

Building a Community of Global Learners
ACADEMIC PLAN for Saint Mary's University 2012 - 2017

PREAMBLE

The Saint Mary's University 2012

DEFINING OUR CHARACTER

Liberal Education

The fundamental strength of Saint Mary's University is its longstanding commitment to liberal education, understanding it to be transdisciplinary and embracing the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural and intellectual world.

The purpose of liberal education is to cultivate in students a broad knowledge base, skills of enquiry across the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, appreciation for the importance of historical and cultural contexts, and respect for truth and ethical conduct. Within the framework of liberal education, our faculties provide in-depth coverage of fundamental disciplines, enabling students to specialize in wide-ranging fields of study and professional programs.

We recognize that the members of each discipline are the best judges of how to organize and present the material of their discipline. We also aim to ensure the continued quality of our academic programs through regular peer Departmental and Program Reviews.

Applied and Professional Learning

Saint Mary's University encourages the application of learning to help our students and scholars to understand more fully and engage the local, regional, and global challenges facing humanity. Our academic offerings reflect an array of participatory instruction techniques that engage students in critical enquiry, leadership, teamwork, and global awareness. Our Business Development Centre, our Continuing Education division, and our Co-op Program also offer applied and professional learning opportunities. We engage in developing techniques for linking theory to practice in our classrooms and laboratories, and through our inter-disciplinary programs. Saint Mary's University has a well-established reputation for preparing professionals through Certificate, Diploma, Masters, and Doctorate programs, and places special emphasis on further development of professional qualification programs. Also, we are committed to preparing students for further post-graduate qualification in such areas as Law, Medicine, Business Administration, Science,

Research, Creativity and Graduate Studies

Saint Mary's University's increased focus on research, creative activity and graduate studies is reflected in numerous ways. Our researchers in all faculties are excelling in the production of original work. Where external research funding is involved, growth is reflected in an increase from about two million dollars at the turn of the century to approximately ten million dollars in 2011.

Since the Government of Canada established the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program in 2000, Saint Mary's has been successful in acquiring nine chairs. Three of these are associated with CNCOHS, the Canadian National Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, established in 2002, which is now home to the largest collection of occupational health psychologists in a North American university-based centre. Closely related is the new Homburg Centre for Health and Wellness, due to open in 2012. These, together with the Gorsebrook Research Institute's Centre for the Study of Sport and Health and The Centre for Spirituality in the Workplace, constitute a concentration of academic expertise centered on health and wellness, and create excellent opportunities for further development.

Two of the chairs are in Astronomy and Astrophysics, and constitute the core of another centre, the Institute for Computational Astrophysics, founded in 2001. These chairs, together with two existing appointments and a third new faculty position, have created a unique, world-leading resource in a fast-growing area of scientific research, that of using parallel computers and innovative algorithms to model complex astrophysical systems and analyze the vast volumes of data flowing in from today's powerful astronomical instruments.

The Sobey School of Business is home to two chairs in Management and Finance, as well as two research centres, The Centre for Excellence in Accounting and Reporting for Cooperatives, and the Centre for Leadership Excellence. These chairs and centres support and build upon scholarship within the Sobey School of Business.

Another chair is in International Development Studies, an area that Saint Mary's University seeks to cultivate, and the Faculty of Science has acquired a chair in Environmental Studies, associated with the Centre for Green Chemistry. Science also has acquired a Senior Research Fellow in Environmental Science associated with the Centre for Environmental Analysis and Remediation.

Our Canada Research Chairs reflect the growth in research and academic expertise at Saint Mary's over the past decade and provide a springboard for further development in the coming years.

The University supports many other research centres fostering innovative work. The Gorsebrook Research Institute was founded in 1982 to foster social, economic, and policy-related research pertaining to development in the Atlantic Provinces, and continues to be a force for change in the region. Accessibility for persons with disabilities has long been a cornerstone of the philosophy of Saint Mary's University, and

through the Atlantic Centre of Research, Access and Support for Students with Disabilities, Saint Mary's has played a leadership role in ensuring that higher education is accessible.

More recently, several centres have been formed to meet community and scientific research needs in the region: CBEMN, the Community Based Environmental Monitoring Network; CEAR, The Centre for Environmental Analysis and Remediation; Coastal CURA, the Coastal Community Research Alliance; MP_SpARC, The Maritime Provinces Spatial Analysis Research Centre; CGC, the Maritime Centre for Green Chemistry; ACEnet, the Atlantic Computational Excellence Network; and the RGC, the Regional Geochemical Centre with its X-Ray Spectroscopy services. All of these centres speak to the vitality of a growing research enterprise at Saint Mary's University.

Another four centres are making valuable contributions to cultural and social research and development. The Atlantic Metropolis Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration, Integration and Cultural Diversity is one of four other national Metropolis Centres. The University has partnered with Xiamen University in China and Hanban to establish a Confucius Institute at Saint Mary's University, joining 300 others around the world for the promotion of Chinese language, culture, commerce, and studies. Our scholars and students also benefit from collaborations with the Atlantic School of Theology in the form of The Canadian Centre for Ethics and Public Affairs, and the Centre for Spirituality in the Workplace.

Building on its tradition and the ethnic origins of a portion of the Halifax community, Saint Mary's established The D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies in 1986, funded by endowments from the University, the Charitable Irish Society of Halifax, the Department of the Secretary of State, and private donations. This chair is the focus of an Irish Studies interdisciplinary

physics research that has attracted some of the highest research funding in the university from the federal government funding agencies. This speaks of our newly emerging research strengths and our prestigious place nationally and internationally.

Community Outreach

Saint Mary's University is already recognized widely for its service to communities at home and abroad. Community service occurs in a variety of spheres, ranging from the heritage sector to environmental initiatives, business and professional development, recreational programming, and the provision of facilities as a venue for community events. Many of our centres and chairs express this dedication in practice, as do academic programs such as the Arts Faculty's partnership with Pathways to Education (the Spryfield-based site of a federal project for enhancing high-school completion among disadvantaged youth), The Sobey School of Business's Executive and Professional Development Program, or the Science Faculty's Community Outreach program.

A priority for the coming years is to build on past successes to serve the community well and to establish civic engagement as a key feature of our institutional identity. To achieve this objective, the development of our academic programs and research activities will remain responsive to community needs and emerging social priorities. Institutional policies and campus renewal projects also have a crucial role to play and many opportunities exist to link our academic expertise to administrative initiatives in the pursuit of common goals, such as our Service Excellence initiative. A clear and pervasive commitment to social responsibility enriches the educational experience of current students, inspires prospective students to choose Saint Mary's University as the place to study, and contributes significantly to their development as active citizens.

Student Success

Numerous steps have been taken to increase student success in the past decade including increased financial aid, enhanced academic advising and mentoring programs, and revisions to academic regulations governing probation and re-admission. A Career Development Centre was opened in 2007, and programs have been developed that offer extra support to selected students re-admitted on special terms of probation after their first year. In January 2007, A Task Force on Student Success presented a major report to Senate outlining measures to enhance successful transitions in three key stages of student life: transition to university, transition through university, and transition to the workplace or further study. The underlying theme of the report is the need to increase student engagement in all aspects of campus life, a factor widely recognized as a key to persistence and success.

The implementation of many of the recommendations of the student success report was a focus in the following three years. The Writing Centre is now well established and provides personal tutoring as well as workshops, in-class presentations and on-line support. It also offers, under the sponsorship of the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Centre, an ESL Drop-in Service to support non-native speakers of English. Among many initiatives, and reflecting our commitment to innovation and accessibility, the University developed and introduced the LEAP (Learning, Engagement,

Achievement, Peer Mentors) program administered under the Centre for Academic and Instructional Development (CAID). The Faculty of Arts introduced an early intervention strategy for first year students facing possible failure. It also reorganized its student advising by creating an Advising Centre and an Arts Committee on Academic Advising.

Like many universities, Saint Mary's University is challenged in retention of students, particularly from the first to the second year. Although attention to program and market conditions is important, success in recruiting and retaining students comes from meeting student needs. The needs are met through program design, considering both intended outcomes, and supporting the learning experiences of students during their programs. Saint Mary's University has broadened its academic program offerings over the years, introducing new programs (e.g., Bachelor of Environmental Studies) as well as modifying existing programs (e.g. adding co-op education to the Bachelor of Arts) that serve to broaden the market locally and abroad. Innovation in academic program offerings is helpful in attracting and retaining students, but appropriate and adequate support for innovation, led by our scholars, is needed to ensure continued innovative program growth. As one approach to addressing retention issues, Saint Mary's University implemented the LEAP Program, a program that takes cohorts of incoming students through a common learning process supported by peer mentoring and targeted student support services in their first year of studies.

Universities are continually challenged to develop innovative ways to address improving student success, and Saint Mary's University is also challenged to look carefully at programs that enhance student success, not only through their first year, but in the transition from undergraduate programs to the work environment.

Demand for Employable Qualifications

A long-standing and on-going debate among educators, students, legislators, and employers challenges universities to rationalize their programs between 'training' and 'education' goals, between 'vocational' and 'general' education, and between university programs primarily as springboards into job markets, or primarily to help students develop their knowledge and understanding of cognate disciplines. Many students are focused on job and career opportunities and seek appropriate learning opportunities that link theory to practice. Over the past 20 years, jobs for university and college graduates have more than doubled. As well, the past 20 years have seen a shift in employment demand and the educational institution sources from which that demand is met. For example, post-secondary diploma and certificate programs have exceeded universities in meeting the demands within the technical, administrative and health support occupations, the clerical sales and service occupations, and the manufacturing, trades and primary industry occupations. Universities, however, continue to be the dominant source for people who can meet the needs of the professional and management occupations.

Conclusions

Looking ahead, Saint Mary's University faces numerous challenges: financial uncertainty; demographic shifts affecting domestic enrolments; student retention issues; pressures to measure and report on the quality of our education programs; meeting the needs of a diverse and increasingly internationalized student body; engaging part-time and commuter students in campus life as part of their learning experience; responding to the demands for applied learning while advancing knowledge of theory and development of critical thinking skills; and advancing research and creative activity.

Despite these challenges, Saint Mary's is well situated to meet them successfully. The defining characteristics of the university and our substantial progress over the years in addressing past challenges provide a strong foundation to meet current and future challenges. We are firmly established as a respected and contributing institution within the fabric of local and national society, and recognized as a university that deeply cares for and is committed to the accessibility, needs and success of its students. Building on these and our other strengths, we face the future with confidence and optimism.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Building on our progress and strengths, and aware of the challenges we face, we have identified six areas of emphasis for the 2012-2017 academic plan.

1. Enhancing Student Learning through Excellence in Teaching.

The commitment of Saint Mary's University to excellence in teaching is reflected in our long-standing efforts to provide quality education in a supportive environment. Students enjoy frequent direct contact with faculty, and have increased opportunities for experiential learning and involvement in faculty research. Individual faculty members are recognized internally and externally for excellence in teaching at all levels. Institutional support for instructional development has been strengthened, and programs have been put in place to allow faculty champions to develop and disseminate innovative pedagogical approaches.

Changes have been made to existing programs that lay the groundwork for further innovations in curricula and potential new program development. We have been successful in maintaining an environment where faculty and students are closely engaged with one another in the process of learning, both inside and outside the classroom, locally and globally. We need to ensure that we continue this engagement, and be open to new opportunities to enhance faculty-student interaction. Teaching and research are complementary, and Saint Mary's takes pride in its commitment and ability to integrate the two. The University community must continue to develop innovative approaches to this on-going challenge.

Proposed Actions

- Ensure that processes and resources are in place that support and recognize effective teaching and its continuous improvement.
- Provide opportunities for, and encourage the participation of faculty in, professional development activities focused on enhancing pedagogical skills to promote learning.
- Investigate ways of better supporting both faculty and students to facilitate learning within diverse and multi-cultural classroom environments.

- Support initiatives that enhance faculty-student interaction, foster student engagement, and promote a culture of enquiry.
- Continue to strive for an appropriate balance between teaching and research, and for ways of integrating the two.
- Develop strategies to enhance first year instruction with a view to better engaging and retaining students.
- Investigate and assess approaches to learning outcomes-based curricula.
- Continue to build on innovations in communications technology to enhance learning, in full consultation with all interested parties.

2. Enhancing Student Success

Saint Mary's University recognizes the importance of the contribution and growth of each individual to the success of the university, and this applies particularly to our students. Considerable progress was made, during the tenure of the 2008-2011 Academic Plan, in improving the conditions for student success.

Building on these activities, the focus for student success will be on five major areas of concern: financial aid, retention, transitions (from school to university, from first year to graduation, and from graduation into the work force or graduate studies), assessment of learning objectives, and mentoring.

Proposed Actions

- Building upon the work of the Senate Committee on Student Success, develop and implement a pan-university framework for student success.
- Continue to work towards the coordination of the efforts of individual Faculties, Departments and services to promote student success.

researchers abroad and bringing visiting researchers to Saint Mary's. We also aim to ensure that students, particularly undergraduates, benefit from research activities at the University.

Proposed Actions

- Recognize scholarly achievements of faculty and students as widely as possible.
- Work through the budget pro/MCIJ8od2nB00 /P 6/8ni26.02 639.22 Tm[R]-2(e)(c)(og)10(niz)-7(e)]

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Complementary to and building upon the Academic Plan, the Saint Mary's University Strategic Research Plan, a necessary requirement for various funding agencies, provides more detailed direction and implementation guidance on strategic areas to enhance research and scholarship. The general implementation of the Academic Plan in all other areas is a complex ongoing process. With the approval of the Academic Plan by Senate and the endorsement of the University Board of Governors, a process for consultation regarding implementation will be undertaken.

To that end, a Committee for Academic Plan Implementation will be struck, the terms of reference of which include:

- 1) to solicit and assess information and provide recommendations to the Vice-President Academic and Research about processes, mechanisms and activities advancing the actions of the Academic Plan;
- 2) to prepare an annual overall report on implementation of the Academic Plan to be available on the Academic Plan Web Page.

Among its deliberations, that Committee will be asked to consider:

- 1) through Senate, the convening of a cross-Faculty Task Force to investigate the current social concern for “learning outcomes” in the university setting, and make recommendations for developing a learning outcomes framework in support of hi1 0R,