



Augusta University College of Allied Health Sciences graduate receives Beard Award

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AUGUSTA, Ga. (May 12, 2023) – Augusta University President [Brooks A. Keel, PhD](#), presented the prestigious [John F. Beard Award for Compassionate Care](#) to Amanda A. Valentini during the university's [Spring Graduate Hooding and Commencement Ceremony](#) on May 11. Keel also conferred Valentini with her Master of Health Science in Occupational Therapy diploma from the [College of Allied Health Sciences](#) during the ceremony.

"This year's Beard Award recipient's dedication to service and compassion is truly inspiring," said Keel. "While pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy, Amanda volunteered over 747 hours in the Augusta community. Because of her kindness and compassion to 'go above and beyond' in service to the community, hundreds of students and families received necessities and gifts that most have never experienced in their lifetime."

During her time at the university, Valentini created and implemented a literacy-based occupational therapy class for 169 students at Jenkins-White Elementary School, a Title I school in South Augusta, where 100% of the children live at or below the national poverty level. The program served every student in kindergarten through second grade, including special education classes. As part of the class curriculum, Valentini initiated a weekly research journal club to understand how learning and development are impacted in a low socio-economic status community.

While serving the elementary school, Valentini learned that some students lacked basic necessities like a pillow or even a blanket for sleeping. Her empathy and dedication to helping those in need led her to launch a fundraiser among her friends and family, including those on Augusta University's campus and individuals at the College of Allied Health Sciences and [College of Education and Human Development](#). She raised enough money to sponsor five students. Wanting to do more, Valentini entered a Christmas contest to generate funds for the whole school. Her efforts were successful, and the online community quickly raised more than \$80,000 to provide gifts for the students.

“In addition to learning literacy skills and receiving tangible gifts and necessities, these families also experienced joy and hope that so many of us take for granted,” said [Laurie Vera](#), an assistant professor and academic fieldwork coordinator in AU’s department of Occupational Therapy. “Not only did Amanda work to meet the educational needs of these students, but she also worked to meet needs related to health, safety, development, and social skills for these children and their entire families.”

Valentini also spent time with Steps of Grace as a volunteer ballet instructor to special needs children aged 4-21.

“While juggling the demands of a full-time academic load, she served as a volunteer for Steps of Grace, providing one-on-one assistance to children with special needs,” said [Mallory Rosche](#), a professor in AU’s department of Occupational Therapy, who is also the program director and founder of Steps of Grace. “She excelled in this role, was patient, kind and positive with the dancers and provided essential support that allowed them to participate successfully.”

The \$40,000 Beard Award is given annually by William Porter “Billy” Payne and his wife, Martha, to a graduating College of Allied Health Sciences, Medical College of Georgia, College of Nursing, or Graduate School student at Augusta University who exemplifies caring and compassion in health care. Payne, the immediate past chairman of the Augusta National Golf Club, established the award in 1998 in memory of his father-in-law, who died of cancer in 1997. The award honors Augusta University President Emeritus Francis J. Tedesco, MD, and Beard’s physician, Mark F. Williams, MD, a 1988 Medical College of Georgia graduate who treated Beard during his hospitalization at Augusta University Medical Center.

DOWNLOAD: [A photo of Amanda A. Valentini](#) with Augusta University President Brooks A. Keel, PhD (credit Michael Holahan/Augusta University).

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