

The Campus as Runway



Elizabeth Lippman for The New York Times

Tamara Belopopsky, in blue shirt, and other students at the State University of New York at Purchase define themselves by their style. [More Photos »](#)

By RUTH LA FERLA
Published: October 12, 2011

JULIA FLYNN was darting to her classes at Columbia University last week in a Marc by Marc Jacobs daisy-patterned dress and high-heeled Chloé boots, her polished turnout accessorized with a Starbucks venti latte. "I'm really loving the whole Chanel, Valentino and McQueen shows," she said. "They completely inspired me." She had gleaned her information that very morning from [Style.com](#).

Ms. Flynn, 24 and a sophomore, is one in a small but self-aware and increasingly vocal contingent of college women who dress to impress. The campus is their runway, a place to show off a style sense that is derived in part from their friends but more often attained through a click of a mouse, a gesture that affords them instant access to the once arcane universe of fashion shows and to the style blogs and shopping sites so many imbibe with their morning brew.

If at one time college women subscribed to a regionally prescribed uniform — twin sets and loafers in the East, frayed jeans and ponchos farther west — now, thanks to the democratizing influence of the Web, trends are disseminated at warp speed, traversing regional borders and, paradoxically, encouraging a more individualized approach to dress.

Whether students' tastes run to an urbanely preppie composite of mannish shirts, slim skirts and blazers, flowered dresses and Ferragamo flats, or to a cutting-edge pastiche of long loose-fitting sweaters, calf-length skirts and platform booties, their absorption with fashion points to a sea change, suggesting that the style bar has been raised, reaching a level of sophistication all but unknown a mere decade

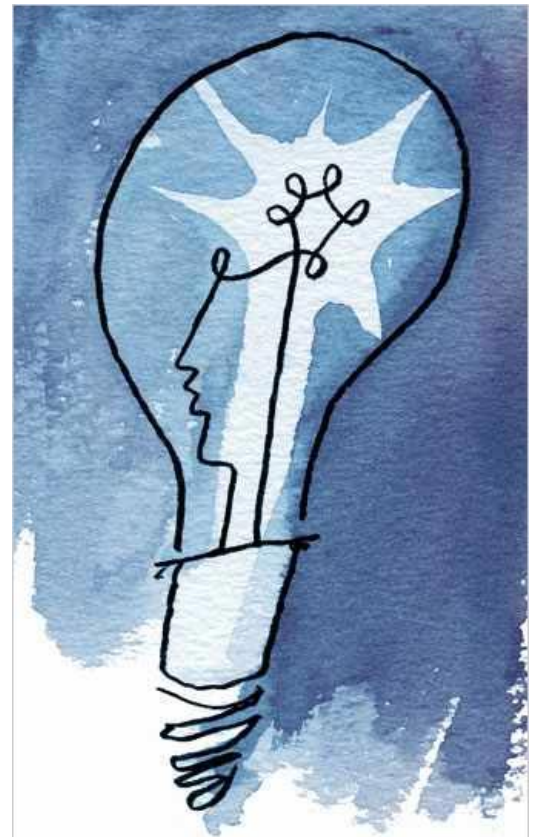
Latest in My Network

What's This?

- Edo Lastiri** RECOMMENDED
Ireland Recalibrates Ties to Roman Catholic Church
- David Stepanczuk** RECOMMENDED
Omitting Clergy at 9/11 Ceremony Prompts Protest

POPULAR NOW
[Panic of the Plutocrats](#)

POPULAR NOW
[No Jobs Bill, and No Ideas](#)



the eni award 2012
ideas for a brighter future

eni rewards
the most innovative projects and discoveries in sustainable energy

deadline for applications
28th October 2011

- RECOMMEND
- TWITTER
- LINKEDIN
- E-MAIL
- PRINT
- REPRINTS
- SHARE

Multimedia



The Campus as Runway

Connect With Us on Twitter
Follow @NYTimesfashion for fashion, beauty and lifestyle news and headlines.



ago.

“The stereotype used to be that college students live in sweat pants and don’t care about fashion,” said Zephyr Basine, the editor of [Collegefashion.net](#), a blog written by college women. “But today that isn’t so.” If at one time coeds signaled their cool by a kind of willful dishevelment, arriving for 8 a.m. classes in trench coats tossed over pajamas, today that sort of carelessness marks them as out of touch.

“People now put more thought into what they’re wearing,” said Amy Levin, 24, a recent graduate of Indiana University and editor of [Collegefashionista.com](#), an influential blog. “Getting ready for class is important. Students want to up their game. That means looking a little more serious, not just throwing on a graphic T-shirt and jeans.”

Many of those students might relate to Diarra White, 18, a freshman at Columbia University. “I’m not a sweats-and-T-shirt kind of person,” said Ms. White, who was decked out for class last Wednesday in a cropped leather jacket, white cotton dress and the camel-colored knee-high boots that she alternates on other days with high-heeled pumps. “Even at the library, I’ll see people in heels. There’s a lot of energy in that.”

“Besides,” she added saucily, “you never know who you’re going to see in the library.”

Today Ms. White and her cohort routinely trawl fashion Web sites like the Sartorialist, Fashion Toast, the Cut and Style Stalker; they scour cheap and chic outposts like Topshop and Forever 21 for approximations of coveted labels like J. Crew and Tory Burch, and for the chunky oversize sweaters, generous scarves, platform pumps and high-heeled loafers that made a splash on fall runways. Then they fill in wardrobe gaps with treasures picked up at vintage fashion boutiques.

They shop well in advance of the school year, some stepping up their purchasing throughout the term.

Spending by these inveterate bargain hunters typically adds up to a few hundred dollars each year or, in rarer instances, \$1,000 or more.

“I used to shop constantly,” said Elisabeth Dickson, 22, who graduated in May from Oberlin College in Ohio. At one time, Ms. Dickson confided, she spent hours on the Internet, scouring the Style Stalker, Fashion Toast, Man Repeller and Style Bubble sites, and making the occasional detour to J. Crew or Topshop “when I was in the market for something edgier or a little bit upscale.”

“There was a point in my sophomore year,” she said, “when I would read fashion blogs religiously in the morning. I bookmarked them and used them for inspiration, or just out-and-out thievery.”

Planning to create a blog of her own, she found herself jotting elaborate descriptions of her daily ensembles. An entry marked 10/14/09 described a vintage blue and white sweater with gold buttons and shoulder pads over navy-blue tights and a white H & M tunic and vintage lace-up cream booties.

“Most people may not have been as obsessed,” she acknowledged, “but the point is that we cared.”

For Ms. Dickson and others, the Internet acts as a primary resource. “Students can watch fashion shows live on the runway,” said Ms. Basine of [Collegefashion.net](#). “They can see what people are wearing on the other side of the globe. Trends now are dispersed faster than ever. They’re not going to stay in one isolated area for long.”

Trends are on Julie Soffen’s radar for sure, as attested by her creamy, quilted chain bag and the faux Burberry scarf that was looped luxuriantly around her neck. Ms. Soffen, 21, who was visiting a friend at Princeton University last week, had put rigorous thought into her turnout, which she may alternate on other days with, she said, “Ralph Lauren head to toe.”

TimesLimited E-Mail



Sign up to receive exclusive products and experiences featuring NYTimes.com's premier advertisers.

tonysilva@mac.com [Sign Up](#)

[Change E-mail Address](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MOST E-MAILED

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

30 articles in the past month

tonyinosaka All Recommendations



1. [His Photos Are Proof: He’s With the Band](#)

2. LETTER FROM INDIA
[New Steps to Tackle an Old Problem: Poverty](#)



3. THEATER REVIEW | ‘SOUTHERN COMFORT’
[Seeking Acceptance, and Family, in One’s Shifting Gender](#)

4. NATIONAL BRIEFING | WASHINGTON
[House Panel Issues Subpoena for Records on Gun Program](#)



5. [Cleared of Murder, Sheehan Reports to Jail on Gun Conviction](#)



6. [With Three 9s, Cain Refigured Math for Taxes](#)



7. [Los Angeles Stakes Its Claim as a World Art Center](#)



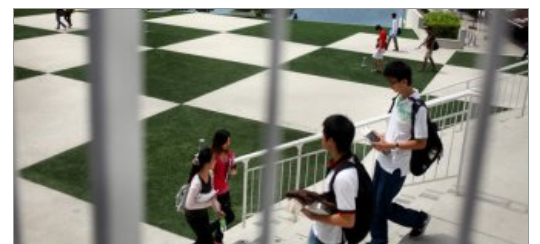
8. [Franklin Kameny, Gay Rights Pioneer, Dies at 86](#)

9. EDITORIAL
[Court Reform for Teenage Offenders](#)

10. [Facing Cuts, a City Repeals Its Domestic Violence Law](#)

PRESENTED BY

[Go to Your Recommendations »](#)
[What’s This?](#) | [Don’t Show](#)



Malaysia Tries to Rein In Private Education Institutions

ALSO IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION »

[School Partnerships to Change the World](#)

[Duke Business School Announces Partnership in Kazakhstan](#)

The New York Times International Herald Tribune

ADVERTISEMENTS

“Some of us,” she added, “like to make an effort when we dress.”

Some of her contemporaries, slouching around campus that day in floppy shirts, tattered jeans or track pants incongruously paired with pricey accessories, had clearly not gotten that brief. Ms. Soffen tossed an acidic glance in their direction. “They think that if they rock it with a \$3,000 purse, that makes it work,” she said. “But it doesn’t.”

Chelsea Cawood, 22, a senior at the University of Oklahoma, logs on to the Web when she plans to shop, expertly combing sites like ShopNastyGal.com, as well as the Urban Outfitters online store. Her online sprees have whetted an appetite for mismatched patterns and textures, leopard prints, oversize knits, fake fur vests and platform heels. All told, they contribute to an aesthetic mash-up that Ms. Cawood defines as “a little boho and downtown L.A., mixed with a bit of Eurotrash.”

Her influences are by no means confined to the Web. Like many of her peers across the country, she takes her style cues from movies, recent and vintage, favoring '80s hits like “Pretty in Pink” and “Almost Famous.”

Tamara Belopopsky, 21, a senior at the State University of New York at Purchase, finds Fellini films more inspiring. “La Dolce Vita,” which she has seen more than once, prompted her to seek out horn-rimmed glasses like those worn on screen by Marcello Mastroianni. She shops at discount outlets like T. J. Maxx and in a string of local consignment shops, rarely laying out more than \$200 to \$300 on her wardrobe during the school year. Her intention is to pull off a look she defines as “a bit androgynous and completely individual” — in short, one she will not see mirrored on her friends.

Does she compete with those friends to score style points? Not so much, Ms. Belopopsky said. But her friend Jamie Pasquarella, 20, a senior at SUNY, who was clad in a camel-tone cape bought at Macy’s, a Vera Wang shirt and Michael Kors boots, was less certain. “People here get angry if someone is trying to cop their style,” she said.

The reason, she indicated, ought to be obvious. “Around here we are trying to define ourselves by the way we look.”

A version of this article appeared in print on October 13, 2011, on page E1 of the New York edition with the headline: The Campus as Runway.


[Connect with The New York Times on Facebook.](#)

E-MAIL
PRINT
REPRINTS



Spend the night in a Hobbit House - nytimes.com/style

When you get home delivery
 IHT All Digital Access comes free
 International Herald Tribune **Subscribe today**



Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

[Rick Owens ShopOnline](#)

Fall Winter 2011 2012 Available
 Tax and fees included Free shipping
www.antonioeli.eu

SPONSORED HEADLINES

[What's This?](#)

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

Parenting.com
13 Discipline Tricks from Teachers

[Colleges and Universities](#)

ELLE.com
Blake Lively's Half Sheer Skirt: Yay or Nay?

[Fashion and Apparel](#)

Lucky
ChicChild.com: Outerwear

[Shoes and Boots](#)

Beauty and Style
How to Pull Off a Plaid Dress

Ads by Google [what's this?](#)

[Shop DJPremium.com](#)
 Dr.Jays Upscale Sister Site
 Premium Denim, Urban Couture
DJPremium.com

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



MUSIC »



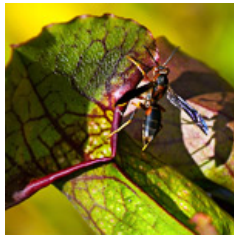
Thinking Globally, Rapping Locally

FASHION & STYLE »



First Stop: Target. Next Stop: eBay.

HOME & GARDEN »



The Lure of Carnivorous Plants

OPINION »

The Conversation: To the Barricades

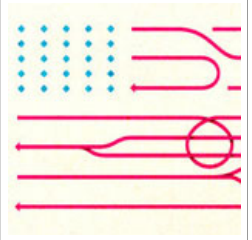
David Brooks and Gail Collins on what they'd give up to balance the budget.

GREAT HOMES »



In Norway, a Home and Headquarters

OPINION »



Room for Debate: A.D.D., an American Affliction?

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)
© 2011 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertise](#)