December 8, 2010
To: Jim Haemker
CC: SEEDS, Dan Bellrichard
From: Georgia Windhorst, Emily Kittleson
Re: Memo: Purchasing Alta Gracia apparel for the bookshop.

We encourage and support Mr. Haemker’s interest in purchasing from the Alta Gracia clothing line (a part of the larger company Knight’s Apparel) when making future purchases for the Luther Bookshop. Alta Gracia pays workers a “living wage,” and we believe that its presence in the Bookshop will help to combat disengaged consumerism on campus and support a new factory that pays its workers well enough to help them out of poverty. Details about Alta Gracia and specific reasons to support them follow below.

Background
In 2007, Luther joined the Worker’s Rights Consortium (WRC) to monitor the working conditions in factories of companies the Bookshop currently buys from. This was a vital step toward pressuring companies to improve factory conditions to a certain standard. Though none of Luther’s current apparel suppliers are “sweatshops” according to WRC standards, none offer their workers a “living wage.” In fact, Alta Gracia may be the only factory in the college market ensuring a wage that allows workers to provide adequate food, clean water, clothing, shelter, health care, child care, and education for themselves and their families. A New York Times article from July 2010 reported, “Industry experts say it [Alta Gracia] is a pioneer in the developing world because it pays a ‘living wage’ — in this case, three times the average pay of the country’s apparel workers — and allows workers to join a union without a fight.” The entire article can be read at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/business/global/18shirt.html

Proposal
We would love to have a company like Alta Gracia present on campus, and we hope that when the purchasing freeze in the Bookshop is lifted, Mr. Haemker will follow through on his interest to include a purchase from Alta Gracia. The Luther Bookshop would be most realistic because it has stronger purchasing power than smaller student organizations’ orders for blank shirts.

Mr. Haemker expressed concerns that since Luther’s Bookshop is not leased by a larger corporation it might not be as recognizable to Alta Gracia for purchasing. However, Alta Gracia is a risky investment by Knight’s Apparel as reported in the New York Times, “The question is whether students, alumni and sports fans will be willing to pay $18 for the factory’s T-shirts — the same as premium brands like Nike and Adidas — to sustain the plant and its generous wages.” Alta Gracia relies on all purchases — even small ones — to survive as a company, and students will not have the opportunity to support the company unless the Bookshop does first. We believe that Luther should
lead other regional liberal arts schools with privately owned bookshops in supporting Alta Gracia.

Rationale

It’s important for students to be more knowledgeable about the products they’re consuming. We want students to think more about where their clothing is coming from, who are the people producing it, and how are they are affected by the production. We hope that students will take an interest in the lives of those producing their clothing, and learn that the purchasing power of their dollars can support ethical companies.

We both plan to attend SEEDS meetings to share our research and goals with the group. SEEDS also manages the WRC reports that track working conditions in companies the bookstore currently supports. SEEDS will be the community for continuing the goals and the work we have started.

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Emily Kittleson ('11) and Georgia Windhorst ('13)