

Main Lines



Suiting Every Body


Melanie Travis '08 (second from left), CEO of swimsuit company Andie, with actress Demi Moore and her three daughters, who shot a campaign for the brand.

To mass-produce one style in multiple sizes, most swimwear manufacturers create a sample bathing suit, then use a computer program to scale it up or down in a process called grading.

The problem with grading, explains **Melanie Travis '08**, is that it makes a garment larger or smaller without doing anything to change its shape.

“Bodies are not directly proportional. An XXL and an XS are not going to have the same body type in just a different size,” says Travis, who was inspired to start her now-global swimwear company, Andie, after commiserating with colleagues about their struggle to find bathing suits for a lakeside work retreat in 2016.

“During that trip I realized just how much swimwear shopping sucks. You go into this tiny

dressing room with bad fluorescent lighting, take off your clothes, and put on something super tight that you’ll end up wearing when you’re the most naked you will ever be in public,” she says. “We all just wanted something comfortable, not skimpy but not matronly, at an approachable price point—like a little black dress of swim. That didn’t seem to exist at the time.”

So Travis created it.

Andie’s first products—three black, one-piece silhouettes mailed directly to customers who could return anything they didn’t like—launched in 2017. Since then, the company has exploded in popularity, recognized for an expansive swimwear collection but also offering intimates, loungewear, and, as of June, cover-ups. Last December, Travis closed her Series B funding round for Andie at nearly \$20 million, with investments led by hip-

hop artist Jay-Z's Marcy Venture Partners.

Eschewing the standard grading process and instead developing unique patterns for various sizes, Andie also stands out for its swimsuit fabric—a recycled nylon-spandex blend Travis says is more breathable than the commonly used polyester. Among Andie's 30 full-time staff members, the largest team comprises "fit experts" who do one-on-one consultations with women however the women choose—through video, texting, phone calls, or email. Sizing ranges from XS to XXXL, with styles offering variations in bust support, butt coverage, and torso length.

"I wanted Andie to be inclusive, and inclusivity means racial diversity, but also size diversity and generational diversity," says Travis, who lives in New York City with her wife, Leah, and 13-year-old pit bull, Sara.

Last year, to promote Andie as "the quintessential cross-generational brand," she worked with actress Demi Moore—one of Andie's angel investors—and her daughters on a marketing campaign in which they wore identical styles "to show that women of any age will look great in this swimsuit." The images went viral, amplifying the company's visibility worldwide.



A comparative literature major who wrote her Haverford thesis on the innovative use of sound in Jacques Tati's *Playtime* and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Travis says backing from celebrities such as Moore and Jay-Z has opened up business opportunities

"beyond my wildest dreams." Initially interested in film theory, she never aspired to be an entrepreneur but believes her liberal arts background prepared her to succeed in business better than any narrower discipline would have.

"The key thing that makes me a good CEO is my ability to learn and understand quickly. At Haverford, I learned how to learn, which is the best tool any entrepreneur can have, whether they make swimwear or rocket ships. It armed me with the skills to solve problems and be a good people leader," she says. "When I'm hiring, I have a bias for folks with a liberal arts education, because even if they don't know a particular subject matter, I know they'll be able to figure it out."

More information: andieswim.com

—Karen Brooks



COOL CLASSES

Class Name: "From Malcolm X to Dave Chappelle: Islam, Humor, and Comedy in America"

Co-taught by: Assistant Professor of Religion Guangtian Ha and comedian and filmmaker Musa Sulaiman

What Ha has to say about the course:

The class traces the history of African American comedy and situates it specifically in relation to the civil rights struggles and the politics of African American Islam. We explore a range of notions such as the entanglement of religion and comedy (vicars, priests, rabbis, and imams as preachers-cum-comedians, sermon as stand-up, etc.), comedians as a special type of social critic, and the entwinement of Islam and Black politics.

The class involves multiple workshops with comedians based in Philadelphia, D.C., and Los Angeles, and included a sold-out comedy event—Muslim Kings of Comedy—in downtown Philadelphia. We also invited Kairi Al-Amin, son of H. Rap Brown, and Basheer Jones, the first African American Muslim councilman in the Cleveland City Council, to visit the class and speak to the students.

There are a number of things we hope students will take away from it. First is a deeper understanding of the role of Islam in contemporary Black culture, from music to literature to comedy. The second thing we wish students to learn is the internal mechanisms for producing a comedy show. Comedy has its own rules, and laughter is a complicated phenomenon that binds the physical to the spiritual, the sacred to the profane. We want students to have some idea of how this is done in actual comedy performances.

Lastly, we want students to get involved in doing something for the community whose stories and histories we have been reading. Thus, all of them participated in producing the comedy event in Philadelphia, and all of them were introduced onstage on the night of the show. We want them to understand that the ultimate purpose of learning is to cross worlds and build solidarity, to understand where one is in the world and what it means to occupy said position. We want them to embrace the communities without whom this class would not have been possible.

Cool Classes is a recurring series on the Haverblog. For more, go to hav.to/coolclasses.