

The Harvard College Project on Purpose And Values in Education (PAVE) has partnered with Assumption College to promote opportunities like the SOPHIA Initiative, a co-curricular program at Assumption that asks its students to consider “big questions” of meaning, value, and purpose.

Harvard’s Project on Purpose and Values in Education (PAVE) chose to link with Assumption’s SOPHIA (SOPHomore Initiative at Assumption) program because of SOPHIA’s focus on liberal education for traditional-age college students; commitment to the education of the whole person; and its nurturing of a thoughtful and reflective stance toward the problems and challenges faced by individuals and society.

Through its website, the PAVE Project highlights 24 colleges and universities committed to providing students with opportunities for vocational reflection and the pursuit of purpose in one’s life. Its focus is on identifying and promoting promising programs that encourage reflection of

meaning, purpose, and values and that have demonstrated influence on students' moral growth.

Assumption is the only central Massachusetts-based institution featured by PAVE.

"Through SOPHIA, Assumption College is offering a truly innovative program," said Katie Steele, manager of the PAVE Project at Harvard College. "SOPHIA aims to help students 'connect the dots' between their personal dreams and goals, academic interests, extracurricular activities, and the needs of the broader world. It's these kinds of comprehensive experiences that we believe contribute to a transformative educational experience for students and we hope other institutions will take note of the example set by Assumption."

SOPHIA—an initiative supported by a NetVUE Program Development Grant administered by the Council of Independent Colleges and funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc.—integrates residential, academic, grant, and travel opportunities with the guidance of dedicated faculty mentors. Its purpose is to foster a culture of vocational exploration at Assumption and to help students in their sophomore year of college discern and choose lives of meaning.

"PAVE's objectives perfectly fit with the mission of the College and SOPHIA," said SOPHIA Director Esteban Loustaunau, associate professor of Spanish at Assumption College. "SOPHIA serves as a catalyst for students to find their calling to a particular field where they may use their skills and knowledge for the greater good. By being a part of PAVE, Assumption joins a growing, national movement that instills in undergraduate students the challenging and rewarding practice of learning to ask foundational questions concerning identity, purpose, and meaning. SOPHIA supports this through the pursuit of vocation as a calling to live out one's gifts and passions in ways that serve the common good."

The SOPHIA initiative lasts an academic year and includes a three-day, off campus retreat at the start of fall semester. Participants are required to take a common course designed for SOPHIA. All 24 students live in the Living and Learning Center, a residence hall on campus built to facilitate theme-based discussions and gathering for students and faculty. Throughout the academic year, at least once a month, students meet in small groups with a designated faculty mentor to reflect on their vocational journeys.

During spring semester, students can choose to enroll in an additional SOPHIA course in their

major or minor, and participate in co-curricular activities designed for them. In May, students participate in a 10-day capstone trip to Rome, Italy, where they stay at Assumption's Rome campus. While in Rome, students take part in a study tour of the city led by Assumption President Francesco C. Cesareo, Ph.D., a renowned historian.

In the summer, after the program is over, students may apply for a high impact grant to continue developing their vocational calling in one of three areas: Faith and Ministry, Community Engagement, and Life of the Mind.