While not uncommon to hear fashion mavens around campus bemoan our lack of sartorial resources, Middlebury actually boasts a host of opportunities for those in search of them. Our campus seems to mirror our generation’s renewed interest in the handmade with a well established and growing community of makers. For our sewists, knitters, or textile creators of any form, the outlets on campus abound, and each one is suited to fit a diverse range of needs and wants.

The Middlebury Sewing Club is quite the catch-all for campus sewists, providing an intimate and community-centric avenue for both honing your already developed skills or diving into textiles for the first time. With a cozy and tight-knit attendance ranging from 5-15 students at their Monday and Tuesday evening meetings, (from 7-9pm in the basement of Wright Theater), the club is all about “meeting new people, making new friends, and enabling people who are new to it to get access,” says Sewing Club President, Leah Smith. Leah discusses one of their major goals: dismantling the major barriers to entry when it comes to sewing and making, as it’s “not an obscure hobby [...] but not everyone has a sewing machine. These are really big investments.” In addition to financial barriers, sewing can be an intimidating hobby to delve into for first time sewists. Indeed, many students around campus mention the ‘gate-keeping’ that can happen around fashion, yet feel that the experience and ability to learn about and explore textile creation should be readily open to all. The Sewing Club seeks to resolve these barriers to entry with the “tools, space, and culture” for any and all interested Middlebury students. Leah herself is always at the meetings and eager and willing to teach beginners, and comes prepared with patterns and lessons for entry-level sewing projects such as face masks. And if sewing in particular is not your arena, Leah is quick to mention, “some people crochet or knit, as there is a lot of overlap in the fiber arts.” While they provide the space and major tools, you are expected to bring your own materials such as fabric; Leah recommends checking out *Sew n Vac* (also known as the *Quilter’s Corner*), as well as reaching out to Sewing Club team members, as some make frequent trips to *Joanne’s* in Rutland and Burlington. Though the club is optimized for those working on individual projects, they are deeply devoted to helping one another out, to “building community around this common interest.” Leah’s eagerness and excitement to welcome members is palpable, and one you can only imagine permeates through the air of their meetings and expands across the club. Check out go/sew or email lesmith@middlebury.edu to learn more.

Of the many forces driving the surge of interest in fiber arts across campus, a commitment to sustainability factors is many new makers’ core motivation. Enter The Studio, another Middlebury space for fashion creators. Newly minted this year and founded with an Innovation Hub Fellowship, Molly Grazioso created The Studio “to provide students with a creative outlet to explore upcycling techniques with peers and expand the conversation.” She emphasizes the importance of The Studio’s local, grassroots focus: “[its] goal is not to be an all encompassing solution to the fast fashion industry. The project is so small scale, it is really more an introduction for people to upcycling and what they want to explore.” Though that small-scale intentionality comes with the occasional wrinkle, (Molly cautions that The Studio is currently best for those who want to work on smaller scale projects, perhaps like embroidery or painting on jeans, as there is only one sewing machine still in need of a surger), the space is coming into its own even faster than expected. The Studio is already up and running, and currently hosts a plethora of materials and tools open to use by all Middlebury community members, which you can reserve for use via their Instagram (@studioatmidd). One of the ways the project differentiates itself from the Sewing Club is in its mission to be a space for discussions surrounding sustainable fashion. Also community-oriented, The Studio aims to expand opportunities and exposure and provides an outlet for those with an eye towards the environment in their making endeavors, as students can gather in The Studio’s upstairs Annex room to talk about salient issues in fashion and learn from one another through constructive dialogue and exchange. Molly speaks far too humbly about the whole endeavor, expressing her genuine passion for simply opening doors and expanding the conversation, not positing The Studio as utopia for upcycling but rather a crucial start; the space is no doubt a place for honest education, as Molly eagerly shares just where she recommends going on campus to learn techniques and continue to expand your knowledge, citing the Makery in town (check out @studioatmidd’s instagram post for more details) and the Costume Shop as particularly useful resources, as well as the Makerspace, discussed below.

Home to 3D printers, a high-end laser cutter, two sewing machines, a vinyl cutter, an X-Carve CNC router, and a small CNC mill, the space is a technical haven for fiber arts. And if that list sounds intimidating, as it does for me, the Makerspace also markets itself as a place for community and education. “We have hired two students,” Abby Truex and Misha Poklad, “to open the space during [their] times to make sure that everyone feels welcome who comes by, and to teach anyone interested in learning more about the gear in the space,” says Daniel Houghton, Middlebury Animation Studio Producer. The Makerspace welcomes students with or without expertise, as it was founded upon ideas shared by the other making spaces on campus - ideas of sharing and expanding the power of making things with your own hands and cultivating community around the experience. Houghton details how he “found [himself] thinking about three important targets: art making, connecting out beyond Middlebury's campus to other people and institutions, and sharing the creative process of it all.” Just one of the many ways they go about sharing this is through their Y[ouTube series](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL872bDKDmfuCBduIOQfdbpTW_zSAYcqGw). “Best able to serve people wanting to try out some of this equipment for the first time, and people wanting to prototype a small design project or art project, something that could be produced in the 4 hours that the space is open,” getting involved in the Makerspace is un-intimidating, “as easy as coming by during the open hours on Monday nights from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. and Saturday afternoons from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.”

With the abundance of textile gurus on campus, and particularly their eagerness to teach and share, diving into any one of these spaces would prove engaging far beyond what a Youtube video or well-worded how-to book could provide. And the list doesn’t stop here. Exploring the knowledge these spaces and their leaders host can point you in even more directions. For those interested in fashion more generally, [Clover Magazine](https://middclover.com/) provides an outlet for fashion writing, photography, and the like. There are even ways to earn academic credit, for which Houghton suggests his course in 3D Computer Animation, while additionally “the courses in Studio Art and Architecture and Theater would dovetail nicely with the opportunities afforded by the Makerspace.” Keep your eyes peeled for [courses](https://middclover.com/blog/on-middleburys-winter-term-corsetry-course) taught by Mira Veikley, Carol Wood, and Robin Foster-Cole, as well, who are our Costume Department’s major fonts of knowledge. After all, the goal that unites all these clubs and resources is that of education; each one specifically cites expanding learning opportunities as their major institutional objective. From goals like teaching “an intro course [...] to start the work of community building that will really help the space to thrive” (Houghton) in the Makerspace, to hosting “guest lecturers, expanding the space to expand opportunities” (Grazioso) at The Studio, to giving “workshops and hoping for it to only grow” (Smith) with the Sewing Club, continued education and engagement is clearly at the forefront. And as Leah says, “For those starting out, don’t be scared to just try.”