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A photo shoot in Times Square was among the highlights of New York Fashion Week for VCU's Nathalie Santis.  
(Contributed photo)

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## **Class of 2025: Nathalie Santis seeks to build on experiences and connections made at New York Fashion Week**

Santis, a fashion merchandising major, enjoyed exclusive access to a variety of opportunities, including networking with executives, viewing fashion shows and connecting with brands.

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By Audrey Alder

**N**athalie Santis' decision to alter her academic path three years ago at Virginia Commonwealth University recently paid off in a powerful way.

Santis switched majors from marketing to fashion merchandising during her freshman year at VCU. That started her down a new road that resulted in the rare opportunity to join the fast-paced hustle of New York Fashion Week this semester. Santis, who graduates in May, used her social media knowledge, fashion savvy and networking skills to capture media over three days at the prestigious event for the VCU Department of Fashion Design and Merchandising's social platforms.

The long weekend included a photo shoot in Times Square while decked out in VCU gear; a visit to the Aviator storefront in SoHo, where employees shared the brand's background and history; Sergio Hudson's runway show, a fast-paced event with tailored looks of bright reds, blues and purples; and a meet-up with the owners of Klein Designs, a small embroidery business in Dumbo, where Santis embroidered her own tote bag.

"That was really cool because the owner of Klein Designs is a couple years older than me," Santis said. "She just recently graduated last year, and she already has her own business within fashion in New York. It was really inspiring to see everything she has built so far in such a short amount of time."

At a welcome event, Santis, who hopes to relocate to New York after graduation, took advantage of networking and connecting with executives from talent and media agencies such as WME, the IMG and the Wall Group. She seized the opportunity to speak with the social media graphic designer at WME Fashion, who holds Santis' "dream job."

"I was able to talk to a lot of people who are doing what I want to do in the future, and kind of just get my foot in the door," Santis said. "I feel like I made a personal connection with almost all [the executives]. That was the highlight

because I set a follow up just to keep in touch with them because you never know what it might lead to."

The trip culminated with a NYFW exclusive designer pop-up with Bruce Glen, the fashion line founded by "fashion preachers" Bruce and Glen Proctor. The "joy"-themed event included a makeover for two women and a short film documenting why they were chosen.

Santis represented VCU in New York through U of NYFW and its partnership with the Collegiate Licensing Company and IMG, the operator of New York Fashion Week. To apply, Santis created a visually compelling storytelling campaign that detailed her potential content calendar for the trip for the VCU fashion department's social media channels. She was selected by faculty to represent VCU based on that campaign. Her expenses were covered by VCU's Trademark Licensing Program.

Looking back now, Santis is grateful that she gravitated toward the fashion merchandising major, which has proved to be an ideal fit for her interests and aspirations.

"That's how I was able to go to New York Fashion Week. It also made me develop closer relationships with the faculty, which I'm really grateful for," Santis said. "I feel like I can count on any of them for anything."

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