



Assumption College has been awarded a NetVUE Chaplaincy Implementation Grant to help students deepen their commitment to vocational discernment through the expansion of an existing reflective retreat as well as the inauguration of a Ministry Internship Program. Both are components of a broader co-curricular program at Assumption that asks sophomores to consider “big questions” of meaning, value, and purpose.

These two programs will be funded by the \$13,395 grant and administered through Assumption's Office of Campus Ministry. The grant will address the need to provide students with periods of reflection to focus on vocational discernment. To that end, an on-campus, one-day retreat called “Crossroads”—which has been held four times over the past five years—would be expanded to a 24-hour, overnight, off-campus format. The retreat has provided groups of 20 sophomores per year with an opportunity to reflect on three foundational vocation questions: what brings you joy, what are you good at, and what does the world need you to be. It has been facilitated by a campus minister, a Residential Life staff member, a career counselor, and a young alum.

“Students find it hard to give adequate time and attention to vocational questions in the midst of their always-connected lives,” said Paul Covino, Assumption's director of campus ministry. “Their schedules and modest budgets usually preclude going away for an extended period of time to engage in this kind of meaningful reflection. While this retreat has received positive feedback from participants, it has also revealed limitations in its condensed format. The increasing popularity of the College's overnight retreats provides a great opportunity to expand the Crossroads retreat.”

Additionally, the grant would also support establishing a paid ministry internship program, which will start in summer 2016. Interns, who would be chosen through an application process, would be placed at parishes or other church organizations where they would work full-time for nine weeks under the direction of an experienced minister on staff. A 10th week would be spent participating in the Catholics On Call Young Adults Conference at Catholic Theological Union. There, the students would meet other young adults discerning vocations in ministry, hear talks by noted theologians related to vocational discernment, visit ministry sites, pray, and reflect on their nine-week immersion in ministry. Students would write biweekly reflection papers and meet weekly with their site supervisor to reflect on what they experience in the internship and what it is revealing about their vocational discernment.

“As a faith-based college, Assumption has a particular interest in supporting students who feel that they may be called to ordained ministry, consecrated religious life, and lay ecclesial ministry,” said Covino. “While many other students are able to pursue full-time, paid internships in their desired field during the summer, students interested in ministry have few—if any—opportunities to do the same. The vast majority of parishes and other church-related organizations are simply not in a position to offer paid internships. To meet that need, Assumption is establishing this paid ministry internship program.”

SOPHIA INITIATIVE

In addition to the Crossroads retreat and Ministry Internship Program, Assumption offers another program aimed at enhancing opportunities for vocational discernment: SOPHIA (SOPHomore Initiative at Assumption) program. 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.

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 who, as a Fulbright Scholar, spent a year studying in the city.

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.

In spring 2015, the Harvard College Project on Purpose and Values in Education (PAVE) partnered with Assumption to promote opportunities like SOPHIA. Assumption is the only central Massachusetts-based institution featured by PAVE. 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.