

Innovation fellow fashions couture class

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PROVIDED BY ALISON KUSHNER From left to right, a vibrant printed gown, a strapless fuchsia dress with organza overlay and a brocade romper, sketched by sophomore Alison Kushner, add to her fashion design collection.

Her hands continue to sew the dress, tailoring it in the seconds before the model takes the stage. She works fast, ready to move on to several other pieces soon to be displayed to the waiting audience.

Last year, the high school's 21st Century Fund, which has been responsible for supporting numerous classes and programs at the high school already (such as EPIC and African-American and Latino Scholars) started a new program called the Innovation Fellowship. The fund picks a teacher and allows him or her to teach one fewer class, giving them the opportunity to create new, interesting and innovative options for students to explore and potentially pursue.

English teacher Elon Fischer is this year's fellow for the program. After hearing of a largely untapped interest in fashion at the high school, Fischer decided to use the resources of his fellowship to help provide more class options to reflect students' creativity.

After finding a few interested students, he contacted the House of Colors, an arts studio on Washington Street, and got the names of more high school students who work with the studio.

"I called the woman who runs it, Michelle, and we met and we talked, and she introduced me to students in her class," Fischer said. "That's how I met with Ali[son] and Basya and we just started talking about things we could do. It was kind of fun."

According to Michelle Muhlbaum-Aviksis, the owner of the House of Colors, she has worked with students since they were in elementary school.

"I was known mostly to the elementary school students because it's very easy to access the elementary schools in Brookline," Muhlbaum-Aviksis said. "So, now the [art students] are getting older and are now in high school."

After noticing this opportunity in a newsletter, sophomore Alison Kushner began working on the project. Kushner was sewing and sketching from a very young age, learning from her grandmother. After going to the House of Colors, Kushner obtained new skills and applied them to actual fashion shows.

From the group of students interested in fashion design, formed a club. After getting in contact with Kushner, Fischer proposed trying to create a class that reflected her passion with the existing club, and has helped pursue the project.

"He's been really great with getting us meetings with different teachers like Ms. Brennan, Ms. Mitchell, and organizing different events and meetings," Kushner said. "He really cares about getting this elective. It's not just us students; he clearly wants to help us get this elective to be a reality."

Sophomore Basya Klein, also an aspiring designer, was introduced to the project by Kushner. Klein has been interning for former *Project Runway* designer Nathalia JMag and working on her portfolio, creating collections that she broadcasts on social media. She explained the obstacles the group faced at first, such as how realistic the demographic for a potential class would be.

"At first, it was a little bit difficult because we did have a different ideas of us coming from the fashion world, and [Fischer] coming from 'Well how do we get things done?' side, but once we sat down and talked a few times, we figured out where each of us was at," Klein said. "It was great."

In addition to trying to start a class, the club has already put on displays of Kushner's and Klein's pieces outside the MLK room.

"[Fischer] is really really good at getting stuff done," Klein said, "So, that's been really useful. For someone who doesn't do fashion design, he's very passionate about helping us and getting to this place in the school."

The group hopes to start the class during the 2018-2019 school year. According to Fischer, elective classes are extremely important and valuable to the high school.

"I think if it was a class, it would serve a lot of students who are not currently being served as well as they could," Fischer said. "The electives in my mind are some of the best parts in this school."

Kushner emphasizes that anyone can do fashion.

"Fashion isn't just a cookie-cutter model of a person," Kushner said. "It's for anyone who's interested. You can be male, female, gender fluid. You can be a freshman or senior; it doesn't matter who you are, it just matters that you have a passion for it."