



Alma Young, VSU CAMP Director

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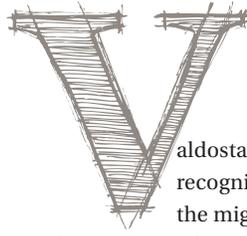


GROWING

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EXPANDING OUR REACH INTO THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER COMMUNITY

For migrant families whose farms sustain their livelihood, the idea of earning a college degree seems out of reach. They can't begin to consider obstacles like paying for college when their help is needed to provide for their families. Thanks to a \$2.1 million College Assistance Migrant Program grant awarded to VSU by the United States Department of Education Office of Migrant Education, students from migrant communities can now make their college dreams a reality.



Valdosta State has long recognized the contribution the migrant community makes in the quality of life in South Georgia and North Florida. The university has taken an active part in the wellness of this community by delivering health care and counseling services through Migrant Farmworker Clinic, LLC in Lake Park, Georgia. Students collect food and clothing for migrant families and host campus events that bring awareness to various social issues within the community. Nursing, social work, and sociology students volunteer to meet a variety of needs ranging from basic case management for affordable medicine to referrals for further medical appointments and educational materials to counseling for more advanced mental health needs such as substance abuse, depression, and anxiety.

Now, Valdosta State is able to expand its reach to the migrant community by offering workers and their families the opportunity to receive a college education. In September, VSU earned a \$2.1 million competitive grant from the United States Department of Education Office of Migrant Education. The grant awards the university \$424,833 per year for five years to establish and maintain a College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) on campus. These funds will be used to identify, recruit, and retain students who are migratory or seasonal farmworkers—or their children—and build a bridge to higher education.

Students accepted into CAMP will receive scholarships covering the cost of room and board, tuition and required fees, academic supplies, and necessary transportation, as well as a small monthly stipend. Additionally, they will have access to a host of support services including tutoring, mentoring and counseling. The program will serve a total of 25 students each year and give them the tools necessary to be a productive and successful member of the university throughout their VSU career.

“As reflected in its mission statement, VSU is committed to meeting the educational needs of the region’s diverse population in order to sustain economic growth and advance the standard of living for everyone,”

said Dr. Anthony Scheffler, interim associate vice president of academic affairs and professor in the James L. and Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education and Human Services, and principal investigator on the grant. “The university has demonstrated this commitment by actively exploring innovative pedagogies and working to enhance its recruitment and student support processes in order to accommodate all students, regardless of their circumstance.”

This was the university’s second attempt at applying for CAMP funding. “We did our homework, we listened to their critiques, and we reapplied. We had to,” said Kerry Morris, who oversees research and grant strategies for VSU’s Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration. “Student support is critical, and this grant has given us the motivation we need to pursue an even larger piece of the federal funding pie.”

Once funding was secured, it was time to find a strong individual to successfully lead this new initiative. The team in search of this leader found strength and more in Alma Young.



Young moved to the United States at the age of 11 and settled in a migrant community in the Texas Valley. Both her mother and stepfather were migrant workers, so her family was constantly moving for work. Eventually, they moved to Vidalia, Georgia, where her parents remain today. Young admits her family’s migrant lifestyle posed difficulties at times, but she couldn’t have predicted that other obstacles would lie ahead.

When Young was 16 years old, she was involved in a car accident in which she suffered a traumatic brain injury. It took a few months, but she was able to recover and return to school. Soon, she began struggling in class and having difficulty in tasks as simple as writing her name. Discouraged, she made the decision to drop out of high school. During her time away from school, her younger brother was able to continue his education and attend Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC), where he became a member of their CAMP grant program. Young’s brother understood the

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CAMP Director Alma Young works to develop relationships with students and families in the migrant communities of South Georgia.

opportunities this type of program could offer his sister, and he encouraged her to complete her General Education Development degree (GED) and follow him to ABAC for CAMP. Young completed her GED and began attending ABAC as a member of CAMP. Because of the grant, Young was able to live on campus and enjoy college activities as any traditional student would. Once her first two years of the program were complete, CAMP mentors began encouraging her to complete her undergraduate degree. Although she was nervous, she made the decision to transfer to a regional university and complete her undergraduate degree. She then returned to ABAC, where she began her first job working with scholarship programs for Hispanic students. After serving ABAC for eight years, she has now made her way to Valdosta State to serve as the Director of CAMP.

Since securing the grant in August, two students have already been enrolled in the program and are receiving benefits. Young plans to have 25 students enrolled

in the program by May, so they can begin taking classes in the fall. To get started with recruitment, she has sought out current VSU students who are eligible to receive benefits from CAMP and educated them on opportunities associated with the grant. By doing this, she hopes to provide support to local students and give them the best college experience possible.

Recently, Young hired a recruiter to target local migrant communities in Brooks, Echols, Colquitt, Coffee, and other regional counties. Within these communities, Young and the recruiter plan to target students who would live on campus as well as those who would commute. Young looks forward to offering commuter students the same opportunities available to traditional students.

Young wants to provide students with a learning community where they experience social growth from attending seminar classes with fellow CAMP members. She also plans to incorporate activities such as trips to museums, aquariums, and businesses to

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foster intellectual growth inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, Young plans to emphasize communication with parents to alleviate misunderstandings regarding the requirements and responsibilities associated with CAMP. Instilling transparency into these relationships will build trust and result in personal growth for the students.

“Building a bridge between the parents and the university will not only prove to be a benefit for the student, but it also gives parents peace of mind and someone they can call if they have any questions,” said Young.

Through CAMP, Young and her team look forward to establishing stability, a sense of community, and cultural appreciation for their students. The overall goal is maximizing each student’s success throughout college and preparing them to find employment after graduation. With recruitment, strategic communication, and a lot of heart, Young plans to spread the news of this great opportunity and provide students with educational support for years to come.



Jose Delgado, a freshman studying computer science at Valdosta State, recently received a scholarship through the College Assistance Migrant Program.

Jose Delgado was raised in a small agricultural town called Statenville in Echols County. There, he spent much of his youth living a migrant lifestyle with his family, which meant missing out on after-school and weekend activities with friends.

Jose dreamed of one day getting his education, but knew it would be difficult. However, his cousin, who was a member of CAMP’s program at another college, informed him that Valdosta State had recently received a CAMP grant and encouraged him to research the program. It was then he realized that achieving his dream might not be as impossible as it had once seemed.

Before receiving benefits, Delgado’s family was unsure if they would be able to afford a housing and meal plan, so they decided he would live at home. Since beginning classes in August, he has been making a 35-minute commute to and from class every day. However, since being selected for the scholarship, he has been given a waiver for housing and a stipend for meals. This spring, he became a traditional student and lives on campus.

For Delgado, CAMP not only provides an opportunity to attend college, but it also provides him and those with similar backgrounds with a community to rely on and have with them on every step of their journey.

Delgado plans to graduate and begin a career as a security analyst. He has no doubt that he will succeed, because he has the best motivation behind him: his family. Delgado is grateful to have a chance to build a better life and give back to those he loves. He plans on utilizing this gift to encourage others from migrant backgrounds to seek educational opportunities and never give up hope.