Sixteen weeks later, they’ve built a runway, trained two dozen models, collected more than 100 garments created by fellow fashion students and notified designers all over Los Angeles County.

It’s all in a semester’s work for the students in Melanie McFarland’s Fashion Show Production class at El Camino College, where the final project will be “Fashion Bound,” the 23rd Annual Fashion Show.

“This is one of the few classes on campus where the students get a lot of say,” says Melanie McFarland, who teaches the El Camino fashion class.

Sixteen weeks to put together a fashion show is “a very short time in the grand scheme of things,” McFarland said. Couture show coordinators typically take up to nine months to plan a show, and they know the date two years in advance.

They also work with a budget that bears six figures, according to Chris Moran-Wisdom, head of El Camino’s fashion program.

But the accomplishment isn’t theirs alone. Every piece of clothing in the show is designed and created by students in the school’s fashion classes.

“Everything in the class is done by them. It builds great community and it really builds their confidence.”

“The students are talented, the teachers are great and someone can come here and start their career in fashion,” he said.

Graduates have gone on to become Disneyland costumers, fashion designers and graphic artists.

McFarland lets the students run the show and manage the stress.

“Some students are really completely overwhelmed, and they realize they can survive and do it on their own.”

They get so much out of making all the decisions. In this class, their opinion matters. They have responsibility, and people are counting on them.”

Paul is contributing to the show a 10-piece collection, which he describes as “traditional, classic pieces with a twist.” He wanted to study business after graduating from Gardena High School. But he took a fashion class at El Camino, “just to see if I liked it,” and got hooked. This is his second time in the fashion show production class, and the second time he’ll see his designs strut down the runway. He graduates in December and hopes to make fashion his career. “I want Joan Rivers’ job,” he said. “I’m also looking into producing fashion shows, I love the process.”

“When you see it on the runway, it’s glam. But there’s so many things that aren’t glam, like all the late nights and cigarettes smoked. It’s stressful. It’s not that glam behind the scenes.”

McFarland lets the students run the show and manage the stress. Not that it doesn’t bleed over a bit. About two weeks before show time, she starts feeling anxious. “It’s like I’m going to vomit every day,” she said. “I’m also looking into producing fashion shows, I love the process.”

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