Sometimes a bit of luck comes your way. That is how I feel about my connection with University Auxiliary Services at Albany (UAS) and how it has influenced my college career in several important and critical ways, as both a student and a young adult. Currently I am the co-chair of Albany Student Dining Advisory Committee (ASDAC), an active member of the UAS board, and a member of the UAS RFP Ad Hoc Committee. The experiences I have gleaned in all of these roles continue to teach me real world lessons that make me a better student, and once graduated, will also make me a more qualified and confident employee and woman.

I have been an active member of ASDAC for about one year. ASDAC is a program that was created by UAS in 2004 to provide feedback between the students and dining services. This program has become a great asset to enhancing our dining services since students are now able to voice their concerns, complaints, suggestions, and approvals to UAS and the food service vendor in a streamlined and organized fashion. ASDAC recommendations are always noted and, if feasible, often implemented. At meetings we have a UAS staff member, Emily Lamontagne, as our advisor. She is the person who sets up our meetings, helps us create an agenda, and communicates our feedback to appropriate parties. She is also the nicest and most capable person that I have ever met. Working with Emily is what motivated me to become more involved with ASDAC and apply for the co-chair position. Becoming a co-chair has allowed me access to events and opportunities I would not have had access to as a ‘regular’ ASDAC member. One such event was the Fall 2012 State Auxiliary Services Association (SASA) Conference, which was hosted by UAS last semester. Myself and the other co-chairs were asked to be part of panel discussion. Presenting at this conference was an amazing experience. I was able to answer questions about ASDAC to help other universities implement a similar program on their respective campuses. It was exciting to know that I could have such a positive impact even beyond my own university.

Being part of ASDAC has also helped me enhance my personal attributes as well. Prior, I did not give my ideas too much credibility, but now I realize that my opinions do matter and that I have the right to speak up if there is a problem. For instance, I have learned that I can talk to a manager or staff member and tell them how I feel about services and they will genuinely listen to my input. Since this group is often used in focus groups for UAS and the food service vendor, I now know how to review an idea from start to finish and provide helpful feedback in an appropriate manner. Along with other ASDAC members, I have helped to implement changes in customer service, food selection, meal plans, and special dining events.

I was excited when UAS asked me to sit on their board this year. As a sophomore, I feel privileged and honored to hold this role at such a young age. When I first came to UAlbany as a freshman, I didn’t realize there was a food service board so when I was asked to join, I was quite surprised.
Being a board member is a big responsibility and I have learned so much in my 6-month tenure. I am now familiar with board by-laws and why they are needed, and most recently, I have participated in strategic planning, helped to send out a national RFP food service contract, worked on a performance evaluation for our executive director, and reviewed the claims of various political and social groups on campus (e.g., Killer Coke). I have completed these objectives alongside some of the most high profile and astute University faculty/staff on campus. Working closely with these other board members, I have learned real world time management and decision-making skills that I would not have learned while only in the classroom setting. My board colleagues treat me with respect and use any opportunities to teach me something as well as learn from me. The true extent of my experiences on the UAS board can’t be adequately put into words and I’m sure the true effects will carry over into the rest of my life.

While sitting on the board, I was also asked to represent the student body during a very significant dining RFP process. Since UAS’ contract with Chartwells, the current food service provider, is ending in June 2013, an RFP was sent out to all qualifying companies. In an effort to make the most unbiased, balanced and best choice, UAS and the board decided to create an additional ad hoc committee to review all the proposals and make a recommendation. The committee encompasses both students and University faculty/staff, only some of which are also board members like myself; so again, I was honored to be asked to participate. I knew that this was going to be a once in a lifetime opportunity and accepted immediately. I have been involved in the arduous process from the beginning. I have watched each company’s formal presentation, been on field trips to other campuses to look at each company’s dining services in action and also labored over each proposal submitted (and they are thick!). Through this process, I have been able to see how contracts are created and what goes into creating a new dining service. I have learned about food quality, food labeling, business etiquette, labor issues, and customer service. I have visited many different schools run by the same dining company and was surprised at both the differences and similarities, and have discovered that the dining standards for one school may not be the same standards held at another school. I realized that University at Albany expects a high caliber of standards in our dining partner, and I have learned that the only way to get change is to ask for it (and expect it). Food initiatives that I never thought would be possible on our campus may just be on campus by next semester! I have also learned the important lesson of learning how to pick your battles. Learning how to bargain with someone or a company is something that is useful throughout ones lifetime, and this process has definitely taught me some valuable long-term lessons in this respect. I feel honored to be representing other students on the ad hoc committee. I know what students want and what they like/dislike from being part of ASDAC and from also being an undergraduate student. I take my role seriously and I want to ensure that the food service vendor on campus fits the needs of the entire student population. The RPF process has taken up significant time on my schedule, but it has been worth it. The chance to help UAS choose a food service partner and the lessons I’ve learned during this process are things I will never forget.

I’m a better student, leader and overall person due to my associations with University Auxiliary Services at Albany. I know I have gleaned skills to bring into the workforce when I graduate. My experiences with UAS have made me more confident in going out into the world. My opinion matters and I now have some real world work experiences to back up my ideas. The people that run UAS, from the top to the bottom, make our auxiliary services one of the best in the system. They really care about me and they care about the students. This is how auxiliary services has influenced my career in school.

ASDAC pizza tasting event (that’s me in the yellow, left), fall 2012