



**DR. JIN SU**  
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# TRACING THE JOURNEY OF JEANS: A LESSON IN SUSTAINABILITY

The average U.S. consumer owns seven pairs of jeans, and this fashion staple can be found in a staggering 96 percent of Americans' closets. But Dr. Jin Su sees another purpose for the wardrobe icon: it provides an ideal way to teach key concepts in business and sustainability.

Su and three colleagues at the Bryan School of Business and Economics – Drs. Elena Karpova, Nancy Hodges, and Kittichai Watchravesringkan – recently received a grant from Cary-based Cotton Incorporated to develop a learning module in which students trace the life cycle of a pair of jeans.

"It was a very experiential project," says Su, an Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies. "It helped students understand why more and more apparel companies and retail stores offer sustainable jeans, and students learned how their own consumption behavior impacts the environment."

This is just one way Su is using her research to educate students as "emerging industry professionals" while also helping businesspeople and companies develop strategies for the future.

Another key area of interest is the study of adaptive apparel, which is designed for people with disabilities or impairments that make it difficult to put on or remove clothing. Adaptive apparel may feature more easily accessible buttons, user-friendly zippers, magnet closures or convenient slip-on shoe designs, for instance. Along with her Bryan School colleague, associate professor Melanie Carrico, and two faculty members at the University of Alabama, Su has reviewed academic literature, analyzed the market, and interviewed consumers about the growing need for adaptive apparel. The project has been funded through a three-year USDA grant.

"People with disabilities have often felt neglected and couldn't find the apparel they wanted or needed," Su says. "This is a huge consumer market, so we want our students to know that they can make contributions to society while also designing stylish and creative clothing products."

As an author of hundreds of peer-reviewed journal articles and papers, Su received the prestigious Mid-Career Excellence Award from the International Textile and Apparel Association in 2023. She continues to see endless possible research topics – ranging from sustainability, economics and supply chain management to marketing, consumer behavior and psychology – that can be studied through the lens of apparel.

"I really think people need to understand the contributions that textile and apparel products have to the whole world economy," she says. "Everything is connected."

