deliver upon that need." Like many industries, she added, continuing education also plays a role in an individual's success. "This industry is constantly changing and evolving, so a student should have a desire to continue learning over the course of their career."

Continuing the Message

The popularity of reality TV programs and the glamour inherent in beauty will always drive young women to have an interest in beauty careers. However, the industry is responsible for ensuring that applicants have an understanding of the skills and knowledge they will need in order to be successful. These careers offer unlimited potential for those who are willing to put forth the effort and commitment. Our responsibility as an association is to accurately reflect both the opportunities and the personal investment required for success. Through effective collaboration with like-minded youth organizations, we can convey that message to tomorrow's industry leaders. ■