

**ACADEMIC PLAN
FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT**

April 2, 2002

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VISION

Saint Mary's, building on its strong tradition of accessibility and community engagement, will be the *University of Choice* for aspiring citizens of the world.

MISSION

The mission of Saint Mary's University is to offer undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs to both full-time and part-time students; to carry out research and disseminate its results; and to serve the community at the local, regional, national, and international levels. In carrying out its mission, Saint Mary's is guided by a commitment to accessibility, diversity, and the provision of a positive and supportive learning environment. It attaches high priority to promoting the personal as well as intellectual development of students, to encouraging engagement with global issues, and to fostering the spirit of critical inquiry through the effective integration of teaching and research.

HISTORY AND CHARACTER

Saint Mary's special character is a product of both its history, which reaches back to 1802, and of the innovative spirit in which it has approached contemporary educational and social issues. The University was founded by the Roman Catholic community of Nova Scotia, many members of which would otherwise have had limited access to higher education. From the outset, it served as a community resource and as a means of collective self-improvement for the population it served. In 1970, Saint Mary's entered a new phase of its existence when it became a public, co-educational institution and entered a period of rapid growth. Adapting to changing times, it has continued to forge partnerships with community groups, including business, government, labour and the voluntary sector. These partnerships have resulted in many innovative programs of community outreach and the development of academic programs that respond to community needs. Throughout its history, Saint Mary's has also had strong international linkages, provided first by the networks of the clergy and religious orders who staffed and administered it, later by government-sponsored educational and research initiatives.

THE FUTURE: 2002-2007

The motto of Saint Mary's is "*Age quod agis*" – "What you do, do well!"

This motto provides the guiding principle for this academic plan, which aims to identify and support the areas where Saint Mary's can excel, either by building on existing strengths or by rising to new opportunities. The distinction between existing strengths and new opportunities is a relative one. Areas of established strength leave plenty of scope for innovation and will remain strong only through continuous development; new opportunities are available in spheres where we have already experienced a degree of success and now have the chance to grow. Strategic choices will be crucial in defining the scope of our activities and in achieving the appropriate balance between various aspects of our work. This balance depends not on "dividing up the pie" between competing priorities but on ensuring that our endeavours are well integrated and mutually reinforcing. In achieving such integration, the best use of resources through collaboration and co-operation will be a key strategy.

Key Success Factors

Resources

The success of our Academic Plan depends on having the necessary human, financial, and physical resources to support its implementation.

Human resources - Saint Mary's principal asset is our people. To realize our goals, we must have successful programs of student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention, well thought-out provisions for professional development, active strategies for promoting cooperation between faculty and staff who provide academic support, and effective means for including students in consultative processes and the definition of priorities.

Physical resources - We also require a strong and fully integrated academic infrastructure. Tools for success include up-to-date information technology, an on-going program of classroom upgrades, and state-of-the art laboratories and research facilities.

Financial resources - We must also secure adequate funding and use it strategically in support of our goals. The Academic Plan will inform our efforts to obtain new sources of revenue from both public and private sources, and guide the allocation of resources internally. Initiatives which support more than one of our strategic objectives by promoting integration and interdisciplinarity will be assigned a high priority.

Data and Analysis – To plan effectively and make the best use of our human, financial and physical resources, we must have accurate, integrated databases and a fully developed capacity for institutional analysis.

Culture

In addition to securing resources of various kinds, we must also sustain and promote an institutional culture consistent with our plan. Specifically, we must foster a spirit of innovation, an openness to collaboration, and a culture of respect for students. Strongly committed to accessibility, Saint Mary's must also continue to excel at removing barriers to education among students with special needs and at welcoming students from a variety of social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Building on Strengths

Undergraduate Teaching and Learning

Saint Mary's has a long history of achievement in undergraduate education. With a comprehensive and innovative Arts faculty, the Atlantic region's leading business school, and a dynamic Science faculty, it also offers two years of study in Engineering and a range of programs of value to current and prospective teachers. Saint Mary's undergraduate programs emphasize both breadth and depth and are designed so that students can combine courses of study from two or more faculties. Student teacher ratios are favourable, average class sizes are small, and the percentage of regular faculty with doctoral degrees is exceptionally high. Saint Mary's has developed innovative certificate and diploma programs in response to community needs and requests. The latest educational technology is used to enhance learning in a variety of contexts and to overcome the limitations of time and space. Strong academic programs are delivered in an environment marked by tolerance and concern for the personal well-being of students.

It is essential that Saint Mary's maintain the strength and vitality of its undergraduate programs. This objective will not be served simply by maintaining the *status quo*. Success depends on an on-going and organized process of development and renewal, informed by the mission and values of the institution.

Actions:

- In the development of undergraduate curricula, include programs and opportunities which are closely related to faculty research and community outreach.
- Under the auspices of Senate, carry out regular reviews of academic programs, and ensure that such reviews are consequential by following through on recommendations.
- Develop sound methods for student evaluation of programs, courses, instructors and services and make student feedback an important factor in planning reforms.
- Maintain close contact between faculty and students as a hallmark of Saint Mary's.

- Expand accessibility through the further use of educational technology and the selective development of programs using the World Wide Web.
- Foster high standards of student literacy by implementing a campus-wide strategy.
- Recognize that learning takes place inside and outside the classroom. Cultivate opportunities for experiential learning and for a high level of involvement in both the university and the community.
- Develop, promote, and continuously evaluate library resources to ensure that they are closely and effectively tied to the academic programs of the university.

Community Outreach

Saint Mary's is uniquely committed to service to the local, regional, national and international communities, a commitment which it realizes through outreach activities, community-based research programs, and contributions to life-long learning. Its reputation as an open and responsive educational institution has brought it a large measure of goodwill in the community. Outreach units include the downtown Business Development Centre, which supports entrepreneurial initiatives; the Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, which contributes to the cultural life of the community; the Burke-Gaffney Observatory, which promotes science education in the schools and among the public; and the university's athletic facilities, an invaluable resource for recreational activities and for building community spirit. In a number of ways, Saint Mary's places its research capacity at the disposal of the community, through the work of individual students and faculty as well as through collaborative and group projects. Continuing education programs offer a variety of opportunities for life-long learning. Saint Mary's downtown campus in the World Trade Centre and various off-campus extension centres facilitate access to an array of courses and programs.

In community partnerships at many levels, Saint Mary's is working from a position of strength and is well positioned to build on its experience and reputation at home and abroad. While a strong foundation exists for future success, energy and creativity are required to make the most of our opportunities.

Actions:

- Develop new community-based research partnerships, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally taking full advantage of new federal funding programs that support such partnerships.
- Develop, expand, and/or support a select number of academic institutes and centres as bridges to the community and as means of influencing public policy.

- Increase the availability of Saint Mary's research and academic facilities to the wider community, combining such access (where appropriate) with the generation of additional revenues for the university.
- Advance partnerships with community and professional groups as a way of developing and expanding programs for life-long learners.

International Programming

Closely associated with Saint Mary's commitment to community service is its distinctively international character, reflected in its proportion of international students (approximately 10%) and its success in securing funding for international projects. Saint Mary's students come from approximately 90 countries. Flourishing programs in English as a Second Language provide a crucial component of both international recruitment and international partnerships. Saint Mary's has a number of active collaboration agreements with universities and educational agencies around the world, and offers study abroad opportunities and international mobility opportunities to students in a variety of its programs. Its undergraduate and graduate programs in International Development Studies are nationally recognized and are important ingredients in its international programming. Other programs in traditional disciplines combined with those in Asian Studies and Global Business also play an important role.

Actions:

- Achieve further increases in the number of international students at Saint Mary's, ensuring that such students have the services, supports and opportunities they require.
- Work for the greater internationalization of the Saint Mary's curriculum as a way of engaging global issues and of preparing students to live and work in a global environment.
- Promote and support greater student mobility and more extensive participation of Saint Mary's students in study abroad opportunities, exchange programs and international internships.
- Diversify and achieve greater balance in Saint Mary's international linkages by establishing or strengthening ties in countries or regions where our presence has hitherto been relatively weak.

Meeting Challenges and Opportunities

Student Satisfaction and Success

Saint Mary's has a strong tradition of providing a positive, supportive environment for students. In the face of current pressures on higher education and the growing demands on students, faculty, and staff, the university will be challenged to live up to its institutional values in this respect. Growth in size and complexity must not be allowed to undermine the friendly and humane atmosphere of the campus. Saint Mary's must provide and maintain high-quality facilities and services for students and ensure that policies and procedures are fair and responsive to their needs.

While working to ensure a positive experience for students, Saint Mary's must also intensify its efforts to increase student success. For a variety of reasons - personal and financial as well as academic - a minority of Saint Mary's students do not complete their academic programs. In the interests of both the university and the students, it is imperative to work toward an improvement in completion rates by strengthening academic support and enhancing student life.

Actions:

- Improve academic advising, emulating best practices inside and outside Saint Mary's.
- Facilitate program planning for students by rationalizing the timetable and by making accurate information about course offerings available in a more timely way.
- Develop and/or strengthen university preparatory courses, access programs for under-represented groups, academic help centres and peer support programs.
- Work toward more effective and expeditious procedures for responding to student complaints and appeals.
- Use all available means to limit the financial burden which students bear, including increasing scholarships and bursaries, limiting tuition increases wherever possible, and providing opportunities for on-campus and co-operative employment. Develop criteria of eligibility for scholarships and bursaries, which reflect the exigencies of contemporary student life, including the fact that many students are unable to take full course loads.
- Build on Saint Mary's career development programs to build the confidence of students and facilitate their transition to the workplace.

Research and Scholarship

Saint Mary's faculty and students have made significant contributions to scholarship over many years. An important dimension of this success has been the extent to which undergraduate students have been included in faculty research projects. Given the historically undergraduate character of the university, however, research has not been assigned as high a priority as it otherwise might have been. Saint Mary's has now reached a point in its history where a greater emphasis on research is possible and opportune. The demands of a knowledge-based economy and the challenges facing a society undergoing fundamental change make the generation of new knowledge and the critical assessment of inherited assumptions matters of urgency. Increased public investment in research, especially by the federal government, offers greater access to the necessary resources. Research funding is increasingly linked to community partnerships, and this trend converges strongly with Saint Mary's traditions of outreach and service. Faculty renewal, crucial to a flourishing research agenda, has been exceptional at Saint Mary's, as nearly half of its current complement was appointed in the last ten years. By the same token, the opportunity to pursue both research and teaching is a central concern of prospective new faculty members. A strong research culture is therefore essential to future recruitment.

Actions:

- In keeping with the Strategic Research Plan for the university, build clusters of research strength in areas where Saint Mary's has the capacity to excel. The appointment of Canada Research Chairs is a crucial ingredient in this strategy.
- Under the auspices of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, develop strategies for gaining maximum access to external research funding from granting councils, other government sources and private foundations.
- Identify additional sources of funds that can be used to supplement current resources for seeding research projects, securing matching funds, and supporting internal research projects.
- Recognize the mounting challenges and opportunities facing scholarly communication, and adopt collaborative strategies for maximizing library resources and supporting research.
- Build on efforts to recognize and publicize the research accomplishments of Saint Mary's faculty. Strengthen Saint Mary's image as a research-active university.

Graduate Studies

Graduate Studies is an area where Saint Mary's has an opportunity to grow significantly. The university currently offers a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary master's programs and a Ph.D. in Commerce, the only one in Atlantic Canada. The momentum which has developed points to further growth, especially in interdisciplinary programs and in areas where Saint Mary's possesses unique strength. Both the capacity and demand exist. The creation of clusters of expertise in strategically selected fields, including through the appointment of Canada Research Chairs, provides the necessary strength to support new masters and doctoral programs. Rising educational standards, the growing demand for employees with graduate qualifications, and strong interest among international students in Saint Mary's programs (current and proposed) offer sound reasons to believe that enrolments in our programs will be strong.

Actions:

- Increase enrolments in existing graduate programs to ensure their viability, to provide graduate students with opportunities for enrichment through interaction with their peers, and to provide a cohort of students who can participate in faculty research projects.
- Under the leadership of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, define criteria and a plan for the development of graduate programs. As part of this planning process, explore appropriate opportunities for inter-university graduate programs and programs designed for non-traditional graduate students.
- Incorporate graduate students into the teaching and research missions of the university, linking such involvement to their professional development.
- Ensure that the particular needs of graduate students are addressed in the further development of the library's resources and services.
- Under the auspices of Senate, develop a system for systematically reviewing graduate programs, either by themselves or in conjunction with broader program reviews.
- Support the development of graduate studies with adequate resources, including competitive fellowships and assistantships for students and provisions for graduate teaching to be included consistently in faculty teaching loads.