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Review

On Tuesday, October 16, 2007, the Campus Activity Board welcomed accomplished stylist, breakout television star, producer, equestrian, best selling author and now fashion designer, Mr. Carson Kressley. He is one of the stars from the original, hit series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* aired on the Bravo Network. With degrees in Finance and Fine Art, Mr. Kressley began his career as an independent stylist until he was employed with Ralph Lauren in New York. At Ralph Lauren, Kressley worked on the design team of the men's sportswear division. He later moved up the fashion ladder to the corporate advertising group. His responsibilities included fashion styling for the company's national retail advertising campaigns, as well as domestic and European men's fashion shows.

Kressley not only styled catalogs for Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, and Bloomingdale's but also styled editorial and film shoots. In addition to doing his part in helping to bridge the gap between peoples of different genders and sexual orientations through his show, Kressley is an avid philanthropist and works with a wide array of charities and organizations. He also uses his celebrity status to advance many different concerns, such as AIDS, mental health, and human rights. It seems as if Carson Kressley is out to make-over the world.

Mr. Kressley's second appearance at the UCF campus was entitled "Ten Tips to Finding Your Own Personal Style." Despite his credibility and experience, any audience member going for in-depth fashion expertise and guidance walked away disappointed. Compared to other performances and events on campus, like Diva Invasion and Homecoming's Comedy Night, Carson Kressley's overall show lacked key components in marketing, focus and setting; nonetheless, his personality proved to be entertaining and stole the show.

A wide variety of UCF events, especially those hosted by celebrities, are heavily marketed before, during and after the actual event. Weeks before, students are usually bombarded by promotional people handing out fliers, e-mails, posters, “chalk on the walk,” and any other announcements or creative ideas carried out by promotional teams. Promoters for special events: such as football games, concerts, and off campus opportunities advertise daily in all different ways and in all different places; however, for Carson Kressley, C.A.B only passed out fliers in front of the student union a few days before his performance. They also did not hand out free T-shirts, free promotional items or a program at the beginning of his show. Kressley also did not have a meet and greet afterwards, like they did for Bruce Bruce, a famous comedian who performed during homecoming week.

Compared to Diva Invasion, Kressley’s setting was under par. The hosts placed Mr. Kressley in the Pegasus Ballroom which seemed unfit for his performance because the space allotted was large and undecorated, the stage was bare, and the house lights stayed on for the duration of his performance. Despite being a half hour late and proving himself to be more of a celebrity icon than a fashion expert, Kressley had the audience laughing to the extreme. Mr. Kressley showed himself as a true entertainer and had all audience members grasping their stomachs and gasping for air throughout the whole presentation. Unfortunately, the spectators only filled the majority of the first few rows in each of the three sections. Kressley even commented on how he felt like he was trapped in an oversize lobby at a Holiday Inn hotel. On the other hand, Diva Invasion, a fundraising event for human rights hosted by local and professional cross dressers also in the Pegasus Ballroom, transformed the room into a swanky night club and sold out almost as soon as the doors opened. White satin sheets draped from the ceiling and swayed from the air conditioning, brightly colored lights shined on stage and set a

sensual mood, while fog machines released a light mist around the room. The stage for the entertainers was made into a runway with two massive flat screen televisions on either side, so everyone in the audience could see.

Despite many of the negative aspects of the event, Kressley's witty and vivacious personality brought his show to life. His first impression to the audience was full of excitement and charm; he jogged on stage waving and smiling until he threw himself all over the C.A.B member who announced him. Kressley felt compelled to kiss him on the cheek and pop up his back leg all before he spoke a single word. He radiated a glow of positive energy and was comfortable with being himself, an openly gay celebrity.

Every word from his first to his last kept the audience in a constant state of laughter, whether he was commenting on how he could not save Britney Spears because he wasn't Jesus, to how he thinks Nitro, our mascot, isn't scary but "cute and gay." He was a fantastic orator, because every word was enunciated and clear, and he kept the forum very playful and fun. He knew how to tie relevant and meaningful information like human rights, problems within UCF, and any questions he was asked together and presented it with his own unique twist. Although he did not speak in depth about his fashion tips, he did have a few original or at least not mainstream ideas like shopping in vintage stores, making friends with a good tailor, disregarding trends, "exposing yourself" to fashion, and embracing colors. He also mentioned tips that are very commonly mentioned on *Entertainment Tonight* and fashion magazines like *Cosmo* and *People*, such as accessorizing, mixing high with low fashion, budgeting and dressing appropriate for different occasions. In this regard, Kressley tweaked and curtailed his advice to be modern yet appropriate for his college audience.

Carson Kressley was also very in tune with the audience. He connected and interacted with the audience by walking down the aisles, sitting on people's laps, and literally talking to people face to face. He spoke to the audience as if he knew each member personally showing genuine interest. He also set time aside for anyone with questions, and his answers were fresh, practical, and uncensored. Kressley made sure that the audience felt fearless around him, letting everyone know that all questions were significant. One aspiring entertainer asked him for advice on breaking into the entertainment or fashion industry. He replied quite in depth saying she should show up at events whether high profile or school related with a video camera, microphone, and a friend, so she could make reference tapes for castings. A young man also asked him if he and Mr. Kressley were wearing the same jeans. Kressley was able to reply quite accurately with the designer, year, type, brand and details only a qualified fashion expert could give, but his personal preferences sometimes interfered with parts of his audience.

At times, Kressley, an openly gay man, concentrated more on students that could relate to being homosexual or bisexual rather than his audience as a whole. He often spoke directly to the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual organization, also known as the GLBSU, making it harder for his heterosexual audience members to associate or "relate" to some of his topics, such as "coming out of the closet," and thus alienated parts of the group.

Kressley also mentioned his involvement with gay rights, and despite support from audience members, he still catered to the people who shared his disposition. People, especially heterosexual males, unfamiliar with Mr. Kressley and his work may feel uncomfortable with the openness of his sexuality; nonetheless, he spoke tastefully about his homosexual lifestyle, even at times when he was not engaging with some factions of his audience. Although fashion was not his main focus as expected, motivational speaking was.

Because of his unique perspective as a homosexual celebrity, Kressley promotes fashion sensibility with a large undertone of gay pride and acceptance. His incredible sense of humor was the key ingredient to keeping the entire audience engaged, despite portions of his presentation that were primarily geared towards homosexuals. His overall message was to love yourself for who you are, accept others for their differences, and let clothes express and accentuate your inner self. Although marketing and physical aspects of Kressley's presentation fell short compared to its counterparts, his unmistakable personality and ability to entertain kept the audience on their toes.