



*MakeYourStory*

Season 3, Episode 4: Purdue Sewing & Design Club

SH = Sarah Huber

RA = River Allison

EL = Erica Long

SH: Hello and welcome to make your story where we highlight student making across campus. My name is Sarah Huber. I'm an associate professor of library science and the director of the Knowledge Lab, which is the library's makerspace. I'm also one of the hosts of this podcast. Joining us today are undergraduate students Erica and River. We're going to talk about their student organization, the Purdue Sewing and Design club. Thank you to you both for being here today.

EL: Thanks for having us.

SH: When I can I attend your Thursday meetings. I have been struck by the variety of students who come, how popular the organization is, and how much fun people are having. I thought it would be great if we could hear from you directly details of what's been happening in these meetings. So if you could just tell the listeners your name and program and year at Purdue.

RA: My name is River Allison. I am a sophomore here at Purdue University studying computer science and ASL in deaf culture.

EL: My name is Erica Long. I'm a junior and I am studying animal sciences and biochem.

SH: What first comes to mind is, how did you get into sewing?

RA: I started sewing because I really just liked fashion and I wanted a lot of unique pieces that I just couldn't find at retail. So what ended up happening is I got into thrifting, and along with that, I started just kind of altering my clothes and then creating entirely new clothes from scratch.

And, yeah, I just kind of taught myself how to do that. I watched lots of YouTube, lots of reading, and figured out what to do and how to do it, and that's how I got here.

RA: I guess I started not exactly by choice. It was my mom and grandma who started teaching me through 4H. And it took a good couple years, but I started to enjoy it and realize the value that it has, what a good skill it is. And now I do it for fun.

SH: Can you tell us how the sewing club started?

EL: So I had the idea, I guess, at the end of last year when I was teaching a friend how to sew in the knowledge lab. And actually Professor Huber said, well, this might be kind of a good idea. A lot of people want to learn how to sew. And so I was working on starting the club over the summer when Tate and River overheard you talking about it, and they also had the same idea. And so we were able to join forces and come together.

RA: Yeah. And for Tate and I, Purdue had just shut down the sewing program. So there was like a fashion design and like textiles program, and I coming in as a freshman, it was shut down my freshman year, so I was never able to take any of the classes, but I was able to use the labs because Joan allowed me to. And so Tate and I met, and we both wanted, with, you know, that program being shut down, we wanted people to still be able to have spaces to sew and also, like, be able to learn how to. And so, yeah, we ended up Erica and then Tate and I were working separately. We end up hearing, overhearing about each other's ideas, and then we end up combining and collaborating and end up making a great team.

SH: Yeah.

Just for people listening. Tate is the third person who runs this sewing club, and she just couldn't join us today. And then Joan is someone who worked in that clothing design program and is still leading workshops in the Knowledge Lab. Thank goodness. And I had met when the three of you came to me separately. I was like, I wonder if this group will get along. I just was like, you all seem very different to me. And then through coming to your meetings, I've turned out, learned that you became fast friends. You can feel that in these meetings. It's just so fun and amicable, and all these different people come together in this space. And I. It just never dawned on me how much people would love sewing. But then, like, once you start talking to people, of course, engineers like sewing. There's a lot about materials and, you know, properties and things like that. There's so much making on campus, and sewing can pull stuff together, right?

RA: Yeah.

SH: So what does a typical meeting look like?

RA: A typical meeting starts with all of the leaders. We text about different ideas. We talk about, like, what people may want to make. We end up coming up with usually, like, two or three ideas for that specific meeting. And then we send out a poll. We see what people are interested in. Once we figure that out, then we set up how we just kind of make a game plan of, like, okay, this is how we want this to go. This is how many people we think we can handle for each meeting. Because one big thing is, obviously, we have a limited number of sewing machines. We have a limited number of people to teach, and we want to make sure that everyone's able to actually complete the projects that we create. So we figure out the projects, we figure out how many people we think we can take. We have a little signup sheet. They normally fill up within, like, 30 minutes, if we're lucky. They fill up very quickly, and then we go in and we just try and do it. Typically, what ends up happening is we try to split up between Tate, Erica, and I. We also now have like a new leader, Emmeline, who is absolutely wonderful, and she is super helpful in teaching. And so she also has increased the amount of people that we can take on. And so now we split it between us four, and we all just go around. We try to teach. We try to make sure everyone is comfortable that they're not taking on anything they don't know how to handle. And we just try to make sure that they're having a good time, they're getting their projects done.

I think we try to take approach much more about people's enjoyment and relaxation. We want sewing to be something that is enjoyable, so we try to really not worry too much about time constraints, especially now, all these projects are generally for personal, so there's no reason for us to be like, you have to finish it by the end of the meeting.

So obviously that's our goal. But we make opportunities for people. If they don't finish, we will find extra time to work with them. We really want sewing to be something that they can learn to love and a skill that they can have for the rest of their lives.

SH: That's my impression when I come in and I see these people who have never sewn before are sewing full garments, and it's so relaxed, you know, it isn't like, I have to, I have to, or I messed this up. And it's just like they have their patterns and they lay stuff out, and little by little, they're working their way through. And I'm so impressed by it. As a teacher, I could take a chapter out of your guys' book for sure.

EL: I guess also, we just kind of. Every week is a little bit different. Some weeks are more structured than others, because some weeks we just have people bring in stuff that they're working on or stuff that they want to mend. Maybe they have a pair of pants that they want to hem, something like that. And so that we kind of help on a case by case basis, just wherever needed. But we also have meetings where we teach step by step. Like a few weeks ago, we all made fleece beanies, and that was something that we, the leaders, like, cut out ahead of time. And that was a more step by step that was better for more beginners so we could, you know, help them along the way. And that was more of a group project.

SH: Again, my impression coming in to these meetings has been, it's a real variety of people from different walks of life and different programs, different years. Can you describe the variety of students and their interests who attend the club?

EL: Yeah. I was also surprised by the variety. I mean, of course, there's the super artsy kids in there, which we kind of expected, but we've also had, like you said, engineers and some people that I guess you would not, you know, based on their background or their major, you would not expect them to want to sew at all.

SH: That's been my impression.

RA: We do have a large LGBTQ population, which I expected, but I was surprised by, like, the amount of. Just, like, we had some just very different people that I was not expecting. Like, we had people from, like, frat houses coming in, which was very shocking to me. I was not expecting frat boys to want to learn how to sew, and they came up with some great designs that day. And, yeah, I was really impressed.

SH: There was one meeting I went to where people drew designs, and, oh, God, I was really impressed what people were drawing up. Western wear. I mean, just. It was the whole gamut.

Why did you expect there to be a big LGBTQ community turnout?

RA: I mean, one, I think that, like, sewing in general and just fashion is very artsy, and so a lot of the LGBTQ community finds comfort in art and creativity. I think that it's something that just in our culture, is very abundant. I think a lot of aspects of queer culture include fashion. I feel like it's almost like a way for us to make each other visible to each other people without completely, completely outing ourselves in unsafe environments. So there are certain items I can wear that I feel like most other queer people could recognize me as a queer person. So I feel like it's almost like a mating call, if you will. We can safely expose ourselves to the people that we want to know so that we can feel seen and safe, but also not expose ourselves to people that are unsafe. And so, I guess, for me, going in, I just expected a lot of queer people to resonate with being able to create fashion. I also think that a lot of queer media includes sewing. Like, if you think about a lot of drag race, it includes a lot of sewing and fashion.

Drag in general, includes a lot of fashion. Not necessarily everyone's sewing their own things, but

everyone is wearing very ornate garments. And so I think that a lot of going in, I expected a lot of queer people to be interested in being part of that process. I also think that Tate and I, as we both are queer, were very intentional in making it a very safe and welcoming space for all people. And so I think between that intentionality and then also the aspect of just expecting a lot of people to want to sew that were queer.

I think those combined really impacted that.

SH: What you just said. I learned something new, and listeners will learn something new, too, that's really interesting about safety, clothing and safety and letting people know in your own way, in your own safe way, who you are.

Is there anything to expand on? What are some of the activities you've been?

EL: I would say one of our favorite meetings has been when we just say, come in with something that you need to be mended, we'll help you. That was one of our best turnouts, and everyone was just having a great time chatting. We'd pop around and show people how to, you know, start their stitching, and everyone always forgets how to tie the thread at the beginning, of course, and then everyone was just so pleased to have, like, something they could wear again or use again. And it was just like one of our really, really successful meetings. And everyone, it was a really good environment, too.

RA: Yeah, I mean, we've touched on kind of the things, but we've done, like, design workshops, so we've done where you draw your own designs. We've done mood boards.

We made beanies one time. We've had kind of a semester long series of meetings that has been creating your own pants or skirt, which has been really cool. It's been really fun to see how excited people are to have something that they've made and they can wear.

SH: What has surprised you the most about the club? Has anything really popped out to you or something you didn't expect to happen, happen?

EL: I think we already kind of touched on about a variety of people here, but also our turnouts have been really good, especially for a new club at Purdue, it's really hard to get members to continue to come to meetings, and we've had really good success with that.

And people have just always been excited to come and work on their stuff. They look forward to the meetings, and that's been really encouraging.

RA: Yeah, the turnout has been. We were incredibly shocked. I mean, our first meeting, we had, like, what, 30 something people?

EL: Yeah, 20 to 30.

RA: Yeah, yeah. And, like, our GroupMe, has over 100 people in it now. And out of those 100, obviously not everyone comes consistently, but we do have a lot of consistent bodies that come in. I mean, each meeting typically is over 20 people, which is mainly because we can only admit so many people. So it's. Yeah, it's been very shocking to see how many people are interested. Like, we have been advertising, but I feel like half of it just people find us. Yeah.

SH: Cause I go to your Instagram page and I'm like, where are the pictures? Where? I want more? There's so little. So, like, for the little advertising, the turnout's amazing. Yeah. What is the most impressive item someone has made in the club? And maybe everything. Like, they're all your children, so

everything they make is amazing. But is there any one thing that pops out to you that you're like, wow, I can't believe this person.

RA: We've had some pretty impressive things. I mean, we had one person make a fully lined and boned corset in two days, which was insane.

SH: This is where I need the pictures. I need pictures.

RA: Yeah. And they did that out of a thrifted dress. We also had another person for an art class create a haori, which is a Japanese top inspired jacket, out of deconstructed jeans. So they took, like, I think. I think it was five different pairs of jeans, and then just cut the legs however they needed and created this entire sculpture out of it. It was incredible.

SH: Incredible. But now it's just the stuff of legends. I'll never know without any photos.

What is one thing you wanted to do with this past year, but it never came to fruition?

EL: We hope to do a fashion show at the end of the year, and that hasn't worked out this year. It just. We had a. It took a lot to get this club off the ground at the beginning of the semester, and we just haven't had time. And I know people are excited. People want to do it, so it's definitely on our plate next year. We're very hopeful that it will happen, but we just wanted to give people more time to create garments.

SH: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's true. It fills up, and I so want this fashion show to happen.

Partially, I just want to be in it. Like, I want to make something completely outrageous that I can barely walk in and, like, yeah, I think it'll be so fun, you know? So I'm definitely there to help. Help make it happen. And you were, you were talking last night, Erica, that possibly in the spring semester.

EL: Yeah.

SH: And that leads to my last question.

What do you think you'll do differently if you'll do anything different this coming, because you're going to have it next year, right?

RA:Yes.

SH: So, again, I don't know that we have many listeners, but if we do, and they're interested in joining, they would just go to Purdue student orgs, and it's listed, and it's just called Purdue Sewing and Design, and they just reach out to you and say they want to join. And there's an Instagram page, there's an.

RA: Insta and then we can set them up so that they can get on the GroupMe, which is just a messaging system that they can get updates about all the meetings and all the good stuff.

SH: Okay, good. And how often do you guys meet? I can't remember.

RA: We meet every other week.

SH: Okay.

RA: We, depending on what projects you're doing, also meet every week. So for the people that are

making their garments this semester, we've been meeting every Thursday and then meeting every other week for just our typical meeting.

SH: I mean, that's a real service to the Purdue community that you guys come in and help like that. So, yeah, if there's anything you have planned that might be different next year or not, are you going to keep the same format going?

RA: I think generally we want about the same format, but a couple things that we were thinking about. One, obviously we want to do that fashion show. So over the summer we are going to be working on getting all the things that we need, sponsors, all that. So we've already started working on different plans for that as well as we're thinking about potentially holding like office hours where people just in the club, if they need help, can come in, we can help them out. Just during typical school day. We figure we have four leaders, so if each of us takes 2 hours out of our week to do, it wouldn't be that bad. Would give 8 hours of time for people in the club to be able to come in, work on their projects and have someone knowledgeable that can help them. I think those are the biggest changes we're looking at right now. Generally, everything has gone way smoother and better than I think we could have hoped. And we've been very blessed to have a lot of really great people that have come in and, you know, just given their time and trusted us to guide them through their projects. And yeah, we've just been very blessed by everyone that's come and just the great community that has been kind of formed.

SH: It's such a great community. And again, shout out to Tate and Emmeline. I got to meet her for the first time last night. It was awesome. It was great.

EL: I also want to add that the Knowledge Lab is.

I know listeners probably know, but the Knowledge Lab has been really, really great to us. They've been very generous with their time and their space. That's where we hold all of our meetings and it's open all day to students. So like you said, you know, there's only one person in the Knowledge Lab. So we wanted to come and give our...

RA: Time back.

EL: Yes.

SH: Oh, thanks, you guys. Yeah, yeah.

EL: So we're very, very grateful for this space.

RA: Thank you guys so much.

SH: You're so welcome. Yeah. Thank you. This was a great conversation. I appreciate.



