

Drexel Honors Ahrendts

By MARNI PRICHARD MANKO

PHILADELPHIA — Drexel University welcomed to campus Burberry chief executive officer Angela Ahrendts, who received the inaugural Westphal Award, honoring a leader in the fields of design, media or arts.

One of Drexel University's Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design's highest honors, Ahrendts was tapped for the award not only for her leadership acumen at the British luxury brand, but also for her humanitarian work through the charitable Burberry Foundation. Ahrendts was also deemed the 2012 Distinguished Speaker of the Year.

"Angela Ahrendts is a forward-thinking business leader and an important role model for Drexel students," said Roberta Gruber, department head, fashion, product design and design & merchandising, on Wednesday.

Posing a formidable presence in a tailored white jacket and slim black pants, Ahrendts, a graduate of Ball State University, spent the earlier part of her day meeting with faculty members and students, attending some design critiques in the process. But the highlight of the visit was her informal one-on-one

chat with long-time friend and former co-worker Judith Glaser, a Drexel alum and ceo of Benchmark Communications.

Before a standing-room-only crowd of more than 400 students and benefactors, Ahrendts and Glaser briefly discussed Ahrendts' early career stints at Liz Claiborne and Donna Karan, but the discussion soon led to Ahrendts ruminating on her journey of succeeding Rose Marie Bravo at Burberry and continuing to drive the brand forward.

"I turned the job down three times," laughed Ahrendts, outwardly musing that she's never publicly admitted to such. "But then I was asked, 'Do you not realize how few opportunities there are for women ceo's in the world today?' I knew then that this was a big thing." Invigorated by the challenge, Ahrendts uprooted her three kids and husband and relocated across the pond.

"I thought, 'How can we get together and create the world's most modern brand?'" she responded when asked how she propelled the company further forward. Together with Christopher Bailey, Burberry's chief creative officer, "We realized that this social thing is changing the world and we needed to turn Burberry into a social enterprise," she said.

With stylized images of Burberry campaigns, runway shows and look books flashing on a massive screen behind her, Ahrendts detailed the virtual platforms on which Burberry engages with its customers. "We stream live videos so tens of millions of people across the world can watch runway shows," she said proudly. "We created Theartofthetrench.com, where over five million people have uploaded pictures of themselves in our trench-coats," she continued. "And we get over one million people visiting our site a week. We're not just getting market share," she said, "we're getting mindshare."



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Angela Ahrendts and Judith Glaser

