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# Tucson Art Institute's closure to limit local choices in fashion design

By [Maggie Driver/Arizona Sonora News](#) on May 9, 2016 | [0 comments](#)



The stage is set and the audience is ready for the 2016 Flowing Wells High School Fusion fashion show, where students showcase the garments they created throughout the year. Flowing Wells is only one of two high school programs in Tucson that teach fashion design to students. (Photo by Maggie Driver/Arizona Sonora News)

The impending closure of the Art Institute of Tucson will make it more difficult locally for students to pursue fashion design at a higher educational level.

The school is no longer accepting new students as of this year. The Art Institute of St. Louis and the Art Institute of California Los Angeles also are closing, according to Bob Greenlee, a spokesman for Education Management Corp.

The number of years the Tucson school remains open will depend on students' programs and courses of study, according to Greenlee, who added that it could be as many as three or four years before the school shuts its doors.

Closure would leave Pima Community College in Tucson, the Art Institute of Phoenix, Phoenix College and Mesa Community College as the only schools left in the state with fashion design programs. Arizona State University, however, plans to add a program.

Greenlee said the Art institute of Tucson will continue to provide classes and support to its students until the last batch graduates.



Flowing Wells High School students line up in the hallway before the start of the 2016 Fusion fashion show. (Photo by Maggie Driver/Arizona Sonora News)

"The institution will remain open and will remain operational and active for a number of years going forward," Greenlee said. "There's nothing that's going to happen very soon."

Despite the closure of many Art Institute locations across the country, The Art Institute of Phoenix is still accepting new enrollments, according to Greenlee.

Despite limited locations for students looking to pursue fashion design in college, there are still places in the state that teach it.

“From what we’ve seen, we continue to believe that fashion education will remain an attractive offering for students going forward,” Greenlee said.

Kimberly Loyd, the fashion design teacher at Flowing Wells High School in Tucson, said she had a student who met with an admissions officer at the Art institute of Tucson and was ready to attend next year.

“Two weeks later, they made the announcement that it was going to close, and that was a very difficult thing for her because she had liked what she saw when she visited the campus,” Loyd said. “It was very disappointing for her.”



Student models at Flowing Wells High School prepare to walk down the runway at the school’s 2016 Fusion fashion show. Multiple students created their own version of a red dress that was featured in a design competition at the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation’s Moda Provocateur fashion show earlier that year. (Photo by Maggie Driver/Arizona Sonora News)

Added Loyd: “It takes away a local opportunity for students who are interested in fashion.”

When Loyd speaks with her students about college options, she said she finds that they care greatly about industry connections and after-college career placement when deciding where to attend.

She also said she asks them which side of the fashion industry they want to go into: design, which is sewing and creating garments, or merchandising, which is the business and product development side of fashion. Her students were split this year, she said.

No matter what path they choose, for the students who participate in Loyd’s two year fashion

design program, many of them are learning valuable sewing skills for the first time.

"Most of the students, I would say honestly, 95 percent of the kids who come through my program in the beginning, have never sewn before in their life," Loyd said.

But some of those students progress, and stay in the program longer than the two years that the school typically offers, which Loyd said better prepares them to go to college if they choose to pursue fashion design.

But even students interested in learning fashion design in high school have increasingly limited options in the state as well.

Loyd moved to Arizona seven years ago and said, "When I came, there were five fashion programs and unfortunately, three of those programs have been dropped from their school's curriculum."

The only other high school with a fashion program in Tucson is at Rincon High School, according to Loyd.

"It's such an unusual program," Loyd said. "I mean, it's something so specialized."

Though options are diminishing, there is possible future hope for students who want to pursue fashion at a university level.

In the fall of 2017, Arizona State University may be the first state university in Arizona to offer a Bachelor's of Fashion degree, allowing students to learn a variety of fashion related skills and transition successfully to a university level program, according to Matt Ransom, an academic success coordinator at Arizona State University.

While this new degree program has not yet been approved, it is currently in development to be proposed to the Arizona Board of Regents, which approves new degree programs for the state's three major universities, according to Ransom.



A Flowing Wells High School student models student designed athletic wear during the school's 2016 Fusion fashion show in Tucson, Ariz. (Photo by Maggie Driver/Arizona Sonora News)

It takes a few months from the time schools submit their class outlines and syllabuses to when the board gives them a final verdict, according to Ransom.

While Northern Arizona University has a fashion merchandising minor and the University of Arizona has a retailing and consumer sciences degree program, no state university offers a fashion design-based degree.

Though that could change in the future, Ransom said, since he knows that some students may want to do a more concentrated subject in the future at ASU, such as focusing on fashion design or merchandising specifically.

"Once this new program gets kicked off, a couple years later, once we can really dial in with what is the student interest and demand," Ransom said, "we can really see how many students would want a concentration of this and then we can start to develop that concentration in more depth."

The first iteration of the the fashion program at ASU, launched in fall 2014, is concentrated under a liberal arts bachelor's degree.

Ransom said because there is not a specific fashion program, the demand has always been there.

"We knew that this would, in part, start to begin the process of serving that need that students were asking for a fashion related program," Ransom said.

Though the school did not advertise their current program in order to test the waters, word got out.

"To our pleasant enjoyment, students were finding out about it through word of mouth, friends of friends. And students were starting to change their major," Ransom said.

Each year, the school has about 30 fashion-interested students enroll as freshman, change their major or filter in from a community college, according to Ransom. The current ASU program has 60 enrolled students.

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