

**Kellogg-Kroc Undergraduate Research Grant
Project Report**

Fair Trade Initiative: Nepal

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Leaving the Association for Craft Producers (ACP) in Kathmandu, Nepal was one of most difficult moments that I have encountered throughout my years. It was at this time that I realized the impact of my work and accomplishments. The purpose of my trip was to help the people that I had talked to and worked alongside everyday. The purpose was to know that these people could obtain a job that can feed their children and, as a whole, that they will be able to obtain basic necessities for their family. Due to a better economy through fair trade products, these goals will be obtained. These were the greatest of my accomplishments.

When I arrived at ACP, one of Nepal's handicraft fair trade organizations, it soon became obvious that the research and designs completed throughout the previous semester were no longer viable. I instead needed to take into consideration the products that they were already producing, what materials they needed to push into market, and what products were selling and what were not.

Throughout my eight weeks, I was able to finish a line of felt handbags, felt kitchenware products, copper garden products, and a few individual products that did not fit into a specific product line. The designers had expressed a need for copper products because copper is tougher to sell due to its rising price. They also expressed a need for more felt designs because felt goods are one of their largest sellers, especially in

European countries. The goal for products in this material was to keep the European market interested but also incorporate ideas that would be marketable to Americans.

At the end of my time at ACP, we held a small workshop for the entire creative team. We presented samples of our products, yet concentrated on a presentation of the ideas and thoughts behind them. We described our research of trends in different markets and explained how ACP's resources could make products that fit into these popular and marketable ideas.

Our designs took into consideration the western markets, specifically the United States, and the popular trends among these specific buyers. Our products, if ordered and produced, will help to boost Nepal's fair trade market, and, therefore, the economy of the country as a whole. Not only will the economy improve, more jobs may also be provided to produce these goods. With our help, ACP can now produce their handicrafts with an understanding of the market and current trends and be able to apply this knowledge to the materials and products that they produce.

One of the largest challenges in this project was working with a group of people who, in a sense, remain very traditional. The clothes, the statues, the temples, and the marketplaces: they have all looked and operated the same way for hundreds of years. Hence, it was difficult to explain to the designers and producers that there are other ways to approach design; there are ways to innovate and use materials in different ways, for different products, in different shapes, or in combination with different materials. We needed to find a way to explain that, while, yes, their traditional designs/color palettes are beautiful and could be used, in order to sell them to a larger market, they need to appeal to more than just the eastern culture. The designs and colors can be used in different ways

to appeal to a wider audience. “Thinking outside the box” is a concept that needs to make itself present within the realm of Nepali fair trade design.

Another challenge occurred when we realized that our original concepts had not taken into consideration the ability and the needs of the specific organization. We essentially had to start the entire design process from the beginning, reducing the amount of time that we had to execute our final concepts.

In relation to my original proposal, I believe that the designs were executed according to the standards of the fair trade market and the western design market, as a whole. If sold, the designs will help the Nepali economy and, thus, provide more jobs for underprivileged individuals and families. As mentioned above, we held a small workshop while presenting our final designs. I would have liked to create a more extensive presentation to accompany this workshop. Although we produced trend boards, we were unable to produce a more in-depth collection of designs and trends in the western market. However, I believe that working alongside the designers everyday may have actually made a larger impact than a workshop. We were able to share our entire design process with them as we were completing the design of the products.

With this work, I hope to reach out to not only the fair trade community abroad, but also the community of fair trade buyers in the west. I have found that the extent of fair trade knowledge among many Americans is that of fair trade coffee. Yet there are many fair trade products being produced by poorer countries whose economies and people rely on these products. Clothes, housewares, jewelry, paper, storage, kitchenwares, decoration and more are all being produced by fair trade organizations.

Along with this, I hope that more producers become aware of the resources that are available to them through Fair Trade Organizations. I believe that the organizations are underused and may help serve some producers' purpose at a cheaper price and with a humanitarian process.

I hope to transfer this knowledge of design and trends to other countries that may rely on a Fair Trade market. By working side by side with Nepali designers and holding a workshop, we helped them to understand the western product market: what sells and why. I believe that this knowledge should be transferred to other countries and fair trade markets as well, through the internet, through fair trade distributors such as Ten Thousand Villages, or simply through more people like me: People who believe in the power of design and yearn to help who they can through it.