

## Lexy Silverstein, the student who said no to Shein x FIDM's partnership

Last May, the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles announced its partnership with fast-fashion brand Shein to launch a new scholarship and course program for students. As part of this partnership, 12 students were selected to each receive a \$40,000 scholarship offered by Shein and to create a collection of five to ten pieces to be sold on Shein's platform. An event that could have gone unnoticed, was quickly contested by FIDM students, and its spokesperson Lexy Silverstein, who then launched a petition on Change.org to protest against a partnership definitely lacking in sustainability.

**FashionNetwork.com: What is your background and how would you like to work in fashion?**

**Lexy Silverstein:** I'm a fourth-year digital marketing student at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising. I've loved fashion all my life. My mom says I was born with the fashion gene because the second I could crawl I ended up in her closet. Growing up, I lived for clothing of all kinds, no matter what it was made of or how it was manufactured. I started a fashion blog when I was just 13 years old. But as I learned more about the industry I wanted to be a part of, I saw fashion's glitter and glam had a dark side, a very uncool hurt-the-planet side. I realized my fashion addiction was enabling an industry that generates waste and pollution on an epic scale. I even wrote a blog, 'Confessions of a Former Fast Fashion Shopper', about my journey to sustainability realizing that commitment to change is not easy.

**FNW: How do you explain FIDM's partnership with Shein ?**

LS: I never doubted for a minute that FIDM had nothing but good intentions when they started the partnership with Shein. Securing scholarships for students is so important and no easy feat. Then to give students access to industry resources and give them the opportunity to launch their design career is beyond a young person's wildest dreams. I would be so proud of my school for this program, if it wasn't for the fact that FIDM is partnering with the largest fast-fashion company in the world and, therefore, potentially one of the biggest fashion contributors to negatively impact our planet.

**FNW: Especially since FIDM claims to be one of the leading sustainable fashion schools...**

LS: I was so disappointed in my school when I heard about this partnership. I honestly couldn't believe it. Back when I was deciding on what college to attend, I got so excited about FIDM after I visited the school and learned about fashion of the future. FIDM was ranked among the top ten sustainable fashion schools in the world. They had a whole room dedicated to different sustainable fabrics such as pineapple leather and biodegradable fabrics made with mushrooms. That was so inspiring. I was sold. I knew this was the only school for me. So that's why this partnership feels personal and honestly just never made any sense. How on earth could they work with a company accused of such appalling labor and environmental practices?



**FNW: How did the protest start?**

LS: I contacted my school and then met with VP of Education Barbara Bundy about my concerns. I told her this partnership gives the impression that FIDM and its students condone Shein's practices, which in my opinion is an unsustainable business model for the fashion industry, its garment workers and the health of the planet. Members of Congress are trying to block Shein from going public in the U.S. due to human rights violations. Shein is also being sued for allegedly stealing smaller businesses' designs.

**FNW: What was your school's reaction when you protested against the partnership with Shein?**

LS: Well they did meet with me. It was a short meeting. They said that the scholarship money benefited students. They said that Shein is trying to be more sustainable and that we were going to agree to disagree. I left the meeting quite disappointed. I contacted them again via email, asking if we could form a sustainability council made of students from FIDM who can provide insights and influence over collaborations and partnerships with the university to ensure transparency and sustainability. I've also been reaching out to sustainable fashion brands such as Chnge to see if they'd be willing to partner with FIDM. As a student, that's not my job. But I don't just want to complain about a situation.

**FNW: Then you were invited to a meeting about Shein's sustainability actions...**

LS: They invited me to come and find out what Shein is doing in the area of sustainability. I am attending the meeting and while I genuinely hope that Shein is dedicated to sustainable practices, my personal impression leans towards skepticism, perceiving their efforts as potentially greenwashing. For instance, Shein has declared initiatives aimed at tackling their environmental impact, such as reducing carbon emissions and hazardous chemical usage and improving and monitoring labor conditions in companies across their supply chains. However, specifics and tangible outcomes of Shein's sustainability initiatives remain undisclosed. Their sustainability report lacks measurable goals and results. If the company is truly serious about making a change, they need to work with independent certification companies to ensure both sustainability and transparency.



**FNW: Were you the only one to protest?**

LS: The partnership has made many students upset. It's been talked about in all my classes. It's not just students who are upset about it, many professors have expressed the same sentiment. Many of us feel this partnership is just a poor reflection of our industry, seemingly to care more about money than the people who work in the industry or the impact our industry has on our planet.

**FNW: How many people have signed the petition to date? And how are the protests organized?**

LS: The Change.org petition has more than 4400 signatures. Some of my fellow FIDM students have taped testimonials that I've posted on my [Instagram](#) and others have made their opinions known on the Change.org comment section. Overall I'm getting a lot of support from both faculty and students on speaking out against this partnership. I've yet to hear a negative response.

**FNW: Do you think FIDM will stop the partnership and rethink your demands?**

LS: When I met with FIDM they gave me the impression that this partnership is ending soon due to the end of the quarter coming soon. I don't know if they plan to partner with Shein again. I am trying to get FIDM to start a sustainable advisory committee to give input about potential partnerships. No one would ever be against teaming up with a fashion brand to help students advance their careers in a tough industry. But our school should be training students for the future and Shein's business model is not a sustainable one for our future.

**FNW: What can we wish for you in the future ?**

LS: I'll be graduating from FIDM this spring. Currently, I'm working with several sustainable fashion brands. I also work with [Red Carpet Green Dress](#) ( RCGD Global) as their social media executive. RCGD Global is a women-led global change-making organization bringing environmental and social sustainability to the forefront of conversation and action within the global apparel and design industry. Once I graduate I hope to work full time with RCGD Global. I would love to also help big fashion brands create impactful, transparent, measurable change.