

Assumption College's SOPHIA (SOPHomore Initiative at Assumption College) Program has been recognized with a Best Practices in Mission Integration Award by the Association of Student Affairs in Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASACCU). The SOPHIA Program was the top ranked program in its category.

The award recognizes those institutions whose programs have a positive impact on student learning; successfully address student and/or campus needs; are original and creative; possess a foundation in Catholic identity; and make practical use of research or assessment. Since it was established in 2013, 98 percent of SOPHIA Collegians have demonstrated significant growth and insight into their personal vocation journey.

"An Assumptionist education is characterized by the rich and productive community between teacher and student, built upon the conviction that truth exists; that this pursuit orients love; the

tradition coupled with a fundamental openness guides; and faith sustains," shared Esteban Loustaunau, Ph.D., associate professor of Spanish and director of the SOPHIA Program. "SOPHIA invites sophomores to recognize that vocation lasts a lifetime, but it begins in the undergraduate years with the need to respond to the world in which they find themselves."

"This understanding and promotion of vocation runs parallel with the mission of Assumption College which is 'rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition, and strives to form graduates known for critical intelligence, thoughtful citizenship and compassionate service'," said Catherine WoodBrooks, vice president for student affairs. "Such an education fosters students' appreciation of the complexity of reality and the Divine Reality sustaining it. SOPHIA is designed to help students discern a personal response, guided by their interaction with their mentor and residential life staff."

Now in its fifth year, the SOPHIA Program fosters the culture of vocational exploration at Assumption to enhance the educational mission of the Augustinians of the Assumption, the sponsoring order of the College. The program encourages students, in particular sophomores, to reflect upon their lives in terms of vocation—to ask themselves about their desired spiritual, personal, and professional goals and to understand that a harmony of such, or vocation, requires constant discernment and evaluation. The program helps students realize that the opportune time to seek and establish one's vocation is during their undergraduate studies once they have acclimated to college life. Each year, 24 students are selected as SOPHIA Collegians following a competitive application process.

The 24 students have the option to reside in a learning community in the College's Living Learning Center and divided into four groups, each with its own faculty mentor. The students and faculty member meet to experience, discuss, learn about, pursue, and share their vocational goals with one another. The program also includes a fall and spring retreat as well as a 10-day pilgrimage to Rome, Italy, where SOPHIA students study at the College's Rome Campus under the tutelage of the College president.

In Rome, students are encouraged to view themselves as part of a long history of pilgrims who for centuries have traveled to Rome to discover characteristics about themselves that nurture their vocational discernment. This experience helps Assumption students appreciate how their own vocational journey intersects with the mission and identity of the College, the mission of the Church, and the needs of society as a whole.

Assumption will be recognized at the annual ASACCU conference in July at the University of San Diego.