

A Fashion Student is Forced to Adjust to a Shifting World

By: Caroline Bodan

Under normal circumstances, fashion students at Cornell University spend their days in studio classes behind sewing machines, crafting new pieces. It is an immersive major, where the classroom experience is unique and invaluable. Students like Grace Rickert, a junior at Cornell, find themselves in a difficult place as the Covid-19 outbreak that has been sweeping the world has now essentially put their studies on hold.

Cornell University made the announcement on March 13th to suspend all classes for the semester due to the Covid-19 pandemic that has displaced most college students for the rest of the year. Starting this week, classes have resumed virtually. For many majors, this is unideal, but perhaps more manageable. However for fashion, which is extremely hands on, it poses more challenges. For Rickert, who was studying abroad at the London College of Fashion, her unique opportunity to study design in a top city was also cut short, and she is left having to brainstorm new ideas to fill the void from her California hometown while also finishing her projects for the year across the ocean from where they began.

Luckily, Rickert is not involved in many studio courses this semester. Rickert says, “for my one studio class, which was draping, which involves a lot of materials, we are just required to submit what we have created so far.” Though she is disappointed that she will not get to finish her studies in this class, Rickert emphasizes that, “I am actually taking a lot of digital fashion courses this semester, so remote learning should still be effective for these classes. One styling project involved us pulling pieces from different websites and styling them digitally, so things like that can still resume as normal.”

While online learning may be effective, the valuable fashion show experience was not granted to students on campus this semester. The Cornell Fashion Show, hosted by The Fashion Collective, is a display where students are able to showcase full collections for their peers. For the seniors, this is where their capstone projects debut. Unfortunately, the show is in March, and social distancing rules had already prohibited large events from happening on campus.

The University ensured that seniors still got to showcase their collections through a virtual fashion show. However, Julia Whealan, a junior at Cornell notes that, “the virtual fashion show was not the same. The fashion show is an event that students look forward to attending all year. The designers work so hard, and it's a nice show of support.” Rickert agrees, and is, “grateful to not have had that experience cut short for me like my

senior friends. It is also really hard for anyone that put work into a collection that now did not get to be seen in its intended forum. The fashion show experience cannot be recreated virtually, and it is a vital part of the learning experience for us as designers.”

Despite several collegiate experiences being cut short, Rickert is more concerned about the industry as a whole, and how it will recover from the pandemic. According to *Business of Fashion*, designers like Prada are already preparing for a large decrease in sales from the coronavirus outbreak, and are rescaling budgets accordingly. For young designers set to enter the industry, the future does not look promising. Rickert says, “it's going to be hard coming into a recession. I think that when we get out of this, companies won't exist or have to scale back on hiring. I am confident in Cornell's resources and their alumni network though. I am relying on that, and feel so lucky to have this resource.” Despite the current opportunities looking bleak, she is assured that she and her fellow fashion students will acquire the skills that they need to work in the industry eventually, even through online schooling and summer internship opportunities dwindling for the year.

Given the creative nature of the major, there is ample room for growth even under unprecedented circumstances. While studio classes may be put on hold, there is still a lot that students can do at home, and in a less structured environment that fosters thinking outside the box. For Rickert, she looks forward to returning to her home sewing machine. She is hoping that this opportunity for creativity will lead to new types of projects and fun experiments, and hopes some pieces can be used for her own senior capstone. Rickert says, “I used to do that a lot when I was little. Just sew for fun. I'm looking forward to being able to do that again.”