





ALBERTUS MAGNUS COLLEGE HELPING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND DATING VIOLENCE

by Andrea Kovacs

This September, Albertus Magnus College announced that the United States Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) has awarded a three-year grant totaling \$300,000 to the College. This grant will allow Albertus Magnus to proactively strengthen services and raise awareness on campus and throughout the surrounding community so victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and/or stalking will be more likely to come forward and seek help.



Photo courtesy Albertus Magnus

The SASS Project: Safe and Sound Students

"This grant provides the financial resources, training and opportunity to create an even safer campus environment for our students," said Andrew Foster, Vice President for Student Services at Albertus Magnus. "In addition, the funds will help develop the Safe and Sound Students (SASS) Project, which formalizes the commitment of the College and our community partners with strengthening our response to sexual violence, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking both on campus and within the community."

The SASS Project will be implemented at Albertus to support collaborative work with partnering agencies in New Haven to better respond rapidly and effectively should an incident occur. Additionally, it will help build capacity to prevent and respond to incidents via campus systems and in collaboration with community partners.

The SASS project will also impact Albertus Magnus students and their families, administrators, staff, faculty, and the New Haven

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community. During implementation of the program, education and training for students (some mandatory), administrators, staff, faculty and the community will be provided.

“We look forward to supporting our students and to the opportunity to work closely with our local partnering agencies,” said Director of Residential Life & Community Standards Samantha Quinn, deputy Title IX coordinator.

During implementation of the program, education and training will be provided for students, administrators, staff, faculty and the community.

Identifying the Scope of the Problem

In 2017, the New Haven Police Department (NHPD) reported 12 sexual assault crimes and 268 domestic violence crimes. Albertus has experienced a low incidence of sexual assault (SA), domestic violence (DV), dating violence (DaV), or stalking (SG) on campus. Albertus strives to foster an environment of acceptance and support in which students feel comfortable following up on an initial report with further action.



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The SASS project will raise awareness on campus and in the surrounding community so that SA/DV/DaV/SG victims will be more likely to come forward and seek help. SASS also will prepare Albertus to work in collaboration with agencies and resources in New Haven to better respond rapidly and effectively should an incident occur.

SASS will help prevent these incidents by shining a spotlight on this problem and taking steps to mitigate the factors that lead to SA/DV/DaV/SG.

The Goals of SASS

SASS has three primary goals: 1) to establish a culture of conversation about SA/DV/DaV/SG embedded in campus life; 2) to educate and raise awareness as part of a Coordinated Community Response (CCR); 3) to build capacity to prevent and respond to incidents of SA/DV/DaV/SG both internally (via college systems) and externally (in collaboration with community partners).

Thus, SASS is twofold, focusing on education and building infrastructure. There is limited public awareness on campus about sexual



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violence. As a campus community, Albertus has not engaged in the conversation necessary to raise awareness about this issue. SASS will provide education to increase the knowledge of all students about sexual violence, and to remove the stigma attached to reporting.

The director of Community Standards will take the lead in organizing comprehensive victim services for SA/DV/DaV/SG victims on campus. We will follow the protocol in the Sexual Misconduct Policy. Certain Albertus employees are designated as private advisors and may talk to a victim in confidence. Disclosures to these private advisors do not trigger an investigation.

Should a student file a report, they have the option of consenting to an investigation or signing a release waiving an investigation. Students may choose to initiate an investigation at any time, even if they previously signed a release. If the student decides to initiate the investigation process, the private advisor is authorized to proceed on the student's behalf to protect the identity of the victim. Procedures remain in place to keep all information on the victim and the incident confidential.

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Victim services include immediate assessment and consultation with the MH counselor, referral to a therapeutic services provider (at our partner victim services agencies), assistance and support opening an investigation (if desired), provision of a private advisor and an advocate selected by the victim, the development of a safety plan, and accommodations to support safety if necessary.

If they are not already involved and the student gives permission, the NHPD will be alerted to the incident so the student can begin the external investigation process. Yale-New Haven Hospital will provide any medical care needed by the victim. The Albertus MH counselor will provide therapeutic services as well as referrals to other resources and services to benefit the victim, such as those offered by WFC or Umbrella Center.

The private advisor will assist with completing a report either to Albertus so that disciplinary action may be taken or to the NHPD so that criminal charges may be pursued, or both. With SASS, we will train more staff/faculty to serve as



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private advisors, and we will also train staff to serve as victim advocates. Thus, in the future, once we have trained advocates, a victim may select such an advocate to provide support during the reporting process and as they navigate the system to access services. With SASS we will develop a web page with links to resources and information for SA/DV/DaV/SG victims.

Victims and individuals who think that they may have witnessed an incident of sexual violence are encouraged to report the incident immediately. To encourage reporting, students who may have violated Albertus's Alcohol or Drug Policy at the time of the reported incident will not be charged with conduct code violations. Retaliation against any person in the campus community for reporting an incident or suspected incident is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. Student rights and adjudication procedures are outlined in the Sexual Misconduct Policy.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Andrea Kovacs is charged with developing and implementing a comprehensive communication and marketing strategy that enhances the College's public image; strengthens the Albertus brand; and supports strategic initiatives. Prior to Albertus, Andrea directed the Annual Fund at Fairfield University; she was Sr. Vice President for Marketing and Community Relations for United Way of Eastern Fairfield County, also responsible for individual gift fundraising.

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