I was very pleased when I learned that TAPAC was in the process of establishing an accreditation process for colleges and universities that have degree programs for students pursuing careers in textiles, apparel and related areas. For a number of years, the AAFA (American Apparel & Footwear Association) had an industry committee that worked with colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada to help educators understand the current needs and requirements/skill sets of employees in the fashion industry. It was first named the AAFA Education Committee and then transitioned into the AAFA Professional Leadership Council.

One of the roles of the Committee/Council was to visit schools, review their programs, and endorse those that met the expectations/needs of the industry. Endorsed schools would then receive scholarship funding and travel reimbursements for industry events that were paid for by the AAFA Education Foundation. Interested schools were also allowed to be represented at the meetings of the Committee/Council.

As a past member and chair of this committee, I had the opportunity to work with most of the universities that were involved and coached several of them regarding their needs to update their programs and stay current with the expectations of the industry.

The AAFA dissolved the Professional Leadership Council several years ago. The schools that were endorsed at that time have still received financial support and automatically qualified to have their students apply for scholarships through the YMA-FSF (Fashion Scholarship Fund). Since there has not been an industry endorsement process for more than five years, the timing of the TAPAC Accreditation Process is just-in-time.

As the newly appointed Industry Liaison of TAPAC, I am pleased that TAPAC is now establishing the requirements for students to be better prepared to meet the evolving needs of the industry. Supply chain strategies are shifting to on-demand manufacturing systems and digital technologies are transforming how products are being designed, developed, marketed, manufactured, and delivered. The accreditation process will be valued by the industry because it facilitates better connections between the industry and academia. It will also provide the AAFA Education Foundation a way to continue its recognition of endorsed schools.