

# **BOLDLY FORWARD:**

## **A Strategic Plan for Saint Mary's College**

### **2012-2017**

#### **PROLOGUE**

The Strategic Plan, “The Path to Leadership,” was approved in October, 2007. That plan was intended to guide our work through October 2012. Consequently, last fall I began to consider how to shape our new work plan. I held twelve listening sessions during the month of September. I invited every full-time employee to attend one of those sessions at which we discussed the following issues: what Saint Mary’s does really well; what we should focus on during the next five years; how we can work smarter; and, finally, any other issues the participants wanted to bring to my attention. The information that I learned at those sessions informed my thinking as we moved forward with this new strategic planning process.

A Strategic Planning Committee was formed and held its first meeting in October 2011. The committee included the President’s Cabinet, five faculty members, a member of the Board of Trustees, the Student Government Association President, a staff representative, an alumna, the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, the Director of Human Resources, and two Associate Deans. This central committee later broke into four sub-committees each of which was chaired by a faculty member. The four subcommittees were: The Current Environment for Higher Education, Academic Initiatives, Life of the Student Outside the Classroom, and Resources. Each sub-committee was free to add more members to aid the committee in its deliberations. Each sub-committee submitted recommendations, most of which found their way into the following draft.

Our previous plan, “The Path to Leadership,” was ambitious. Indeed, I have heard from some members of the Saint Mary’s Community that we have had too many projects over the course of the last several years. Although I think a strategic plan

should be realistic, I also believe that it should aim high. Only with high aspirations will we continue to improve Saint Mary's College. Therefore, it is quite likely that this new plan, when finalized, will contain just as many recommendations as the previous plan. Because of the importance and scope of some of the goals in the last plan, some of the recommendations in this new plan will actually be continuations of projects underway but not yet completed.

Of the 29 distinct recommendations in "The Path to Leadership," 17 have been completed or are in progress. This is an extraordinary accomplishment even in ordinary times. The last five years have been anything but ordinary. We have lived through the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression; there has been a significant decline in the public's trust in higher education; and there has been a decline in families' ability/willingness to pay for higher education, especially private higher education.

I am extremely grateful to the entire college community for the efforts expended over the past five years to make Saint Mary's better and stronger. Those efforts have been fruitful. Saint Mary's continues to have a strong financial base and, with the exception of fall 2010, student enrollment has remained strong. We remain an institution with lofty ambitions and a work ethic that sustains us while we strive to achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

## **SECTION I**

### **SAINT MARY'S MISSION**

The Saint Mary's Mission Statement has not been altered in the course of this planning process. Our mission and philosophy are both well known by the members of the college community and also widely embraced by them. Because of the Mission Statement's continuing vitality, we are proud to present it and the accompanying Statement of Philosophy and Purpose in their unaltered forms.

### *Mission Statement*

Saint Mary's College is a Catholic, residential, women's college in the liberal arts tradition. A pioneer in the education of women, the College is an academic community where women develop their talents and prepare to make a difference in the world. Founded by the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1844, Saint Mary's promotes a life of intellectual vigor, aesthetic appreciation, religious sensibility, and social responsibility. All members of the College remain faithful to this mission and continually assess their response to the complex needs and challenges of the contemporary world.

### *Statement of Philosophy and Purpose*

As a center of higher education, Saint Mary's fosters an academic climate of scholarship and learning for faculty and students alike. Through excellence in teaching and the example of its own active scholarship, the faculty challenges students to expand their horizons and supports them in their intellectual pursuits. A broad-based course of study invites students to think critically and creatively about the natural world and human culture. Acknowledging the need to prepare women for an array of careers, the college insists on a liberal arts foundation for all its students. During their years at Saint Mary's students, acquire depth and breadth of knowledge, competence in quantitative skills and modern languages, the ability to think clearly about complex problems, and the capacity to communicate with precision and style.

As a Catholic college, Saint Mary's cultivates a community of intellectual inquiry, liturgical prayer, and social action. The college creates an open forum in which students freely and critically study the rich heritage of the Catholic tradition, raising the questions necessary to develop a mature religious life. The celebration of liturgy

encourages students to explore the fullness of life and its mysteries. The college nurtures awareness and compassion for a troubled world and challenges students to promote human dignity throughout their lives. In preparing women for roles of leadership and action, Saint Mary's pays particular attention to the rights and responsibilities of women in the worlds of work, church, community, and family.

Dedicated to the personal and social growth of its students, Saint Mary's cultivates a community of students, faculty, and staff, which responds to the needs of women. In order to offer the richest educational experience possible, the college strives to bring together women of different nations, cultures, and races. It provides a residential environment where women grow in their appreciation of the strengths and needs of others. Through a host of co-curricular programs on campus and in the local community, Saint Mary's initiates students in the habits of civic responsibility. Engaging in all aspects of the college experience, students acquire the hallmarks of a liberally educated woman: keen self-knowledge, lively imagination, lifelong intellectual and cultural interests, and the ability to make socially responsible choices about the future.

## **SECTION II**

### **A VISION FOR SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE**

An essential first step in any planning process is to agree about the direction of the organization. The planning group must be able to articulate what the group hopes will result from execution of the plan. In short, the group must have a vision that shapes the plan. The Strategic Planning Committee began its work by developing a new vision statement for Saint Mary's.

The following vision statement describes Saint Mary's College as we hope it will be when the plan has been successfully implemented. The vision statement does

not present the blueprint for achieving the vision, nor does it describe all of the many qualities that characterize Saint Mary's College.

### *VISION STATEMENT*

Saint Mary's is a vibrant, diverse, Catholic college that is nationally recognized for its excellence in educating women. Saint Mary's fosters the pursuit of knowledge and a spirit of discovery, ethical leadership, spiritual development, and personal growth. Innovative undergraduate and graduate programs prepare students to engage creatively with our complex and changing world. Rooted in the tradition of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, a Saint Mary's education is animated by its mission and enriched by a holistic educational experience that vitalizes students, faculty, and staff in a common quest for a life filled with purpose and meaning.

## **SECTION III**

### **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

Saint Mary's College is proud of the excellent job it has done since 1844 of educating young women. We now aspire to expand our offerings to a limited number of graduate-level degrees, the students for which will include men as well as women. This will not be the college's first venture into either the waters of graduate education or those of educating men. Our very successful School of Sacred Theology led the way in graduate studies, and the co-exchange program with the University of Notre Dame has long brought undergraduate men into our classrooms. Saint Mary's is a place of aspiration, a community that hungers both to serve the needs of our time and to continually improve the education we offer. Both aspirations are evident in the goals and recommendations laid out below. This plan was developed in light of four fundamental principles that have long guided the college and one new one, at least one that is newly articulated, if not new to this community. It is important to articulate these principles so that we do not lose sight of them.

## **FIRST PRINCIPLE**

*Saint Mary's is committed to providing students with an excellent intellectual and academic experience.*

Our commitment to academic excellence requires constant vigilance to ensure that we continue to deliver the superior education for which Saint Mary's is known. This commitment to excellence will be as true of our new venture into graduate education as it has been of our long tradition of undergraduate education. Saint Mary's is committed to the education of the whole student. Although that education occurs both inside and outside the classroom, the core of the educational experience is classroom experience. Recruitment and retention of the best faculty is essential to the excellence to which Saint Mary's is committed. The college seeks faculty who are unusually committed to teaching, to their own scholarly lives, and to contributing to the college's intellectual community and its distinctive mission. The success of the college relies upon an environment in which faculty can flourish.

Saint Mary's focus has long been on the undergraduate education of women. As we currently contemplate expansion of that mission to graduate education, we believe that the expansion will enhance not only the professional expertise of our new graduate students but also the educational experience of our undergraduate women.

In the undergraduate realm, small class size and individual attention are hallmarks of a Saint Mary's education. Excellent teaching holds primacy of place in the process of promoting and tenuring faculty. Pedagogical innovation and the development, implementation, and assessment of curricular programs are constant and valued activities. The concerted activity of the faculty in designing the new Sophia Program and preparing to implement that program are prime examples of the value that this community places upon such work. At the same time, we understand that scholarly endeavors are an integral part of teaching excellence. Through their scholarship, Saint Mary's faculty members advance their disciplines, keep current in their fields, and bring their scholarship into the classroom to enliven course content and to engage students in current debates in the relevant discipline.

The Sophia Program is the product of several years' work. It is worthy of the extensive effort that has been given to it because it affects the experience of every Saint Mary's undergraduate student. Its design is unique and tailored to this college which provides a broad based liberal arts education for every undergraduate student regardless of her major.

The pressure to focus solely on career preparation and the economic benefit of a college education is far stronger today than it was when our last strategic plan was written. While the cost of an education is such that a college ignores those pressures at its peril, there also is danger in providing students only narrowly tailored career preparation programs. At this crucial time in their development students should explore their place in the universe and their obligation to contribute to the common good; they should develop a vision of the good life and the virtues that comprise it; and, they should deepen their understanding of and empathy with all human beings. If they do so, they will be better prepared not only for the obligations of citizenship, but also for the ups and downs that inevitably will come their way. The Sophia Program ensures that each Saint Mary's undergraduate student will have the opportunity to explore these larger issues.

Another of the college's distinctive commitments is to an intensive writing experience, known as the W. Every student must earn her W not only as a beginning student at the college but also in more advanced studies in her chosen major. The Basic W and the Advanced W requirements are valued components of a Saint Mary's undergraduate education. We also require a senior year comprehensive experience in each student's major area of study. The senior comprehensive experience provides every student, not just a chosen few, with the opportunity for an intensive, summative experience in her major. Although focused in each student's area of academic concentration, this type of work prepares her for a life of continuous learning.

## SECOND PRINCIPLE

*Saint Mary's College is unwavering in its commitment to being a Catholic and Holy Cross college.*

Saint Mary's was founded as, and continues to be, a Catholic college. The Catholic character of the college requires it to provide certain curricular offerings and to cultivate a community that supports its Catholic faith in a variety of ways including liturgically and through work for justice. Our aim is to sustain a community that functions as a bearer of hope to a suffering world. The lived reality of the campus community has been strongly influenced by the charism of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, including their educational philosophy and their tradition of hospitality. That tradition of hospitality, together with long-standing Holy Cross values, means that the college does not simply welcome non-Catholics and non-Christians, but embraces as its mission the teaching of all regardless of their faith traditions.

Roman Catholicism views all education as proceeding from the effort to clarify the conception of the human person as being created in the image and likeness of God and possessing openness to the transcendent. Saint Mary's is committed to providing every one of its undergraduate students with a broad-based liberal arts education that plants the seeds of a lively intellectual life. It is not only Religious Studies or Philosophy courses that are important to the Catholic character of the college. The Catholic tradition contains a notion of God as Logos—as the Order – as well as the Mystery at the heart of the universe. Consequently, Catholicism views knowledge itself as fundamentally and intrinsically valuable. Catholicism recognizes the dignity of human reason and its capacity to seek and know reality. Therefore, while it is clear that there is no Catholic calculus or chemistry, our very Catholicism leads us to value and embrace all fields of knowledge.

Saint Mary's infuses the academic and residential life at the college with the Catholic and Holy Cross characteristics that give the campus its unique sense of community. As our Mission Statement implies, our commitment to education is not solely to or for the benefit of the individual student, but also for the benefit of the broader society.



### THIRD PRINCIPLE

*Saint Mary's is committed to the education of undergraduate women.*

Only three all-male colleges exist and the number of women's colleges continues to decline, and currently stands somewhere around fifty. Yet Saint Mary's is strongly committed to continuing as an all-women's college at the undergraduate level.

Our commitment is based in the belief that undergraduate women's colleges provide benefits for their students that typically are not available to them at coeducational institutions. Our experience at Saint Mary's College reinforces that belief.

According to the Women's College Coalition, research shows that students who attend a women's college enjoy the following benefits:

1. Measurably higher levels of self-esteem than other achieving women in coeducational institutions. Nine out of ten women's college graduates give their colleges high marks for fostering and developing self-confidence.
2. Greater satisfaction from their college experience than their coed counterparts.
3. A higher likelihood of graduating in four years or less, and of earning graduate degrees than female graduates of coeducational colleges.
4. The opportunity to participate more, both in and out of class, due to small class size and an environment that demands the participation of women. Small class size also creates a more positive learning experience because students receive greater individual attention.
5. High-quality references by faculty and staff which play more of a role for women's colleges' alumnae in being accepted to graduate school or finding a first job.

Everything Saint Mary's does at the undergraduate level is aimed at educating women, and that is as true outside the classroom as it is within the classroom.

Moreover, if there is an undergraduate student initiative, every facet of it will be planned and executed by women. That alone is fundamental and important.

#### **FOURTH PRINCIPLE**

*Saint Mary's is committed to being a residential college.*

Our tradition of residential life and learning for our undergraduate students is so strong that it is impossible to imagine a Saint Mary's campus that empties at the end of each class day, or even a Saint Mary's whose student population shrinks substantially each weekend. It is the residential nature of our campus that provides our students with the rich opportunities for intellectual exchange and personal growth so central to a Saint Mary's education.

There is a growing perception that such a model is outmoded and too expensive. Certainly, Saint Mary's must take advantage of modern technologies that provide not only educational efficiencies and flexibility but also educational enrichment and advances. But, as we adapt to the changing landscape of higher education, we must do so without losing that which has made Saint Mary's distinctive: producing graduates whose lives are marked by "intellectual vigor, aesthetic appreciation, religious sensibility, and social responsibility."

Indeed, Saint Mary's alumnae most often identify the sense of community as the distinctive trait of the college. It is a community in which faculty and students interact often and in many different settings. It is a community that values candid discourse, nurtures respect for every human being, and instills a sense of responsibility for oneself and others. It is a community that holds itself and its members to high standards for achievement and for acting morally, fairly, and justly. It is a community that shares its joys and its sorrows. It is a community that believes in God and in the transcendent nature of the human person, but also welcomes and respects those who do not share those beliefs, for they too are created in the image and likeness of God. It is a community that calls each of its members to be more fully human. The lived experience of this community is an integral part of the Saint Mary's education.

Can this type of community be created on-line? Can it be conveyed in the short bursts of time on campus required by hybrid courses or degrees? Our limited experience with on-line courses offered to our own students during summer suggests that, at least to some extent, the answers to those questions are positive as long as the class size remains small. At present we do not envision offering on-line undergraduate degrees, but expansion of our summer on-line offerings continues apace and our alumnae are very anxious to have Saint Mary's courses available to them on-line. The growing availability of sophisticated materials on-line may not eliminate the need for the in-class lecture, but they may provide greater opportunity for the in-class professor to lead the kind of critical analysis of the material that is the heart of real learning. In short, a Saint Mary's education is much more than pouring knowledge into brains. We believe not only in nurturing intellectual curiosity but also in bringing our students to a deeper understanding of what it means to be fully human, helping them develop a sense of wonder at the beauty and complexity of the created world, and possessing a life-long hunger to know and understand more. We must learn how to use new modes of instruction that meet the needs of today's students while holding onto our fundamental commitment to education of the whole person. Our distinctive undergraduate education depends strongly not only upon learning together, but also upon eating, living, praying, and playing within a community that helps to shape our students into people of hope, inquiry, ambition, and love.

## **FIFTH PRINCIPLE**

*Saint Mary's is committed to campus sustainability.*

The word "sustainability" is most often used in conjunction with ecological concerns. We use the word "sustainability" here in a much broader sense, a sense that includes social, economic, and cultural sustainability in addition to environmental protection.

Why add this principle to the four articulated in our preceding strategic plan? Shortly after approval of the 2007 plan, this country and most of the rest of the world experienced the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Recovery from our Great Recession is not yet complete, and some predict that we have several years before employment rates will return to previous rates, if they ever will.

Two of the major consequences of the financial downturn call for a focus on sustainability. The first consequence leads us to focus on the higher education enterprise itself, and the second on the just distribution of wealth and social justice.

The recession greatly stressed the already fragile business model on which higher education operates. Moreover, private institutions such as Saint Mary's, as well as state higher education systems, have faced unprecedented challenges. The American public became cash-strapped as the value of homes plummeted and people lost jobs. The economic strain felt by families, combined with a public mistrust of higher education and its attendant costs, has led a significant segment of the population to question the wisdom of investing in higher education. These pressures will surely affect the face of higher education and Saint Mary's must adapt.

A second and more tragic result of the last few years is a still greater socio-economic polarization of our society, threatening the disappearance of the American middle class. Such a society is unstable as well as unjust. At risk are not only such institutions as Saint Mary's but also a sustainable social fabric. Continuing to make a Saint Mary's education available to students from families across the economic spectrum is more important than ever.

Thus, our efforts at sustainability must include not only preservation of natural resources, which is essential to the well being of the planet, but also preservation of social norms that value human dignity and the just distribution of goods. Fortunately, the rich Catholic intellectual tradition provides us with guidance as to those norms.

## **SECTION IV**

### **GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Having outlined our foundational principles, the remainder of this document outlines our goals and recommends actions designed to achieve those goals. The recommendations are grouped thematically under goals. Neither the goals nor the recommendations are in priority order. Indeed, nothing has been included in this plan that is not a high priority for the next five years.

#### **GOAL #1**

##### *Enhance Our Academic Programs*

It is our fundamental obligation to provide students with the best possible education. In addition to actually providing an excellent educational experience, Saint Mary's must also work to increase its national reputation. In the current economic and social climate, small private colleges struggle simply to maintain enrollment numbers. When a college recruits students, the perceived quality of the school is more important than ever. We must make certain that the excellent programs we offer receive the recognition they deserve. We offer an undergraduate education for women that takes a back seat to no other program. Indeed, our goal is to offer the best undergraduate education for women in the country and to receive the recognition that such quality deserves.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

##### **Complete Implementation of the Sophia Program**

The approval of the Sophia Program by the faculty and the Board of Trustees was the culmination of more than three years of work. The Sophia Program is an innovative program tailored specifically for Saint Mary's students. The conceptual development of the program and its approval, significant as those steps were, were only the first steps of a multi-step project. The transition from our former

discipline-based curriculum to our new curriculum based on learning outcomes is not simple. Since the approval of the program, many courses have been developed and certified for the implementation of the first phase of the Sophia Program in fall, 2013. Many more courses and programs are being refined in order to fully implement the program in subsequent years. Advising must be revamped so that faculty and students are competent to discuss and plan an outcomes-based education. An assessment plan must be developed for the Sophia Program; faculty development must be provided as needed; and the program must be evaluated, and if necessary, revised so that it effectively accomplishes the aspirations that inspired its creation. Full integration of Sophia into the curriculum must continue as a high priority.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

### **Seek Authorization for and Begin Graduate Education in Selected Programs**

The excellent education that Saint Mary's offers undergraduate students can, in some instances, be expanded to offer equally excellent master's level programs. Our faculty possesses the expertise to offer this next level of education, and doing so will provide several advantages. A master's program in speech pathology, for example, can produce the following benefits. First, the program would address a societal need. As the nation's population ages, the need for speech pathologists is quickly rising. A speech pathologist must have a masters' degree in order to practice, but for every four bachelors' degrees awarded in speech pathology there is only one slot available in current masters' level programs. Second, the presence on our campus of a master's program in speech pathology will benefit our undergraduate students by enriching course offerings and allowing the undergraduates to interact with the more advanced students. Third, offering direct entry into the master's program will aid Saint Mary's efforts to recruit undergraduate students. Lastly, the program will help to diversify the college's revenue streams. We hope that over the next five years we will inaugurate three graduate level programs.

The Saint Mary's College Board of Trustees has authorized the college administration to proceed with development of graduate programs, each of which will require specific Board approval. In addition to Board approval, we must receive authorization from the Higher Learning Commission to conduct graduate programs and to confer Masters' degrees. In some instances, we will also need accreditation from disciplinary accrediting bodies.

Federal regulations require that graduate programs be open to both men and women. That was true of the School of Sacred Theology at Saint Mary's which awarded degrees to men as well as women. We do not believe that this in any way compromises our commitment to having the best undergraduate college for women in the country.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

#### Support Student-Initiated Learning Experiences

A Saint Mary's education is marked by close faculty-student interaction and collaboration. One of our challenges is to make this reality more visible to prospective students and their families. The intensive writing experience required to earn the Basic W and the Advanced W, the senior comprehensive project required of each student, the SISTAR program, the Sophia Program's experiential learning requirement, the many international study options, and student collaboration with faculty on research or scholarly projects are all indicators of the vibrant intellectual life that Saint Mary's makes available to each undergraduate. Saint Mary's goal is a life of intellectual vigor for each of our graduates; we initiate such a life by these many efforts to learn through experience, adventure, and excitement. We can make these efforts more visible and enhance them by establishing an endowed fund, \$4 million, to which a student may apply for support: for international study, to attend an academic conference, to purchase supplies for her research or her art project, or a variety of other educational pursuits. Each student will have a unique opportunity to nurture her intellectual passion regardless of her personal financial situation.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4**

### **Reduce the Teaching Load**

Saint Mary's faculty members are superb teachers. Teaching is valued by the faculty and holds primacy of place at the college. Indeed, our strong reputation rests primarily upon the outstanding performance of our graduates. However, the current teaching load is not consistent with our aspirations. During an academic year, Saint Mary's faculty members currently teach three courses one semester and four courses the other semester (known as a 3/4 load). Schools we aspire to be like generally teach far less, some as few as 2/2. Our goal is to reduce the teaching load for all faculty members to 3/3. The reduction will have several benefits. Teaching effectiveness should improve. In order to teach seven courses each year, teachers need to make compromises, most obvious are the number of graded tests and assignments and the time spent with students outside of class. Less obvious obstacles to the best teaching are such things as lack of time to experiment with pedagogical techniques or innovative materials. Reducing the number of course preparations per year will also afford faculty additional time to explore collaborative projects with each other and with students, as well as to pursue research and scholarship. The implementation of this change must be undertaken, however, with due concern for the impact on course availability and on the college budget.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

### **Begin an Honors Program**

The last strategic plan recommended that the college consider an honors program. That consideration has taken place, and a faculty committee, under the guidance of the Bruno P. Schlesinger Chair, has taken the lead in designing a program that is currently running as a pilot program. Informed by what is learned from the pilot program, the design process must be concluded and the program implemented. It is our belief that such a program will be an effective student recruiting tool. In addition, grouping the most promising incoming first-year students together for a



limited number of honors courses and programs will challenge them appropriately and provide the peer-to-peer stimulation that most successfully motivates students.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6**

### **Build on Our Strength in Study Abroad and Global Studies**

The 2011 *Open Doors* report ranks Saint Mary's College

- 7<sup>th</sup> among all U.S. baccalaureate institutions for the number of undergraduate students studying abroad for an academic year,
- 20<sup>th</sup> among all U.S. baccalaureate institutions in total undergraduate study abroad participation, and
- 29<sup>th</sup> among all U.S. institutions (doctoral, master's, and baccalaureate) in total undergraduate study-abroad participation.

We already have distinguished Saint Mary's as uniquely committed to global understanding. In addition to maintaining this distinction and our current rate of participation (of at least 50% of the graduating class), we must find more ways to engage across borders and define ourselves as a college where students learn to live, study, and work with intercultural awareness and competence. A newly approved Global Studies major began in fall 2012. That fills a need in our curriculum. We aim to improve the campus' intercultural awareness and competence by increasing the number of students who participate in the Intercultural Leadership programs offered through the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership (CWIL) and by engaging an even broader segment of the student body in activities developed to teach those skills.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

### **Conduct External and Internal Evaluation of All Academic Programs**

The last strategic plan called for periodic external reviews of all of our academic programs. Such reviews have successfully begun but have experienced a hiatus while we have begun to develop graduate programs. We must resume those

external reviews, which focus on the curricula of our programs to ensure that our programs are up to date and comprehensive.

More recently, the Academic Affairs Council has recommended that all programs also undergo an internal review aimed at examining the vibrancy of each program and whether we are properly allocating the resources of the college, both human and financial, among our various programs. The purpose of these reviews, like the external reviews, is to ensure that Saint Mary's is meeting our students' needs and providing the best education possible. Periodic re-examination of all programs and their accompanying resources should be conducted. Sometimes injection of fairly modest resources is all that is needed to rejuvenate a program that has lost some of its steam. In rare instances, it may be necessary either to shrink or sunset an existing program that is no longer sustainable at its current level. We neglect a fundamental duty if we neglect to do such evaluations.

## **RECOMMENDATION 8**

### **Support a First-Class College Library**

The three basic ingredients of a great academic institution are a great faculty, a great student body, and a great library. Although the libraries of the early twenty-first century are distinctly different than libraries of a generation ago, the need for a great library (whether in-print or virtual) remains constant. Our last strategic plan noted that our library budget lags far behind the library budgets of our aspirant schools. Unfortunately, that has not changed. As we add graduate programs, the need for in-depth and up-to-date materials will only increase. We must find ways not only to stretch the dollars currently allocated to our library, but also to increase library funding. The difficulty of balancing the college's annual operating budget indicates that endowment funding for the library is more important than ever.

## **GOAL #2**

### *Focus Our Efforts to Recruit and Retain Students*

Over the past ten years, our fall enrollment has ranged from a high of 1664 to a low of 1469, and incoming first-year classes have fluctuated between 479 and 333. The swings create havoc with faculty hiring and with the college budget.

Our last strategic plan called for stabilizing total enrollment at 1600. We failed to meet that goal in academic years 2010-11, 2011-12, and this fall because the entering class in fall 2010 was exceptionally small (333). While the ideal number of students would be between 1700 and 1750, we need to ensure that the student body does not fall below 1550 and that every effort is made to have at least 1600 full-time students. Assuming that cohort enrollment numbers are met, we expect to regain the benchmark of 1600 once the small class graduates. Should we fail to do so, we will underutilize both our physical plant and our faculty and staff, and we will strain the college coffers.

## **RECOMMENDATION 9**

### **Continue Our Excellent Retention and Completion Rates**

Across the country there is great concern about college retention and completion rates. The key to a good graduation rate, of course, is to retain the incoming students. Our rate of retention for first-year to sophomore year is typically between 85% and 87%. Over the past ten years, our rate has been as low as 78.7% and as high as 88%, with the average being 85.5%. It is our goal to maintain a rolling ten-year average retention rate of at least 85%.

The federal government tracks the percentage of students who graduate within six years of beginning their college education. In 2010 the national six-year graduation rate for all four-year institutions was 58.3%. At the same time, the rate for 4-year private non-profit colleges was 65.4%. Over the 10 year period that includes classes entering Saint Mary's from 1997 until 2006, our average six-year graduation rate was 76.4% (the rates varied from a low of 71.4% for the class that

entered in 1998, to a high of 82% for the class that entered in 2004). It is our goal to maintain a rolling 10-year average of at least 76%.

To be clear, at Saint Mary's there is not a great deal of difference between our 4-year and 6-year graduation rates. Of those students who remain with us, 93% of them graduate within 4 years.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10**

### **Target Recruitment and Retention of U.S. Minority Students and International Students**

Building and nurturing a vibrant intellectual community at Saint Mary's is a constant work in progress. One of the key ingredients is bringing together faculty and students with a variety of lived experiences. Typically, approximately 65% of Saint Mary's students come from four Midwestern states-- Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio-- and our students are overwhelmingly racially and ethnically homogenous. It continues to be true, certainly in the United States, that one's race and ethnicity impact one's life experience. Consequently, the presence within this community of persons from the various racial and ethnic groups is an important ingredient in the vitality of our intellectual climate.

Our efforts to recruit and retain students from all racial and ethnic minorities must continue and actually intensify. Our last plan set a goal of having 15% of the student body from historically underrepresented minority groups. In fall 2007 our percentage was 9.2% and in fall 2011 we were at 13.5%. We reached 15% this fall. Our goal for the next five years is to raise that percentage to 20%. We recognize that numbers alone are not sufficient (it is the learning from one another that is central), however, numbers do matter. We should build on the success already achieved with Latinas. Saint Mary's efforts to recruit students from historically underrepresented minorities have been most successful with Hispanics, perhaps because so many of them are Catholics. For the past five years, between 60% and 66% of our minority students have been Latinas. In addition to recruitment of students from historically underrepresented minorities, we must continue and improve our services that support those students.

In addition to our intellectual goals, a review of demographic trends quickly reveals the dangers in our current recruitment pattern. First, with the exception of Indiana, each of the states in our primary market has a decreasing number of high school graduates. Second, the U.S. census reports that in 2011, for the first time, births of non-Hispanic whites fell below 50 percent of the births in the country. In a very short time, those young people will reach college age. Saint Mary's must be a place attractive to young women from the full spectrum of this country's racial and ethnic profile.

We have a record of small but growing success on which to build with regard to recruiting international students. This fall we welcomed seven degree-seeking students from places around the globe, in addition to international exchange students and English Language students. The opening of our English Language School last year will, we hope, provide an additional avenue of entry to full-time study at Saint Mary's for international students. The presence of international faculty and students is also critical to our learning environment. Preparing our students for life and work in a global economy has grown in importance since development of our last plan. Career advancement in many American venues will require our graduates not only to work with colleagues around the world but to work for extended periods of time outside the United States, often taking two or more assignments outside the U.S. Intercultural competence has become essential. The presence of four-year-degree-seeking students from places around the globe has a profound effect on the campus culture and on the perspectives of our domestic students. We must remain steadfast in our resolve to achieve our goal of having at least 4% undergraduate international students.

## **RECOMMENDATION 11**

### **Expand Intercollegiate Athletic Opportunities**

Promoting healthy living habits, helping students build leadership skills and confidence, and providing quality athletic programs all support student success in the classroom as well as outside it.

The athletic program needs additional staff and resources for student recruiting and team travel. We need to increase the number of coaches who are employed by Saint Mary's full-time. Only four of our eight intercollegiate sports are coached by full-time athletic department staff. Coaches who are employed full-time at the college are more integrated into the life and culture of the college and are expected to embrace and convey the values of the school. Because they have time to focus on their coaching, they are often better coaches and they are more likely to be consistently present and to have a long tenure at the college. Full-time coaches also have recruiting responsibilities. All of our coaches who are full-time also have other responsibilities in the Athletic Department in addition to their coaching. We plan to continue that model and have at least five full-time coaches.

Expansion of our intercollegiate athletic programs is key to our continued success in student recruitment. Expansion of our programs has been limited by our facilities and by budgetary concerns. We are confident that current fundraising efforts will provide improved and expanded facilities. We know that every year we fail to enroll some students because we do not sponsor their sport. We also know that some students do not even consider Saint Mary's but would do so if recruited by our coaching staff. Given the importance of athletics in the lives of today's young women, investing in our athletic program is an investment in the future well-being of the college (and its enrollment numbers) and consistent with our commitment to education of the whole person. We hope to soon add a lacrosse team.

## **RECOMMENDATION 12**

### **Become More Effective at Telling the Saint Mary's Story**

Over the past several years, we have taken a number of steps to help us better convey the vitality of the Saint Mary's community and the benefits of a Saint Mary's education. We have worked with a marketing firm to help us understand the public perception of the college and to help us shape the way we communicate with our students and their families, with our alumnae and friends, with prospective students, and with the general public. We have improved our web

presence and our media relationships. All of this work is on-going and will continue to be so.

With regard to student recruitment, periodic renewal of recruiting materials (whether print or electronic) has long been necessary. Experts now tell us, however, that the time span that encompasses a generation of students is getting shorter and shorter. The import of that observation is that a few years ago a particular set of recruiting materials might have remained effective over a four or five year time span. That is no longer the case because the character of the student cohort has changed. Therefore, our research needs to be updated approximately every two years and our materials need to be shaped in response to what we learn from the research.

Other areas are also directly affected by our ability to make Saint Mary's better known. Those other areas include employment of our graduates, alumnae engagement with the college, donor relations, and community relationships.

### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

#### **Better Assist Students to Bridge Their Growing Knowledge and Skills with Practical Experience**

During their time at Saint Mary's, students acquire a vast array of skills and knowledge that prepare them well for life in the workplace and elsewhere. With the deep concern about the cost of a college education, concern about job readiness has become a far greater concern for students and their families. We already do a great deal to assist students to transition from college to career. The Cross Currents Program, the Career Crossings Office, internships, student/faculty research collaboration, the experiential learning aspect of the Sophia Program, participation in the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative, departmental advising, the W program, and Senior Comprehensives all specifically aim at practical knowledge and skills and aid students in a successful transition from one stage of life to another. However, if we make what we do more explicit and more coordinated, we can better serve our students and hopefully lower their anxiety

level. Moreover, such efforts will implicitly convey our knowledge of the strains created by a dismal economy and of the challenges that new graduates now face.

Focusing on practical experience for our students also provides an opportunity for Saint Mary's to use its resources with non-traditional populations as well as to incorporate alternative learning methodologies. We already interact with non-traditional populations in a variety of ways: in the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative, in Summer Academy, Athletic and Fine Arts Camps, and through the many fine lectures and arts events that are open to the public. We hope to increase opportunities for such interaction through establishing a communicative disorders clinic serving both children and adults, providing continuing education credits for working adults in areas of our expertise, expanding opportunities for young girls to be taught by a faculty-led academy, providing science lab opportunities for home-schoolers, and offering workshops for retirees. These initiatives and others will allow Saint Mary's College students and non-traditional populations to develop knowledge and skills through practical experience.

## **RECOMMENDATION 14**

### **Develop a More Comprehensive Leadership Program for Students**

Saint Mary's students assume leadership during their college career in a variety of ways and we offer an Intercultural Leadership program to students. Certainly, the Student Government Association provides a number of leadership opportunities, but there are many, many other opportunities such as parent weekends, Dance Marathon, club leadership, peer ministry, and community service.

We should collaboratively review our existing offerings and better assist our students by being more explicit, organized, and intentional with regard to leadership opportunities. A leadership program could take a variety of shapes. For example, we could offer organizational training to student leaders when they return to campus each fall; and/or we could offer a series of "drop-in" programs designed to help student leaders manage their organizations. Service within one's churches is important to many of our students. Indeed, as the number of ordained clergy shrinks within the Catholic community, lay leadership takes on critical importance.



Providing a variety of spiritual leadership opportunities and preparation therefor, must be a priority.

### **GOAL #3**

*Meet the Needs of a Diverse Community*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 15**

Continue Efforts to Diversify the Faculty and Staff

It is imperative that we continue to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the faculty, staff, and administration. Doing so is a key element of our academic excellence. Diversifying the faculty and staff is a slower process than diversifying the student body because the turnover rate among faculty and staff is much lower, but with recent faculty retirements some progress has been made and we anticipate more hiring opportunities in the near future. Renewed effort to increase the diversity of all applicant pools is obligatory.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 16**

Promote a Culture that Values and Embodies  
International and Multicultural Diversity

All our efforts to recruit more diverse faculty, staff, and students will be wasted efforts if the Saint Mary's community remains unchanged by their presence. We must not see the views and experiences of some members of this community as the norm and undervalue the views of those who speak from different backgrounds and perspectives. All members of this community must be valued and contribute to our on-going discussion of life's important questions. We will all benefit from such a community.

Saint Mary's is a community characterized by remarkable good will, but good will is not sufficient to ensure that the community is able to make all its members feel welcome and part of the community. One must possess both knowledge of various

cultures and sub-cultures and also skills to navigate the chasms that too often exist between persons of differing cultures. This is acutely so in a residential setting, a setting that is not only one's place of work or study but also one's home, one's refuge. Especially during the first several weeks of adjusting to college life, new students are more vulnerable to slights, whether they are intentional or the result of ignorance or thoughtlessness. We must provide education that creates knowledge and awareness of proper behaviors and practices. Experience indicates that such education is essential for everyone on the campus. The President's Council on Multicultural Affairs has developed and offered training for college employees and Student Affairs has provided training for hall staff, including resident assistants, and has programming for all first year students. All such efforts must continue and be expanded.

### **RECOMMENDATION 17**

#### **Promote Understanding of Socio-Economic Differences**

The shrinking of the American middle-class means that campuses like ours have a greater and greater divide between those who have, and those who lack, resources. A student with a very nice car is quite visible and is sometimes assumed by faculty and staff, as well as by other students, to be the norm simply because her affluence is evident. But a student without enough money to go out for pizza with her friends, or to buy her books may be quite invisible and completely unaware that many other students are similarly situated. It is our obligation to create awareness of the variety of circumstances represented among our students and in our larger society and to create an environment of sensitivity to those differences.

## **GOAL #4**

*Address a Variety of Infrastructure Needs*

### **RECOMMENDATION 18**

Develop a New Campus Master Plan

It has been approximately fifteen years since the development of the last comprehensive campus master plan. A thorough audit of every campus building has been completed and has guided our building repair and renovation work over the past several years. While we currently do not need much additional square footage on campus, a complete master plan is needed to allow us to plan and prioritize future projects.

A campus master plan will address not only deferred maintenance issues, but also enhancement of the existing facilities and campus spaces. The importance that campus community spaces should have in such a plan dictates special mention. The addition of the Student Center brought vital space for student government, student involvement, and the Office for Civic and Social Engagement, among others, but it did not provide the sort of study and social space that students crave. The residential spaces on campus need attention and the development of graduate programs may create new space needs. Much work remains to be done to address all these needs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 19**

Improve the Campus Information Technology Services and Infrastructure

Our students are digital natives; they do not remember the time before cell phones, personal computers, Wikipedia, or electronic tablets. They simply expect to have access to the latest and best technological innovations. While Saint Mary's has neither the resources nor the need for the trendiest innovations, we must at least keep pace with other excellent colleges.

We have made significant strides over the past five years, but much remains to be done both for administrative computing and for instructional technology. In every one of last fall's listening sessions, IT made the list of areas we need to work on in the next five years. No other area was spoken about as consistently.

A lengthy list of needed IT improvements has been developed and prioritized. We must methodically work our way through that list as well as constantly reevaluate and update the list. Like housekeeping, this is a task that will always be with us.

## **GOAL #5**

*Grow and Faithfully Steward College Resources*

### **RECOMMENDATION 20**

Improve the Work Environment and  
Increase Compensation for Faculty and Staff

The most precious of our resources is the people of Saint Mary's. They, not our buildings nor even our beautiful grounds, make Saint Mary's the wonderful place it is. Over the past few years budgetary difficulties have caused our employees' morale to falter as well as their salaries and total compensation to fall behind. Despite the fact that many, if not most, of our employees find great satisfaction and fulfillment in their work at Saint Mary's, it is essential that we always attend to their working conditions. We must make resources available to provide appropriate professional development for our staff and administrators. We must also properly compensate all our employees and have salaries that are competitive when it is necessary to hire a new employee. The tradition of Catholic social teaching and the well-being both of our employees and of Saint Mary's College require that we do so.

## **RECOMMENDATION 21**

### Grow the Endowment

“The Path to Leadership” called upon us to increase the endowment by at least \$100 million. In 2007 the assumed continued growth in the world markets combined with fundraising efforts made achievement of that goal in five years plausible. The market collapse in 2008-09, of course, dramatically changed the picture. The college’s need continues. In fact, because families’ ability to pay for college has declined, Saint Mary’s need for endowment funds has actually increased. Again, our goal must be to increase the endowment by at least \$100 million over its 2007 value. This can be achieved only by astute investing and the increasingly hard work of fundraising.

## **RECOMMENDATION 22**

### Increase Dollars Raised and Grow Alumnae Participation in Annual Giving to the College

The college’s Annual Fund provides unrestricted monies to the operating budget. These funds are essential to our fiscal health. Over the last three years, through a variety of efforts including hiring additional staff and expanding the phon-a-thon, we have increased the dollars raised by approximately \$300,000 each year. That is very good news in a difficult economy. Continuing to grow at that rate is probably unrealistic absent a dramatic upswing in the economy. Our goal for the next five years is to increase the Annual Fund by \$150,000 per year.

Unfortunately, at Saint Mary’s as at many other institutions, the alumnae participation rate has faltered. Alumnae giving rates are important for obtaining some foundation grants and are one indication of alumnae satisfaction with their college experience. Because participation rates nation-wide have fallen dramatically since the economic downturn, and are not predicted to recover, we have altered our goal for our alumnae participation (either restricted or unrestricted) to 35%.

## **RECOMMENDATION 23**

### Reduce the College's Carbon Footprint

God's gift of creation is a precious resource. Its beauty is abundantly evident on our campus. Caring for this gift is intimately connected to our commitment to protect and defend human life and the dignity of all persons, especially the poor and vulnerable who are most impacted by environmental degradation and the absence of a just distribution of basic human services and resources. We must study and plan for an annual reduction of the college's carbon footprint.

## **RECOMMENDATION 24**

### Continue to Address Campus Maintenance

Over the past several years we have made significant progress in addressing existing campus facilities. Madeleva Hall has been completely renovated. Several buildings have new roofs: the Cushwa Leighton Library, Havican Hall, Moreau Hall, and Regina Hall. We have a very significant pledge that will allow us to renovate our chemistry labs and address some of the other learning spaces in Science Hall. Numerous other renewal projects have been completed, are underway, or are in the planning stage. Whether built at the close of the nineteenth century or in the waning days of the twentieth century, the rich building legacy that we have inherited must continue to be maintained and cherished.

## **CONCLUSION**

Saint Mary's continues to provide the transformative education that has been its hallmark for decades, an education that combines rigorous academic study with character formation and inculcation of a sense of responsibility for communal well-being. This mission, emanating from our founders' deep faith, continues to be as relevant today as at our founding. Indeed, in an era in which some of our peer institutions have focused solely on academic achievement, our mission may be more important than ever before. We recommit ourselves to it and look forward to its new facets as we expand our reach to graduate education.