


Living-wage college gear arrives at Tulane

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The Tulane bookstore recently began to carry Alta Gracia, a new living-wage brand of college-logo apparel.

The apparel is made at a factory located in the poverty-stricken town of Altagracia in the Dominican Republic. The new brand is named after both the town and the Virgin of Altagracia, honored as the protector of the largely-Catholic Dominican Republic.

Alta Gracia aims to provide a living wage for its workers, one that would cover the local living costs for a four-person family. The Workers Rights Consortium, an independent labor rights monitoring organization, calculated this cost, verifies pay and monitors factory conditions. The WRC has more than 180 college and university affiliates, including Tulane.

"It's awesome that we as students have the opportunity to support corporations that pay their workers fair and sustainable wages," said senior Mary Alice Sandberg, regional organizer for United Students Against Sweatshops.

Under the factory's previous ownership, workers received the minimum wage of \$147 per month. Under Alta Gracia, workers now receive a wage of approximately \$500, nearly three-and-a-half times the minimum wage. Workers unionized this summer shortly after the factory resumed operations.

"I am proud and happy to sew Alta Gracia clothes," Alta Gracia apparel worker Elba Nuris said. According to a press release by Alta Gracia. "Alta Gracia clothes are made in a totally different kind of factory where we earn a living wage and have the right to form a union. We have a voice at our workplace."

Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium, said that Alta Gracia is a product of longstanding efforts in university communities to achieve real progress for the workers who make university logo apparel.

"Alta Gracia demonstrates that apparel need not be made in sweatshops," Nova said. "It can be made in factories that pay their workers a living wage and respect their rights. If Alta Gracia is successful it can open the door to a transformation in the industry."

Knights Apparel, Alta Gracia's parent company, is the largest supplier of college-logo apparel in the United States.

"Knights Apparel has the vision to understand that students want to know that the clothing they wear is made by workers that are treated fairly," Nova said.

Nova said that it is important to understand that Alta Gracia is a bold experiment — the first of its kind in the developing world — and that ultimately, the consumers have the power to determine whether this project succeeds or fails.

Tulane now sells Alta Gracia apparel including T-shirts, hoodies and sweatshirts.

“Alta Gracia products have been selling quite well and response has been positive, but it is too early to tell if this will be a good line or a great line,” Tulane bookstore manager Larry Jones said.