This summer I was a production intern for Christian Siriano in New York City. Christian Siriano is a New York based fashion designer who is best known for his luxury womenswear and statement red carpet pieces. Siriano has been building his fashion house for nearly ten years, and the brand has expanded into other areas of style and decor. Established extensions include shoes, handbags, fragrance, and accessories; while more recent additions to the Christian Siriano brand include eyewear, intimates, home, bedding, and beauty collections. You can find his work in Neiman Marcus, Bergdorf Goodman, and on many celebrities (including Lupita Nyong'o, Gwyneth Paltrow, Sarah Jessica Parker, Celine Dion, Oprah, Kate Hudson, and Tina Fey). In 2012 Siriano opened his first flagship store in New York city and in 2013 he was inducted as a member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). As a production intern, I was responsible for making pick-ups and deliveries to and from various factories and our many fabric vendors throughout the garment district in Manhattan. My first week, Meg Ryan wore one of Christian’s gowns to the CFDA awards and accompanied him as his date. It was incredible to see a gown on the red carpet that I had seen only hours earlier in the atelier. Additionally, I was responsible for keeping the production room organized, sourcing fabric, making trim packets, and keeping organization of the Fall/Winter 2017 collection for a seamless production.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

The errands I ran throughout the garment district accomplished a crucial day to day difference in the company. The fabrics I picked up were essential to the internal production of garments in the atelier.
and the external mass production of garments throughout the factories the company works with. Through this, to ensure I picked up the correct fabric, I learned to distinguish between many types of fabrics such as charmeuse, stretch charmeuse, silk, silk faille, and jacquard. My vocabulary of the fashion world was deeply strengthened throughout my day to day errands, naturally. My communication skills were reinforced everyday through my contact with factory owners and fabric vendors, again testing my knowledge and vocabulary of the fashion world in order to successful pick up what was ordered and to relay direction of how to use what I was dropping off. My knowledge of the process of design was also deeply strengthened. On an afternoon when the production work slowed down, my fellow production intern and I aided the design interns in copying design patterns. One of the head designers sat us down and taught us step by step how to trace the outline of the pattern onto a new sheet to create an identical piece. This piece would later be cut out and used as an outline for cutting the fabric in an identical fashion, thus creating a portion of a garment. I also went sourcing for fabric. This means that I went to as many fabric stores as I could, looking for something like, “black stretch velvet”, for example, and took swatches back to the office of as many “black stretch velvet” options I could find. Eventually, the swatches would be shown to Christian, and he would choose the velvet he liked best for the new collection, and I’d be sent back to the fabric store from which I’d taken the swatch and purchase the yardage needed.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

One of the activities I most looked forward to was matching zippers to fabric. It’s not as easy as it sounds, and can at times be difficult, if a metallic fabric, for example, demonstrates different prominent colors from different angles and in different light. There are times when I need to find the zipper myself and there are times when I was sent to buy zippers for a garment for which the zipper color is already known. If this is the case, the zippers are labeled with numbers, and I’m given which number to go pick up. One morning, I went to pick up zipper for a dress. The zipper had previously been decided, and so I was sent with the specific number of which one to pick up. I found it, a bright orange, and headed to the factory to drop it off. When I arrived, the woman who ran the factory, Cindy, looked horrified as I pulled out the bright orange zipper. She showed me the gold dress I was intended to bring zippers for, and I headed back to the zipper store, orange zipper and gold dress in hand, panicked that I had to remedy this situation on my own. I returned the orange zipper, and had the whole management team working with me to match a zipper to the gold dress (remember, metallics are hard!). Finally, with the fate of the gold dress in my hands, I picked a zipper and hurriedly returned to Cindy. She thankfully approved. It was heartening to see, a month later, when a rack of identical gold dresses were wheeled into the production room, they all had zipper #551, a result of my judgement call. Sewanee equipped me for this moment in many ways. I am prepared to not only work hard but to be successful under pressure because of the high standards Sewanee holds me to academically and morally. Sewanee also holds me to a social high ground that allows me to react to stressful situations with rational communication, agility and grace. Most importantly, Sewanee has ignited me to trust my instincts and problem solving skills as an alternative to bending at the will of agitation and dread.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?
My fellow intern and I were constantly working together to work more efficiently during the day. When given a long list of errands, which at times would keep us away from the office for up to two hours at a time, it was crucial to coordinate. Walking between west 34th street and west 40th street, between 8th and 6th avenue, it was critical that we organized, distributed tasks, and worked together to never back-track in direction or be carrying too many fabric rolls or garment bags by ourselves. It was important to gage the physicality of what we were being asked to do and compare it with our abilities. For example, if we were carrying a heavy ball gown for five blocks, it was necessary that we join forces for that particular errand in order to carry the gown together so not to let it touch the ground, wrinkle, or hit a fellow pedestrian.

**How did your internship affect your career plans?**

This internship gave me incredible insight into the daunting world of fashion. Clothing doesn’t just appear from the assembly line of a giant machine in a factory far, far away. It takes real people doing really hard work to create something beautiful. It is hard work. That is the most important thing I took away from my internship this summer. Fashion is a lot of work and I want the world to take it seriously. It’s not a backup career or a materialistic pastime, and it impacts everyone whether they realize it or not. This internship has strengthened my desire to enter this career field, and made me more passionate for its positive effects.

**In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons’ perspectives?**

One of the most prominent differences between the people I worked with this summer and myself is our education. Everyone I worked with majored in fashion design or fashion merchandising. Many of them went to schools specifically for a fashion education and hadn’t heard of Sewanee. It was interesting to compare our experiences yet still hold the same enthusiasm for fashion. This excited me because I am approaching my career with such a different perspective than those who went to school especially for fashion. I don’t view the field to have any rules or direct paths to a favored outcome, and I truly believe that my motivation, and love for the industry will lead me in a unique path to success.

**Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:**

To my donor: Thank you a million times over. It is beyond words that I can describe what an amazing gift you gave me. New York is expensive, and you truly aided in any extra stress or anxiety I felt on top of the stress and anxiety of trying to impress in a work environment. You are AMAZING! You gave me the gift of not feeling guilty about buying that second cup of coffee. You caffeinated me, supported me, and were oh-so-generous with your thoughts and money.

Thank you thank you,

Greer Pollock