

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

PREAMBLE

The Saint Mary's University 2012-2017 Academic Plan is presented as a statement of how we view our role in society, as a reaffirmation of our core academic values and commitments, and as a guide to areas of strategic emphasis for the development of our academic programming over the next five years.

Both the 2002-2007 and 2008-2011 plans enjoyed strong support within the Saint Mary's community. Our consultations across the academy that began in 2010/2011 indicated continued support for the priorities of those plans, but also openness to refreshing and refocusing those priorities following upon developments in scholarship, academic programs and infrastructure renewal. Faculty, staff and students welcome sustained momentum in areas where major advances have occurred, and look forward to opportunities for new growth. It was clear that our constituents favored a high-level academic plan upon which implementation plans would be developed.

The 2012-2017 plan reaffirms the fundamental purpose of Saint Mary's University as a force for higher education, always bearing in mind our university vision to educate aspiring citizens of the world. The plan also sets out our values and defines our character as a unique institution within the context of contemporary universities. A section is devoted to outlining the context of Saint Mary's University as a Maritime Canadian mid-sized university, another to describing the progress made over the first decade of the century, and yet another to the challenges we face. These sections provide the foundation in support of the six areas of special emphasis that will be our focus for building on our strengths over the life of the plan. Each area proposes actions that may be taken to further achieve our purpose, on the understanding that implementation plans at the department, faculty and pan-university levels will build on the guidance provided by the plan.

This Academic Plan emanates from the office of the Vice President, Academic and Research, and is approved by Senate, the academic governing body of the university.

## ACADEMIC VISION

Building on its strong tradition, Saint Mary's University will be the University of choice for aspiring citizens of the world. Saint Mary's University aims to cultivate intellectually curious and creative faculty and students with highly developed critical thinking and analytical skills, who are adept at applying theory to practice.

## MISSION

The mission of Saint Mary's University is to offer undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs; to engage in research and to disseminate its results; and to serve the community from the local to the international level.

## ACADEMIC VALUES

### *Discovery and Dissemination of Knowledge*

We recognize that the common good of society depends on knowledge and its free exposition. As the foundation of our mission, Saint Mary's University, through our teaching and scholarship, values discovery and dissemination of knowledge in all its forms.

### *Academic Freedom*

Recognizing knowledge as provisional and subject to reinterpretation, we base our scholarly enquiry on principles of academic integrity and academic freedom, the freedom of students and faculty to explore and assess different approaches and contributions to human knowledge. Academic freedom is the foundation of the intellectual community, which fosters independent critical thinking, informed judgment and expression, and open debate.

### *Professionalism*

True scholarly enquiry arises from intellectual curiosity and is directed by rigorous critical thinking. Within the intellectual community, scholarly communication is fostered by ethical conduct and mutual respect. Our aim is excellence in research and creative activity, and innovative and creative accomplishment in teaching.

### *Inclusiveness*

We recognize the importance of the contribution and growth of each individual. In our efforts to prepare students for responsible and rewarding lives, we value inclusiveness, cultural and intellectual diversity, and a global perspective in our approaches to learning.

### *Collegiality*

As an academy of scholars we value institutional autonomy, collegiality, and shared governance.

## 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, and Engineering. University professional preparation addresses the theory behind the practice, and in keeping with the basic purposes of scholarly education, it engages in research to advance the knowledge base of the profession.

### *Research, Creative Activity and Graduate Studies.*

The creation of knowledge is an essential function of a University, and Saint Mary's has a long tradition of fulfilling this mission by means of original research and creative activity. Institutional support for research has been greatly strengthened and significantly more external funding has become available. As a sign of our commitments to innovation and research, we have invested in strategic areas that have distinguished themselves regionally, nationally, and internationally, entered into fruitful collaborative partnerships with other universities, and increased support for individual scholars. Growth in graduate studies has been a crucial factor in supporting research activity. Under the direction of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, Saint Mary's has taken a leading place among research active universities of a similar size. Our commitment to the research enterprise

has helped to attract high caliber new faculty and students, and assures that undergraduate students, as well as our graduate students, are learning in a research environment.

### *Accessibility and Diversity*

Saint Mary's University promotes an academic environment wherein all members, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or creed, work and study together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation. We are committed to accessibility for the communities we serve, cultivating community involvement and civic engagement. We have a long tradition of responding to the needs of the local community in partnerships and strategic alliances with business and industry, all levels of government, other educational institutions, and non-government agencies. In the spirit of accessibility which we have long cultivated, Saint Mary's looks forward to building stronger relationships with distinct groups within the Nova Scotia cultural fabric, particularly First Nation peoples, African Nova Scotians, and growing immigrant cultures.

Our outreach programs through the Sobey School of Business, the faculties of Arts and Science, and the Continuing Education program, as well as our numerous research centres and institutes, all reflect strong partnerships addressing critical societal needs. We are committed to developing flexible course/program delivery strategies allowing students to study evenings, weekends, off-campus, and through the Internet.

Saint Mary's University's well-established commitment to cultural diversity encourages and supports the development of a global perspective. Our international student numbers continue to grow and reflect our focus on a global citizenry. The internationalization of our curriculum is fostered by diversity in our faculty, who draw upon global experience. Our accessibility is further emphasized in the diversity of cultures represented in our student body, drawn from both international and local communities. The multi-cultural character of our campus and programs offers opportunities for personal enrichment through contact with diverse cultures.

For over thirty years Saint Mary's University has played a leadership role in ensuring that higher education is accessible to students with physical or learning disabilities and to mature students. The work of the Atlantic Centre of Research, Access and Support for Students with Disabilities reflects our on-going commitment to accessibility on which we continue to build.

### *Innovation*

Saint Mary's University has long made a practice of seeking ways to support faculty talents and community interests, and to take advantage of funding opportunities, in order to develop research and programs that meet the needs and interests of the community and of potential students. We have developed many unique and innovative programs by these means. Most of these have arisen out of the talents and initiatives of particular members of the university community who saw an opportunity to contribute to the special character of Saint Mary's University and to create unique learning experiences for our students.

We are committed to continuing and enhancing the exploration of innovative opportunities. Given our commitment to accessibility, experiential learning, interdisciplinarity, and community engagement, we particularly recognize and support scholarship and creative work that addresses community involvement and international concerns.

## OUR PROGRESS

Saint Mary's University has developed from a small institution focused on undergraduate learning into a mid-sized university offering approximately 60 undergraduate and graduate academic programs across four faculties: Arts, Science, Business, and Graduate Studies and Research. The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research is by nature transdisciplinary, overseeing and facilitating graduate studies and research in all other faculties. Arts, Science, and Business have full complements of traditional departments, and our faculty aspire to research and teaching of the highest quality in all sectors.

### *Expanding the Academic Environment*

Saint Mary's University has made great progress in expanding its intellectual capacity and developing its academic environment in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A detailed report on examples of progress under the previous Academic Plan may be found on the Academic Plan web page, accessible on the Saint Mary's University website under "Vice President Academic and Research". What follows here is a summary of outstanding accomplishments embracing a wider historical context.

### *Program Renewal*

The university has experienced significant program renewal. New courses have been developed, changes have been made to existing programs, and new programs have been introduced. The Sobey School introduced a Ph.D. program in 2000, The Institute for Computational Astrophysics graduated its first Ph.D. in 2008, and Psychology now offers a Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. The Faculty of Arts now offers seven masters programs, and Business and Science three each. Recently, new certificates and degrees have been introduced, such as the Certificate in Financial Instrument Analysis, the Minor in Latin American Studies, the Bachelor of Environmental Studies, and the Master of Arts in Theology and Religion. An initiative of the Faculty of Arts, the Bachelor of Arts with a major in entrepreneurship is the only such program offered in a Canadian university. A Major in economics and minor in business also are offered within the B.A. The Faculties of Arts and Science are working to develop a pan-Faculty School of the Environment. The Deans of the Faculties of Arts and Graduate Studies and Research, and the Director of Continuing Education have worked extensively to develop a Master in Liberal Studies, appealing to mature learners in a very accessible format. The Faculty of Arts has been working on developing a Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Culture. Such developments reflect Saint Mary's determination to develop a range of programs meeting the widest expectations of prospective students, and serving the highest aims of post secondary education.

### *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 program.

#### *Professional Development*

Saint Mary's University has shown great progress in faculty renewal, recruiting excellent scholars across all disciplines. Our support for the professional development of our faculty is reflected in the establishment of our Centre for Academic and Instructional Development (CAID). We also have well-developed professional leadership training and education programs. The Saint Mary's University Business Development Centre was created in 1989 to build a bridge between the University and the business community, providing business solutions while developing the student's practical experience. In addition, we offer executive professional development programs and an Executive MBA program. Further, in the interest of sustaining and enhancing this link with the business community, the Sobey School of Business has developed a Master of Finance program suited for those interested in moving into the corporate world as well as those who wish to pursue further research in finance.

Saint Mary's University has been an associate member in the consortium of Canadian Universities that own and operate TRIUMF, Canada's national laboratory for nuclear and particle physics. Over the last few years there has been a very strong growth in subatomic

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. The Faculty of Science has reorganized its advising structure to better serve student needs. The Sobey School of Business has undertaken several initiatives towards improving the School's assurance of learning processes. Continuing Education has developed an orientation guide for students considering returning to university, and is experimenting with university preparation courses. Student Services offers the STEPS (Strategies Toward Establishing Personal Success) program in partnership with the Faculty Deans, and the FYI Boot Camp, which aids students in making the transition from high school to university. Formal and informal surveys of students continue to indicate that they are seeking further improvement in academic advising and career development services.

#### *Campus Renewal and Sustainability*

Substantial attention has been paid over the past decade to infrastructure renewal at the university in support of scholarship and student learning, and to reducing our environmental impact. For example, the Saint Mary's University Energy Project reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 33% through conversion to natural gas, and reduced energy use by 18% through upgrades to the lighting, plumbing, and heating and ventilations systems. Part of this program involved the implementation of the dashboard web page, showing sustainability activities, and current energy and water use, by individual building. New construction of the Atrium complex and the Homburg Centre has greatly improved our facilities and the appeal of our campus. Additional examples of improvements in classroom, laboratories, living space, and meeting space include significant renovations to the Loyola complex, our Science Building, and more recently to the McNally building.

## OUR CHALLENGES

Looking ahead to the next five years, we have the opportunity to build on the successes of our academic programs and support services. As we do so, however, we will have to address many challenges in order to meet our academic vision and mission while remaining true to our values.

#### *Financial*

Financial resources to support our academic programs come from two principal sources, the Provincial Government operating grant to the University, and student tuitions. In 2010, the Government of Nova Scotia released a report with recommendations intended to make the university system in Nova Scotia more competitive and sustainable. The recommendations focused on student accessibility (particularly the needs of low-income students), restructuring of student assistance, administrative efficiencies at universities through increased cooperation, and quality improvements at the universities through monitoring performance and accountability measures. Since the release of the report, Government has reduced operating budgets of Nova Scotia universities by approximately

7% over two fiscal years, and universities face uncertainty in the level of provincial government support looking ahead. Government also recently approved a new multi-year memorandum of understanding between the Government and universities, calling for Nova Scotia universities to develop and implement accountability measures focused broadly on the delivery of quality educational programs.

In the context of those challenges, student tuition at Saint Mary's compares favorably with other Maritime universities. However, given that the majority of the Saint Mary's University operating budget comes from student tuition, decreases in domestic enrolments or in international enrolments from our major markets can have a significant impact on the university's operating budget, with consequent impacts on academic programs. Until recently, student tuitions had not been allowed to increase. Increases are now permitted subject to Government direction on maximum allowable caps. Enrolments also figure prominently in the funding formula used by the Government to determine the university operating budget, and declining domestic enrolments have a disproportionate impact in reducing the university's operating grant that is currently offset by increased international enrolments.

#### *Competition*

Saint Mary's University has traditionally been a university of choice for high school graduates within the Halifax Region. That predominance is being challenged by other universities as demographic shifts occur reflecting fewer high school students within the region. Statistics Canada projects on-going decreases in the 18 to 21 age cohort for the Maritime provinces over the next decade and a half. As competition among universities for fewer domestic Nova Scotia students becomes more acute, Nova Scotia's universities are looking beyond the province to recruit both domestic and international students. In that larger competitive arena, Saint Mary's University has been challenged in attracting domestic students from other provinces. We are also facing greater competition from other Nova Scotia universities that have been paying more attention to attracting international students and are showing significant increases in their numbers of full-time visa students.

#### *Internationalization*

Additionally, with approximately one-quarter of our student body coming from over 90 countries, there are challenges that arise with an increasingly internationalized student body: (1) ensuring that the needs of our growing international student body are met appropriately; (2) concentration of international students in only one of our Faculties; and (3) dependency on only a few countries, whose policies could change, for the majority of our international students.

#### *Student Engagement and Retention*

Canadian universities are focusing on the engagement students in a wide array of campus activities to complement the learning experiences in classrooms, labs and field-work. Saint Mary's University is characterized by a relatively large number of part-time students and those who commute to and from campus. This creates challenges to engage students in a rewarding on-campus life outside of classes.

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.
- Recognizing academic advising as co-curricular academic support, continue to develop a network of academic advisors in faculties and programs.
- Increase recognition and rewards for outstanding student achievements in academic programs, including first year successes in adapting to the university environment.
- Assess the potential for a cohort-based first-year transition program for Nova Scotia and other Canadian high school students with special needs.
- Develop and implement a policy for co-curricular transcripts recognizing extra-curricular activities that contribute to academic development.
- Investigate ways of enhancing Saint Mary's University's appeal as the university of choice for local students.
- Continue efforts to improve the retention rates of students beyond the first year of their academic program.
- Continue to improve our understanding of key dimensions of the student experience and follow up on results with appropriate action.
- Assess and implement best practices for early detection of students requiring preparatory assistance for success in their area of study.

### *3. Linking Theory and Practice*

Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a growing movement among educational institutions for the integration of theory and practice as an integral part of the processes of higher education. This movement is concerned with better preparing students for the transition to successful careers and civic engagement, but even more with stimulating interest in theoretical learning, for levels of student engagement tend to increase with the realization of real world applications of knowledge.

In enhancing the success of our students, and the scholarship of our faculty, we are committed not only to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, but to linking theory and practice as a means of motivating student involvement, and as a means for the development of responsible citizens capable of contributing effectively to the democratic exercise through the application of knowledge.

#### Proposed Actions

- Identify and implement professional development workshops for graduate students.
- Enhance efforts to research and implement innovative techniques that engage students in applied learning in the classroom as well as applied learning opportunities that extend outside the classroom.
- Improve opportunities for students to engage in co-op and internship placements.
- Seek and promote ways in which academic studies can be linked to community involvement projects to promote applied learning experiences.
- Respond to the demand for second credentials by expanding our offerings in various forms of professional preparation.
- Support innovative professional development programs building upon our core strengths across faculties.

### *4. Promoting Research, Creative Activity and Graduate Studies.*

A defining characteristic of Saint Mary's is the success of our scholars in advancing knowledge through substantial growth in high quality research. Success brings with it new challenges. In keeping with our commitment to accessibility, community engagement, and internationalization, many of our research initiatives focus on issues and opportunities faced by the wider community. Saint Mary's University continues its efforts to enhance the communication of research outcomes to external academic and non-academic audiences. In the past five years Saint Mary's University has become recognized by granting agencies, other academics, and regional and national research administrators as highly successful in research activities relative to its peers. It is important to maintain this momentum. We will continue to develop research programs that are relevant to and engage the Atlantic Canada community, and engage in research projects that offer value nationally and internationally by involving Saint Mary's

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 process to ensure that growth in access to scholarly resources keeps pace with our accomplishments in research.
- Facilitate the on-going engagement of faculty in research grant funding opportunities.
- Encourage and facilitate publication of on-going research in scholarly media.
- Facilitate research connections among faculty and potential community partners.
- Continue the strategic development of graduate programs as a key ingredient in our promotion of research, consistent with the Faculty of Graduate Study and Research's "Guiding Principles" document.
- Through our academic review process, continue to improve the quality of our current graduate programs.
- Provide support for scholarship that engages undergraduate students in research studies.
- Further integrate research with teaching and learning, drawing on best practices inside and outside Saint Mary's.
- Continue to apply effective methods of knowledge transfer so that the full social and economic benefits of our research can be realized.
- Maintain our efforts to attract and retain excellent faculty and graduate students.

#### *5. Building Thematic Clusters of Teaching and Research*

Saint Mary's University is committed to building upon its strengths in scholarly enquiry and its research partnerships. As well, we will continue to support the development of new areas of investigation led by our scholars, with particular emphasis on interdisciplinary endeavors. In recent decades, a broadening recognition of the complexity of systems has resulted in an increasing interest in studies that integrate knowledge across disciplines. Disciplinary studies can benefit from cross-fertilization, and students can benefit from studying topics and problems through interdisciplinary approaches. Saint Mary's University's commitments to teaching, research and innovation are reflected in our notable progress in developing interdisciplinary centers, institutes and curricula of various kinds. Exciting innovative research programs and curricula can emerge from thematic collaboration among separate disciplines, and Saint Mary's University aims for leadership in the promotion of such broad-based and comprehensive learning experiences.

#### Proposed Actions

- Build on already established programs as major foci of integrated interdisciplinary areas of enquiry.

- Provide support for innovative new areas of enquiry that serve the academic mission of Saint Mary's University.
- Investigate innovative structures of organization to better support both interdisciplinary programs and traditional departments simultaneously.
- Further internationalize our scholarship and curricula through support for interdisciplinary studies that contribute to understanding of global issues.
- Sustain and build upon academic programming and scholarship focused on culture, health and wellness and on sustainability issues, such as green energy.
- Explore further opportunities for involving the larger community in the sponsorship of endowed chairs of interdisciplinary study.
- Develop ways of assessing existing interdisciplinary programs to assure their continued vitality.

#### *6. Enhancing our International Diversity.*

Saint Mary's University is among the most international of Canada's mid-sized universities. The strong international character of the University is rooted deeply in its history and currently consists of a high proportion of students who come from outside Canada, the extensive involvement of Saint Mary's in international projects and partnerships involving research and technical assistance, and the offering of programs with a specific international focus. Our Centre for Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) brings hundreds of additional international students on campus each year and serves for many as a stepping-stone into our degree programs. Saint Mary's also provides opportunities for students to take advantage of international field trips and study abroad.

As our success in attracting students from abroad to Saint Mary's University has increased, we have benefitted from the diversity of ideas and experiences gained from individuals of multiple cultures coming together. Challenges also arise that require that we be ever mindful of the need to think about student learning and success across a multitude of cultures.

#### Proposed Actions

- Improve coordination among the various agencies across campus that are working on internationalization.
- Provide greater opportunities for students to develop ways of linking theoretical learning to real world experience by studying abroad.
- Investigate and implement ways of engaging international and local students at Saint Mary's University in an exchange of ideas and experiences.
- Continue to internationalize the curriculum as a way of engaging global issues and of linking global issues to local, social, and economic realities.
- Explore new markets and strategies to recruit international students.
- Develop recommendations for best practices aimed at assisting and supporting international students as they progress through their degree programs.
- Further support international research and research partnerships.

## 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 high quality learning experiences for students;
- 2) the establishment of a Working Group on Linking Theory and Practice to investigate and recommend techniques to incorporate within academic programs; and
- 3) the reorganization of the International Working Group to recommend best practices aimed at ensuring international student success.