

## **What recent innovations in the Marist Fashion Program have demonstrated that Marist Fashion students are ready to enter the world and make a change?**

**By Laura Kelton**

The media portrays fashion students as clothing obsessed, high-end, and oblivious to the world around them. Although Marist College's fashion students are clothing obsessed they are so much more than what the media portrays them to be. Marist College, a small liberal arts school in the Hudson Valley is home to one of the top fashion programs in the world. The Steel Plant, Marist's fashion facility, is home to over 500 students who have come to Marist to pursue their passion for fashion. The Marist Fashion Program has grown in size and popularity over the past few years, and with this growth has come many new innovations. Programs such as the Runway of Dreams, The Silver Needle Runway, and Mporium give fashion students a taste of the real world and prepare them for their futures after Marist. Each of the advances of the Marist Fashion Program has sparked inspiration in the students and has made them ready to enter the world and make a change.

Sustainability is one of the core pillars of Marist's Fashion Program and has been embraced by hundreds of students. Sustainability has become a topic of conversation in recent years due to a lack of fashion brands that are adapting to environmentally friendly practices. Marist has been proactive about the shift to sustainable practices by creating a Sustainability in Fashion course as well as creating clubs such as The Ethical Fashion Initiative. These organizations give students a chance to express their ideas regarding sustainability in fashion while working together to create change. They allow students to take initiative and work for what they believe in. They promote sustainable practices on campus while making those outside of the fashion world aware of how detrimental this industry can be to the environment.

Marist Fashion's Silver Needle Runway Show is a highlight of the program and an opportunity for students to work on an industry-level fashion show for the past thirty-seven years. SNR provides students with hands-on experiences that will prepare them for any challenge the fashion industry can throw at them. Podcasts, photoshoots, model castings, and lookbooks are just a few of the many tasks that the Silver Needle Runway students take on each year. The students have four short months to put together a full-scale fashion show under the direction of the senior capping students. The discipline, creativity, and communication needed for the production of this show are unmatched and are skills that are necessary to succeed in the fashion industry. The students in the Silver Needle Runway Production have accepted the challenge to prematurely work in a real-world setting making them ready to succeed post-graduation.

Hands-on industry experiences such as Mporium, a student-run boutique, prepare students for a real-world entrepreneurship experience. The Mporium retail store in The Steel Plant provides fashion students with an opportunity to work in departments such as Human Resources, Customer Service, Marketing, Visual Merchandising, and Planning. Learning these skills early in their education allows students to develop their own methods of entrepreneurship and values within the business. They develop drive and a true sense of what it is like to own a

business out in the real world. The Mporium experience shows that Marist fashion students know what they want and are willing to put in the effort to meet their goals.

Marist fashion students have shown that they empathize with those who are forgotten in the fashion industry through The Runway of Dreams. The Runway of Dreams is a culmination of student work that is designed to help disadvantaged individuals. This past spring, the Runway of Dreams held a fashion exhibition catered to those with disabilities. The pieces were adaptive, innovative, and functional, designed for those that the fashion industry tends to forget. The thoughtfulness of the designs goes to show that Marist Fashion students believe that everyone is equal and should have the opportunities to express themselves through their clothing choices. Individuals who embrace the values of The Runway of Dreams will have an advantage upon entering the workforce due to their understanding of a distinct customer on a personal level. These students will have the ability to change the lives of those who are disadvantaged and give them a whole new meaning to what they consider fashion.

The innovations in the Marist Fashion Program demonstrate that Marist Fashion students are going above and beyond expectations and are working to make a change in their communities. In the next few years, these students will be out in the industry. They are the future of the fashion world and embody values that can help to make a real change. They are driven, conscientious, and inspiring, and give hope to those who are soon to leave the fashion industry that their passions will be left in good hands.