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UL-Lafayette bookstore commits to stocking fair-trade apparel made by workers receiving living wages

BY KAILEY BROUSSARD | Special to The Advocate

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Trish Gowl folds University of Louisiana at Lafayette themed apparel on Tuesday, October 18, 2016, at the Ragin' Cajun Store within the Student Union.

Advocate staff photo by BRAD BOWIE --

After a student-driven campaign for socially conscious clothing, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette bookstore has committed to carrying fair-trade apparel.

The university's chapter of Catholic Relief Services Student Ambassadors, an organization that addresses human rights issues, had been advocating for the change.

Amélie Desormeaux, CRS president and a senior international relations major, said her organization had made consumer consciousness a key goal this semester.

"Essentially, what we are saying is that every purchasing act is a moral act," she said. "It's not just this moral transaction — it's a human transaction. I am buying the goods that human hands have gone into making."

The bookstore has committed to working with Alta Gracia Apparel, a Dominican Republic-based clothing company with a mission to pay living wages to its workers. It is owned by Knights Apparel, a college-logo apparel company based in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Charlie Bier, communications specialist for UL-Lafayette, said in an email statement that Alta Gracia has entered the licensing process with the school, which would enable the company to produce official UL-Lafayette apparel.

“The university-owned Ragin’ Cajuns Store has committed to place a merchandise order once Alta Gracia is licensed,” he said.

Wil Perkins, the university’s Student Government Association president, said although the initial order will not replace a significant amount of apparel already carried, the bookstore may order more if the products are well-received by students.

Desormeaux said because of brand loyalty — and Adidas' support for the Ragin' Cajuns football team as its official apparel sponsor — she does not see Alta Gracia overtaking any others provided currently.

“We really just want that third to be cutting into their order — not get rid of them completely,” she said. “People are very dedicated to those brands, so we’re not going to even try to ask about that.”

Desormeaux said Catholic Relief Services Student Ambassadors has garnered support from other student organizations such as Spanish Club, The Muslim Student Association and SGA.

“When we sat down and deliberated, we saw that there was no negative side to what they’re asking,” Perkins said. “They weren’t looking to take away brands from the bookstore or anything like that; they were asking to add a brand, offering more to students,” all for a good cause.

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