

# **Samantha Villa: Recipient of the Diane Sierpina Award for Emerging Leadership in Youth Justice**

We are honored to announce that Samantha Villa, a remarkable senior from Lee College, has been awarded the prestigious 2025 Diane Sierpina Award for Emerging Leadership in Youth Justice. This esteemed award recognizes Samantha's exceptional dedication, profound insights, and unwavering commitment to driving positive change within the youth justice system.

## **Meet Samantha: A Passionate Advocate and Future Leader**



Samantha Villa is currently pursuing her degree in Criminal Justice at Lee College, with a concentration in Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. More than just a student, she's a leader driven by a philosophy of collective impact, a principle that resonates deeply with the spirit of the Diane Sierpina Award.

"Receiving the Diane Sierpina Award is incredibly meaningful," Samantha shares. 'It's not just a personal achievement; it's a recognition of the collective effort to create meaningful opportunities for young people.' This sentiment reveals a young leader who understands the power of community and the importance of lifting others as she rises."

## **A Commitment to Justice:**

What ignited Samantha's passion? It's a blend of personal experience and intellectual curiosity. "From a young age, I was drawn to the stories of those who felt unseen and unheard," she explains. This innate sense of justice, coupled with her academic pursuits, has shaped her into a powerful advocate.

"I'm passionate about representing and defending young people," Samantha states. "I believe in the transformative power of legal advocacy." Her words reflect a deep understanding of the law's potential to create lasting change, not just for individuals, but for entire communities.

## Leadership in Action: Real-World Impact and Growth

Samantha's leadership extends beyond theory. As Vice President of Phi Sigma Sigma and a leading plaintiff attorney for her university's mock trial team, she's honing skills that are essential for any advocate: empathy, strategic thinking, and effective communication.

"These roles have taught me the importance of collaboration and understanding diverse perspectives," she notes. Her internship at the Waterbury Reentry Center has provided invaluable real-world experience, offering a glimpse into the complexities of the justice system and the challenges of reintegration.

## Research for Change

Samantha's Honors thesis, focused on the underlying causes of truancy and the effectiveness of community-based prevention methods, represents a significant scholarly contribution.

Her research is driven by a sense of responsibility and a commitment to evidence-based reform. "I feel a sense of responsibility in addressing this issue, as truancy is often a gateway to deeper involvement in the justice system," she explains.

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## Join Us in Celebrating Samantha!



We're thrilled to share that Samantha Villa, our 2025 Diane Sierpina Award winner, was honored to personally receive her award from Diane Sierpina during a meaningful meeting yesterday at the University of New Haven. Joining them were Erika Nowakoski, TYJI Executive Director, and Bill Carbone, TYJI Senior Executive Director. Samantha's dedication, leadership, and compassion serve as a powerful example within our community. We are incredibly proud of her achievements and eagerly anticipate the positive impact she will continue to make through her inspiring commitment to service and innovation.



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