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Winter 2021

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GOLD & BLUE LAW EDITION

# SCHOOL *of* LAW

## ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

FALL 2020/WINTER 2021



# *Justice for all*

New dean to build on spirit of  
service at St. Mary's Law

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REMEMBERING

## RUTH BADER GINSBURG

(From left to right) In July 1995, Georgetown Law Professor Marty Ginsburg, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and St. Mary's University School of Law Professors Gerald S. Reamey and Vincent R. Johnson (standing) hike along the Panoramaweg, a trail high in the Alps above Innsbruck, Austria. The Ginsburgs taught in the St. Mary's University School of Law's program in Innsbruck that summer.



Courtesy Photo

**On the cover:** New St. Mary's University School of Law Dean Patricia Roberts, J.D., stands under the archway featuring the Marianist cross near the Sarita Kenedy East Law Library. Read more on Page L6. Photo by Carlos Javier Sanchez.

## St. Mary's team wins national constitutional law moot court competition

The St. Mary's University School of Law Advocacy Program continued to dominate this fall, securing a national championship win and several individual awards before the end of the semester.

The National Moot Court Team earned a national championship at the 20th Annual Leroy R. Hassell Sr. National Constitutional Law Moot Court Competition, and went on to place second at the Mack Kidd Administrative Law State Moot Court Competition.

The team's coach, attorney Ricky J. Poole (J.D. '90), said the recipe for success is three-fold: having intelligent, talented and motivated student advocates; conducting exhaustive preparation both before and during the competition; and having a tempered confidence to communicate their message.

The National Trial Team participated in the third annual Battle of Experts in Philadelphia in October, finishing in a three-way tie.

Collectively, the National Team has earned a number of awards this fall, including best advocate and best brief. Read more about Advocacy on Page L2.

## Law school creates committee on diversity, equity and inclusion

This summer, School of Law Dean Patricia Roberts, J.D., established a Dean's Advisory Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which is looking at ways to celebrate and grow the existing diverse law school community.

Currently, 66% of St. Mary's Law students come from racially diverse backgrounds. St. Mary's is also a recognized Hispanic-Serving Institution, and 50% of its law students are Hispanic.

The advisory committee will not only advise the dean on ways to increase diversity among faculty, staff and students, but also help establish goals that require accountability, identify areas for improvement, and increase programming and training opportunities to ensure all community members feel valued and included.

The School of Law's committee complements and strengthens a broader University effort also launched this summer,



André Hampton

the President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which is tasked with creating a strategic plan for inclusive excellence. The University committee is chaired by Professor of Law André Hampton, J.D.

## St. Mary's Law launches pilot mentorship program

The St. Mary's University School of Law partnered with the San Antonio Bar Association to connect 87 second- and third-year J.D. students with experienced lawyers to mentor them during fall semester.

The new Mentor Circles program connects students with experienced lawyers in a confidential, small-group setting to discuss different practice areas and work settings, real-world ethical dilemmas, career strategies and other career-enhancing topics.

The pilot program included three sessions, on the topics, Things I Wish I Had Known Earlier in My Law Career; Practice Areas, Work Cultures and Career Options; and a Q&A.

Each mentor circle had two or more volunteer lawyers who were paired with groups of eight students or fewer. One student from each circle was designated as a student leader, who assisted the lawyers in scheduling and preparing sessions, as well as summarizing takeaways to send to the group.

"We were excited to launch Mentor Circles because they create a unique opportunity for our 2L and 3L students to interact with experienced attorneys willing to discuss the challenges of practicing law and provide practical advice and guidance," said Robin Thorner, J.D., Assistant Dean for Career Services.

To learn more about mentoring opportunities, email Thorner at [rthorner@stmarytx.edu](mailto:rthorner@stmarytx.edu).

## Donation enables St. Mary's Law to access multistate bar exam practice questions

Thanks to a \$68,000 donation, the St. Mary's University School of Law contracted a one-year institutional license for multistate bar exam practice questions this fall.

The service, AdaptiBar, provides access to more than 2,000 multiple choice questions from previous bar exams. The questions cover a wide variety of topics, including contracts, torts, property, constitutional law and criminal law.

Professors incorporated questions into their classes during the fall semester, helping students to measure their understanding of the lessons.

"You're having the students practice with questions that actually appear on the exam, and just giving them this really cool, early exposure to the style of question, to the topics that are being tested, and some of the strategies that are used to tackle them," said Zoe Niesel, J.D., Director of Assessment and Statistics, and Associate Professor of Law.

## New professorships help ensure highest-quality faculty

With the help of generous donors, St. Mary's University created two professorships to help recruit and retain highly accomplished faculty in the areas of Law and Accounting, who will help propel students to academic excellence.

The University named Michael S. Ariens, J.D., LL.M., a faculty member of the School



Michael S. Ariens

of Law, to the Aloysius A. Leopold Professorship of Law. Mark B. Persellin, Ph.D., of the Greehey School of Business, was named to the Ray and Dorothy Berend Endowed Professorship in Accounting.

"It only takes one professor to make a lasting positive difference in a student's trajectory," said President Thomas M. Mengler, J.D. "These new appointments demonstrate the lasting effect gifts can have on the faculty of the University and the generations of students they educate and mentor over the course of their careers."

These announcements build upon a series of donations from alumni and friends of the University supporting The Defining Moment Comprehensive Campaign, the largest campaign in the institution's history.

# PIVOTING WITH EXCELLENCE

## ST. MARY'S COMMUNITY ADAPTS IN RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC

by Frank Garza

This year, the St. Mary's University School of Law community joined together as never before to meet the needs of its student body and the San Antonio region. Faculty, staff, students and alumni have adapted to new challenges not just at the onset of COVID-19 in the spring, but throughout the summer and fall semesters by holding virtual advocacy competitions, deepening classroom discussions online, embracing remote work experiences and providing pro bono legal aid to health care workers.



### ALL-STAR PROFESSOR LEADS THE WAY FOR NATIONAL VIRTUAL ADVOCACY COMPETITIONS

The day that A.J. Bellido de Luna, J.D., Hardy Director of Advocacy and Service Professor, was supposed to cancel the St. Mary's University School of Law's Lone Star Classic for the fall, three other advocacy competitions had been canceled.

He paused. What was going on? By this point, it was April. In March, his students had their spring competitions taken from them. Hours and hours of preparation went untested. He remembered their disappointed faces.

"There had to be another way," he said. That thinking would not only lead St. Mary's Law to launch a new form of online competition,

but also to the law school assisting the American Bar Association with two of its national competitions and possibly more.

Trying to regroup the Lone Star Classic, Bellido de Luna reached out to a couple of schools to see if they were willing to do something online in hopes of hosting a tournament.

Loyola University New Orleans, Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, UCLA, UC Berkeley and UC San Diego were among the first to sign up. Shortly after, Pace University in New York and the Inter American University of Puerto Rico also offered to help. Suddenly, the schools were looking at hosting a March Madness-style, 64-team tournament. The Lone Star Classic was reborn as the National All Star Bracket Challenge.

"A lot of schools loved the fact that we stepped up at a time when others were stepping down, not because they wanted to, but because they didn't have the support or the resources to move forward," said Bellido de Luna, who is president-elect of the National Association of Law Advocacy Educators. "The positivity behind this has been outrageous."

St. Mary's created two more tournaments with partner schools as a result: the All Star National Challenge, which took place in November, and the National All Star Moot Competition (with the help of South Texas College of Law), which begins oral arguments in January. Together, these competitions will have hosted 140 schools and 150 teams from 34 states and two U.S. territories.

To level the playing field for all involved, each competing school received the same equipment: two high-definition cameras, two studio-quality microphones, a hub to plug them into, extension cords and a stand for their iPad or cellphone.

"It is definitely harder to host a tournament online. There are a lot of things that can and will go wrong," Bellido de Luna said. "That's just the nature of technology."

When the American Bar Association heard about what St. Mary's Law and its partner schools had done, they reached out asking for assistance. During the regional competitions this fall, St. Mary's Law offered technical assistance so that the ABA's negotiations and arbitration tournaments could do online scoring and behind-the-scenes tabulations.

St. Mary's also helped with national moot court championships through November. It will also assist with the National Moot Court Competition finals in February, co-sponsored by the New York City Bar Association and the American College of Trial Lawyers; and will assist with the National Trial Competition in February, co-sponsored by the American College of Trial Lawyers and the Texas Young Lawyers Association. St. Mary's will provide bailiff training, judge training, competitor resources, on-call help and assistance with developing the rules for remote competition.

"We were the first school to say, 'We're going to do this,'" Bellido de Luna said. "To some degree, we had to make it up as we went along, but we're learning."

## ASSOCIATE DEAN BRINGS LEGAL TOPICS INTO FOCUS THROUGH ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Even before COVID-19 hit, Colin P. Marks, J.D., Associate Dean for Graduate and Summer Programs and Ernest W. Clemens Professor of Law, was certified to teach classes online. So, when he pivoted his approach mid-semester last spring, his students continued to learn through short video lectures with quizzes and a once-a-week Zoom session to discuss learning objectives and questions.

Using learning objectives, Marks said, has been the biggest teaching method he's picked up during this time. By publishing them at the start of each chapter and assignment, it really helped focus the class and his teaching on the truly important topics. It also helped his students stay engaged.

"The responses have demonstrated that the students are not just processing the material," said Marks, who was also the 2019-2020 president of the Southeastern Association of Law Schools, "but have thought about the policy underpinnings of the law."



## EXTERNSHIP DIRECTOR HELPS PREP STUDENTS FOR VIRTUAL PRACTICE

Hustling to move the law school's Externship Program online by summer, Amanda Rivas (J.D. '09), Director of Externships, said her main focus was on supporting externship supervisors and externs as they switched to remote working environments, ensuring that students would continue to receive challenging work and feedback.

Externships are experiential learning courses that allow St. Mary's J.D. students to earn credit while working with a nonprofit, government agency or select in-house counsel. They give students a better understanding of the relationship between legal doctrine and practical legal skills.

Externship Program staff created a training video and resource manual, hosted

supervisor training sessions and added tailored resources for students.

Rivas emphasized building community among her students via online discussions of American Bar Association articles, TED Talks, interactive timelines and more.

"Starting an externship comes with all the stress and anxiety of starting a new job. It's an exciting but scary time," Rivas said. "Self-doubt can overwhelm you. Building community in our online course from the start assures students they are not going through these growing pains alone."

Developing a sense of community ensures students will continue to develop the skills they need for future work.

"Virtual practice may last longer than this pandemic crisis," Rivas said. "We want our students to leave their externships with the skills to succeed."

## ASSISTANT DEAN FORGES NEW DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

In some ways, going virtual has made it easier for the Office for Law Student Affairs to meet with students, said Alan K. Haynes, J.D., Assistant Dean for Law Student Affairs. Setting up meetings with students before could be difficult, especially if they lived outside San Antonio. Even if it's just a conversation, Haynes will use Zoom instead of the phone to talk to the student.

"You get a better sense of what's going on if you're talking to someone you can actually see," Haynes said. "You get a better sense of what it is you need to do. You can share your screen, you can share documents, which is easier especially if it's related to registered student organizations."

Even before COVID-19, Haynes used Calendly — an automated scheduling software — to set student appointments. After the pandemic hit, he worked with Felicia Cruz (B.A. '12, M.A. '14), Ph.D., Director of Online Learning and Curriculum Innovation, to set up a system through which students could reach him at any time.

"Even after we get back to normal, whatever that will be defined as, it's going to be easy to connect with a student, even if they're in Austin," Haynes said.





## ASSOCIATE DEAN HONES SENSE OF GRATITUDE THROUGH ONLINE TRANSITION

This fall, Ramona L. Lampley, J.D., Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Law, kept students engaged through a hybrid of synchronous and asynchronous components, coupled with multiple assessments and a flipped-classroom model.

This teaching method included pre-recorded short lectures, multiple choice quizzes, a 70-minute Zoom lecture and the use of discussion threads to assess legal writing.

Lampley has seen a tremendous improvement in her students' writing abilities through the use of discussion threads and individualized feedback. Seeing her students on Zoom has become one of the highlights of her day, she said.

"We've had to adapt to a new way of life, and those moments of seeing a face and smile become even more special," Lampley said.

"I am grateful to interact with motivated and inspirational law students and colleagues who make amazing contributions to our community."

## LAW STUDENTS AND ALUMNI UNITE TO PROVIDE REMOTE SERVICES TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Several St. Mary's Law students and alumni joined an effort by the San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA) to draft wills for health care workers battling COVID-19 on the frontlines in San Antonio this summer.

Though they couldn't meet with clients in person, third-year J.D. students Georgia-Beth Blue (pictured below) and Katarina Kretz adapted.

They had to send the paperwork over and follow up if the health care workers had questions or hadn't yet submitted the information. It could be difficult scheduling times to talk because the workers often had hectic schedules, Blue said.

"Remote work is definitely a unique experience. I finished my spring internship remote, so I had limited experience working with clients remotely," Kretz said. "Because everyone understood we were in uncharted territory and that we are all in this together, it aided in making the transition more seamless."

It was also a fulfilling experience, Blue added.

"These people were risking their health to help all of us in the community," Blue said. "To be able to give a little back to them is truly rewarding."

Faye Bracey (J.D. '81), Sara E. Dysart (B.A. '74, J.D. '81) and SALSA board member Mary Stich (B.A. '78, J.D. '81), dove deeply into volunteer recruitment and client coordination for this project. The trio met in law school and remained friends.

"When I think about all the volunteers and the way we leaned-in together, it was like we were leaning in together in law school again," Stich said of her experience working with Bracey and Dysart. "There is a bond we have that allowed us to do some good as part of a broader team of volunteers."

The three alumnae recruited more than 300 volunteers to the project in the course of a week. Bracey also acted as a program director. Stich volunteered her time for cases. Dysart, in addition to taking cases, wrote thank you notes to volunteers.

SALSA alleviated stress for people who otherwise may not have been able to find a lawyer to draft a will during the pandemic, Bracey said.

"Lawyers are dedicated to ensuring access to justice, which means legal representation for everybody, but the reality is that lawyers are very expensive," Dysart said. "When you think about people who are financially challenged, how do they get legal services? It's those kinds of needs that SALSA and other pro bono legal organizations address."



# My path, *mi ohtli*

*Law alumna creates paths for the overlooked and underserved*

*by Melanie Skaggs (M.A. '02)*



Courtesy Photo

“I didn’t think I had a shot. People questioned hiring me as the CEO of an organization of engineers. Why this Latina and why a lawyer? I like to think I’ve proven them all wrong.”

In 2017, after a 20-year law career, Raquel Tamez (J.D. ’98) set on a new course as CEO of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE). She felt drawn to its mission, empowering the Hispanic community through careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

“Law school was the foundation for my executive presence. What I learned there set me up for success in my legal career and success as a CEO,” Tamez said. “It’s about demonstrating leadership and articulating a vision.”

As a young girl, Tamez witnessed the injustice toward relatives and neighbors who talked about not getting paid for a job or being fired. She remembers the discrimination they faced because of their race and lack of opportunities.

Growing up poor in Houston’s Second Ward, the youngest of six born to Mexican immigrants, Tamez “hated seeing other people feel helpless,” and viewed education as a pathway to independence and opportunities.

Tamez developed grit early. She rode a bus across town to River Oaks, one of Houston’s wealthiest areas, to attend better schools.

When she finished high school, Tamez received full-ride scholarship offers from multiple schools. She applied to law school after graduating from the University of Texas in Austin and discovered her professional calling. She selected the St. Mary’s University School of Law to benefit from a small-school experience.

“I saw a legal profession as a way to influence change and have an impact,” she said. “Law school was the first step along that path. For the first time in my life, I felt viscerally motivated by a sense of justice. I knew deep down that I would always be on a mission or a part of one.”

During law school, Tamez participated in mock trial and moot court, was a teacher’s assistant, clerked for several firms and represented individuals as part of the Immigration and Human Rights Clinic. She now serves on the School of Law Dean’s Board of Visitors.

Tamez has used her law expertise throughout her career to inform her role as a Latina leader and advocate. After earning her J.D., Tamez joined the U.S. Department of Labor, prosecuting cases involving labor violations. Then at Mary Kay Inc., she supported an organization that helps empower women around the world. Later, as chief legal officer and general counsel at SourceAmerica, she advocated for and helped create opportunities for people with significant disabilities. Throughout, Tamez helped open paths for the overlooked and underserved.

When the opportunity to join SHPE as CEO presented itself, she was apprehensive but knew she would be helping advance the Hispanic community.

“It was a calculated risk going to work for SHPE, but I wasn’t going it alone,” Tamez said. “Since I’ve been there, we have accomplished great things together as a SHPE familia, most importantly, creating new and more opportunities for Hispanics and their families throughout the country.”

In September 2020, the Mexican Government honored Tamez with the prestigious Ohtli Award, given to individuals who have aided, empowered or positively affected Mexican nationals’ lives in the United States or other countries. The name “ohtli” is a Nahuatl word that means “path,” implying the idea of presenting a way for others.

“Dare to create new paths, not just for yourself, but for others,” she said. “It’s the paths that I create and leave for others that mean the most to me. My story is an American one, but my path, the one that led me here, will always be my ohtli.” ■



# Justice for all

## New dean to build on spirit of service at St. Mary's Law

by Frank Garza

**T**he mark of a great law school to Patricia Roberts, J.D., is weaving values of service into the educational mission, while training skilled, competent lawyers — both ethical and formed in faith.

Though only seven months into her deanship of the St. Mary's University School of Law, she said the campus, which is home to these ideals, already feels like her home as well.

After all, she said, St. Mary's Law has similar values to her alma mater and former employer, William & Mary Law School in Williamsburg, Virginia.

"Their mission and identity centered around the idea of creating citizen lawyers, as Thomas Jefferson originally foresaw. We have a responsibility to others," Roberts said.

It is this sentiment she saw practiced by faculty and staff at St. Mary's, especially during the pandemic.

"Despite really trying times, and a requirement that we reevaluate the way we've always done things, everyone stepped up 100% to make sure we were ready for our students," Roberts said. "We didn't have to ask, 'Will you help us do this?' Everyone just did it."

### *Fulfilling a dream*

Since age 12, Roberts knew she wanted to become a lawyer. She remembered being struck by the ending of the movie, *And Justice for All*, starring Al Pacino.

"I was just devastated by the idea that the law could get it wrong, that the system could be that broken," she recalled.

After earning her bachelor's degrees in biology and psychology from what was then Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, she went straight to law school at William & Mary.

"I approached my studies very much like an undergraduate. What I didn't realize at the time is it's more about application and less about memorization," Roberts said. "The tendency is to say, 'Oh, here's the answer,' when the law is often never that simple."

As the first in her family to attend law school, Roberts didn't have any family members who could offer her advice on how to approach legal studies. She earned her J.D. with guidance from faculty and administrators at William & Mary and by utilizing resources outside the law school, which inspired her to build stronger mentorship programs at St. Mary's Law.

### *Courtroom to classroom*

For eight years, Roberts practiced civil litigation: insurance law, personal injury and medical malpractice cases. Yet she felt she was not making the kind of impact on people's lives for which she hoped.

"I wanted to help people solve problems, help get them out of trouble. But what I found was there was less of that and more adversarial fighting with opposing counsel," Roberts said. "It was more about a scorched-earth policy than finding a solution. I don't mind conflict when it's necessary, but I do mind conflict for the sake of conflict."

This prompted her to start teaching at her alma mater as an adjunct professor. She loved it and became Assistant Dean for Academic Programs when a position opened in 2000. That experience developed into a passion for pro bono work, especially veterans' issues. Her closest friend served in Vietnam, her father served in the U.S. Army Reserve, her father-in-law in the U.S. Army and her husband in the U.S. Navy. In talking with more veterans, her desire to help them only grew.

"Once you sit down with veterans and you listen to the sacrifices that they and their families have made, you understand the tremendous complexity they go through in order to obtain benefits to which they're entitled," Roberts said. "And you hear the selflessness that they continue to have when you're pursuing their claim. They're always worried about other veterans, veterans who had it worse than them."

She started Military Mondays at William & Mary, a program that provides advice and counsel to veterans in Starbucks locations throughout the country, and was the inaugural president of the Board of Directors of the National Law School Veterans Clinic Consortium. She served on several boards in Virginia, and frequently speaks on veterans' issues and access to justice nationwide.

She eventually became William & Mary Law's Director of Clinical Programs in 2008, Clinical Professor of Law in 2014 and Vice Dean in 2017, before coming to St. Mary's in June as the new School of Law Dean and Charles E. Cantú Distinguished Professor of Law.

Though she doesn't reflect on it often, Roberts recognizes how fortunate she is to be in a leadership position in a field long dominated by men. She sees opportunities for female leaders opening up more and more.

"For every woman who does the job well, she's paved the way for the next generation," Roberts said.

### *Looking to the future*

Even before Roberts arrived on campus, her commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and the success of St. Mary's Law was clear, said Robin Thorner, J.D., Assistant Dean of Career Services.

"She values each member of the law school community, including our students, staff, faculty and alumni; listens to what they have to say; and supports them in their personal and professional development,"



Photo by Carlos Javier Sanchez

## School of Law Goals

Continue enrolling *diverse student populations*, including first-generation students from minority backgrounds and nontraditional students

Ensure that *support is in place through the Law Success Program* and curriculum so every admitted student can succeed academically and pass the bar

Increase the *School of Law's engagement* with alumni, improve annual giving to more than 6%

Raise funds to *renovate the Law Courtroom*

Influence the *School of Law's regional and national reputation* by highlighting the impact of faculty accomplishments



Dean Patricia Roberts gives welcome remarks to a socially distant and virtual audience at the 68th annual Red Mass in San Fernando Cathedral on Oct. 22. Photo by Robin Jerstad.

Thorner said. “She also recognizes where we have opportunities for growth, and isn’t afraid to embrace our challenges and work hard to address them head-on.”

Roberts has already identified five major goals she feels will strengthen St. Mary’s Law.

Her first goal is to continue enrolling diverse student populations, including first-generation students from minority backgrounds and nontraditional students. Already, Roberts has taken steps toward encouraging diverse student population growth by creating the Dean’s Advisory Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which aims to find ways to increase diversity among faculty, staff and students.

“We live in a diverse community, and we just want to make sure we’re serving the community around us,” said Alan K. Haynes, J.D., committee co-chair and Assistant Dean for Law Student Affairs. “Part of our job is to make sure we’re touting the successes we do have in terms of working with communities of color, and doing our best to develop what we need to increase our outreach to other groups, other people who would be outstanding lawyers.”

But enrolling more students of diverse backgrounds is not enough. It’s important to ensure that support is in place through the Law Success Program and curriculum so every admitted student can succeed academically and pass the bar, Roberts said.

She also aims to increase the School of Law’s engagement with alumni, improve annual giving to more than 6% and to raise funds to renovate the Law Courtroom, particularly in support of the Advocacy Program’s continued success.

Finally, Roberts aims to influence the School of Law’s regional and national reputation by highlighting the impact of the faculty’s accomplishments.

“I am delighted by Dean Roberts’ embrace of the St. Mary’s mission, enthusiasm for engaging our law alumni and her high expectations for our students and the national rank and reputation of the School of Law,” said University President Thomas M. Mengler, J.D. “I cannot imagine becoming dean in the midst of a global pandemic, but Patty has been tireless in planning with her colleagues a highly successful fall semester.”

Faith is an integral part of Roberts’ character and has helped her connect with the University’s mission. She believes it embodies all the characteristics that make a good lawyer: honesty, integrity, a dedication to service and compassion for others.

“We are meant to serve others in this profession,” Roberts said. “Faith can be the inspiration for becoming a lawyer, and it can serve as a compass while you are a lawyer.” ■

“**We are meant to serve others in this profession. *Faith can be the inspiration for becoming a lawyer, and it can serve as a compass while you are a lawyer.***”



# GOLD & BLUE

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

FALL 2020/WINTER 2021



## Pivoting with *excellence*

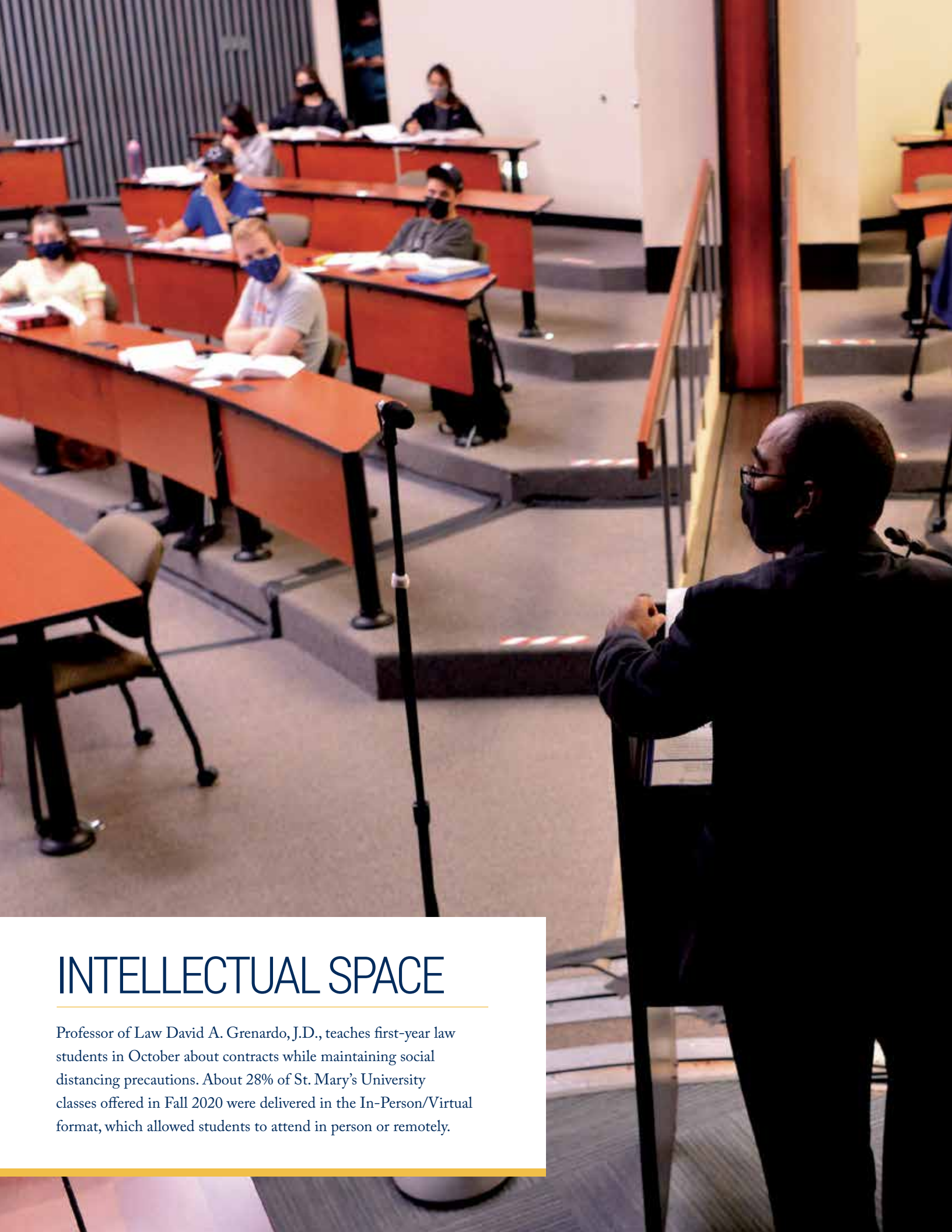
St. Mary's community adapts  
in response to pandemic

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## INTELLECTUAL SPACE

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Professor of Law David A. Grenardo, J.D., teaches first-year law students in October about contracts while maintaining social distancing precautions. About 28% of St. Mary's University classes offered in Fall 2020 were delivered in the In-Person/Virtual format, which allowed students to attend in person or remotely.



# GOLD & BLUE

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

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DESIGN Daniel Paniagua  
*Art Director*  
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*Graphic Designer*

WRITERS Brooke Blanton Leith  
Nikki Harris  
Sara Hoover  
Tom Norris  
Kendra Rainey  
Melanie Skaggs (M.A. '02)

PHOTOGRAPHERS Tina Dwyer  
Terri Glander  
Timothy Hurst  
Josh Huskin  
Robin Jerstad  
Vanessa Kosop  
Carlos Javier Sanchez  
Darren Shiverdecker  
Brian Wilson

*(Denotes degree from St. Mary's University)*

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## MISSION

St. Mary's University, as a Catholic Marianist University, fosters the formation of people in faith and educates leaders for the common good through community, integrated liberal arts and professional education, and academic excellence.

## CONNECT WITH US



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Photo by Robin Jerstad

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Co-Director helps launch Public Health certificate



## @StMarysU Social

1. Family, friends, faculty and staff proudly support the St. Mary's Class of 2020 with a unique Diploma Pickup Day in June.
2. PD, the University Police Department cat, shows how to properly practice social distancing while indoors.
3. Rattlers celebrate Spirit Thursday.
4. Men's Soccer Head Coach Johnny Clifford, left, celebrates a goal against senior midfielder Ollie Wright during the St. Mary's Spectrum Esports Arena grand opening gaming livestream on Sept. 18.

**On the cover:** Francisco Olivas Carmona, an Industrial Engineering senior, left, and senior Regina de la Parra, a double major in International and Global Studies, and Environmental Science, are members of the Mask Squad. The Mask Squad is a group of students who have worked to stem the spread of COVID-19 on campus this fall. The Mask Squad is one of many efforts taking place across campus and beyond to keep the St. Mary's community and the public safe. Read more on Page 8. Photo by Josh Huskin.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## *Appreciating challenging times*

In St. Mary's University's Gateway Strategic Plan, which was adopted more than seven years ago, we said, "Responding and adapting to higher education's changing environment will require bold courageous action and innovation." I'm sure we didn't have a worldwide pandemic in mind in 2013, but those words ring true today. Through bold courageous actions and innovations, we are ensuring that our students — today, tomorrow and long into the future — will continue to receive an education that leads them to a life of professional success and dedication to the common good.

At this time last year, it would have been difficult to imagine what we have experienced these past 10 months — as a society, as a community and, certainly, as a campus. The students who graduated in Spring 2020 were the first to graduate while experiencing this level of upheaval, challenges and change that we have all experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic. This fall, we welcomed a new group of incoming students who began their St. Mary's University educational journey under similar conditions.

Through this all, St. Mary's University — our faculty, staff, students and alumni — have come together to support each other and our community. During the spring semester, we pivoted to an online format for virtually all classes and services. Over the course of the summer and fall semesters, our faculty used the time to perfect the art of virtual classrooms, many signature events continued (online, of course), and our staff was innovative and

persistent in their efforts to ensure the campus and our community had what it needed to continue to operate with excellence. Meanwhile, alumni and friends stepped up generously to ensure students who were experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic could continue their education.

Much like spring before it, the fall semester was nothing as expected. But our goal as a Catholic and Marianist University — our mission — remains steadfast.

One day, we may all come to appreciate that these challenging times, while disruptive, made each of us stronger, more committed to our faith, and closer to our classmates, professors and coworkers. I believe that we will become even more sure of the importance of a St. Mary's education, which develops graduates who are well grounded in the liberal arts, formed in faith and centered as ethical leaders prepared for their vocation.

Throughout this issue, you will read the stories of the students, employees and alumni who have used their talents to help in a time of crisis in many ways, great and small. They are all a part of the effort to pivot with excellence that we are experiencing. ■



Thomas M. Mengler, J.D.  
*St. Mary's University President*

“  
Through this all, St. Mary's University — our faculty, staff, students and alumni — **have come together to support each other and our community.**  
”



Photo by Robin Jerstad



# CAMPUSNEWS

## St. Mary's awarded \$1.3 million grant to help underserved students

St. Mary's University will receive more than \$1.3 million for a TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help retain and graduate first-generation and low-income students and students with disabilities.

The \$1,309,435 grant will fund support services for 140 students each year for the next five years. The goals include at least 81% of program participants returning for the next academic year or graduating, and 86% maintaining good academic standing.

Forty-seven percent of the St. Mary's student body is classified as first-generation and 40% of undergraduates in 2019 were Pell Grant eligible, an indicator of exceptional financial need. National graduation rates for students in these demographics are traditionally lower than those of other demographics.

The SSS program at St. Mary's includes study skills development, academic advising, financial aid coaching, cultural enrichment activities, financial literacy coaching, career and graduate preparation and more. The program includes three full-time staff members.

## New drone lab flew toward completion in Fall 2020

Construction is complete on the new Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Laboratory — or Drone Lab — at St. Mary's University.

The \$600,000 lab, located behind the Richter-Math Engineering Center, was funded by the Title V – Building Capacity for Excellence in STEM Education grant, as well as support from the Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation, and Union Pacific Foundation.

“This is an opportunity to add programming that will launch St. Mary's graduates into a fast-growing emergent industry,” said Winston Erevelles, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology.

The facility will house new summer camps for high school students and also support the new UAS concentration under the B.S. in Engineering Science program.

## U.S. News ranks St. Mary's fourth in West for value, top in SA for social mobility

St. Mary's University ranked fourth in the West region in the Best Value Schools rankings by U.S. News & World Report, which released the 2021 edition of its annual *Best Colleges* guide.

This category uses a calculation that takes into account the school's academic quality and several cost factors, which include the 2019–2020 net cost of attendance for a student receiving an average level of need-based financial aid.

The St. Mary's ranking rose to tie for the eighth spot out of 127 universities in the West for academic quality, especially student outcomes. The University has been included in the list of top-tier regional universities for 27 consecutive years.

U.S. News introduced a ranking for Top Performers on Social Mobility in 2019 to evaluate which schools best serve underrepresented students. St. Mary's tied for No. 25 in the West and also ranked first in San Antonio in this analysis for the second year in a row.

St. Mary's also rose to tie fifth among the Best Colleges for Veterans in the West, which includes schools that take part in federal initiatives to aid veterans and active-duty service members in funding their education. St. Mary's University is a Yellow Ribbon School.

## Spectrum Enterprise powers new esports arena for St. Mary's University

St. Mary's University has teamed with Spectrum Enterprise to power the cutting-edge new home of the Rattlers' varsity Esports program. The partnership establishes the Spectrum Esports Arena, which opened on Sept. 18, and expands the role Spectrum Enterprise services have played on the campus for nearly a decade. Spectrum Enterprise has provided the arena with a dedicated Fiber Internet Access (FIA) circuit to meet the demands of data-intensive video-streaming applications and optimize the gaming experience.

“Spectrum Enterprise's support aids us in continuing our Catholic and Marianist mission for future generations of Rattlers through this exciting new medium of education, connection and competition in esports,” said St. Mary's President Thomas Mengler, J.D.

Read more about the Esports team and its head coach on Page 18.

## St. Mary's envisions a more diverse and inclusive society

St. Mary's University continues on the path to creating a more diverse and inclusive society — starting on its campus.

The President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which was announced in June and formed this fall, will help develop St. Mary's as a firmly anti-racist university with a focus on dialogue, concrete action and respect for all community members.



Masked students catch up on campus in November.

Chairing the Council is Professor of Law André Hampton, J.D.

### St. Mary's University partners with Baylor College of Medicine

In a continued effort to increase the pipeline of underrepresented students into careers in medicine, Baylor College of Medicine has partnered with St. Mary's University in San Antonio on a program that will give three qualified students from the University the opportunity annually to participate in Baylor's Medical Track Program.

The program puts accepted students on track to attend medical school at Baylor College of Medicine once they complete their undergraduate studies at St. Mary's.

Thomas Macrini, Ph.D., St. Mary's Chair and Professor of the Department of Biological Sciences, said that this program will further help students of the Hispanic-Serving Institution who are already accepted into medical schools at a much higher rate than the Texas and national averages.

### St. Mary's President reappointed to another term

Thomas M. Mengler, J.D., was unanimously reappointed to a fourth term as President of St. Mary's University by the Board of Trustees on Friday, Nov. 13, 2020.

Since 2012, Mengler has proven to be one of the University's most successful presidents in its history. In November 2019, St. Mary's reached The Defining Moment Comprehensive Campaign goal of \$130 million — and with two years remaining in the campaign raised the goal to \$150 million. When this goal is reached and exceeded by December 2021, it will be 7.5 times greater than any previous St. Mary's campaign. With almost \$70 million in endowment funding, including \$40 million in scholarship aid, this campaign will prove to be a turning point for the University.

The Board of Trustees recognized Mengler as having shown extraordinary leadership in managing the University through the pandemic. He led efforts to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, prioritize health and safety, prepare faculty to sustain the teaching mission under new conditions, and protect the University's financial soundness. He worked alongside his leadership team to guide these tough calls with care and confidence.

Mengler's work to strengthen the St. Mary's commitment to its Catholic and Marianist identity is sure to be another of the most significant legacies of his presidency, said Leticia "Leti" Contreras (B.A. '89), Chair of the Board of Trustees.

### Joel Lauer appointed permanent Vice President for Advancement

The Board of Trustees unanimously confirmed the recommendation by President Thomas M. Mengler, J.D., to remove the interim title designation and appoint Joel Lauer the permanent Vice President for University Advancement.

Lauer stepped into the leadership role early in the pandemic and immediately began efforts to connect with alumni and donors and check on their health and safety. He quickly understood the challenges our students are facing in this pandemic, and he led efforts to help address their needs by raising funds for the Rattlers Helping Rattlers initiative.

Already, Lauer has been a leader in the success to date of The Defining Moment Comprehensive Campaign, which is on track to reach its goal of raising \$150 million. He is committed to leading the University to the finish line and preparing for the next comprehensive campaign.

Lauer served as the Executive Director of Advancement for the School of Law before becoming the Assistant Vice President for Development in 2018.



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# ACE TO PH.D.

## *Rattler Baseball player graduates to research scientist*

by Alex Z. Salinas (B.A. '11, M.A. '19)

Like young baseball fans around the world, Jeff Wigdahl dreamed of making the big league — Major League Baseball.

The San Antonio native began playing organized baseball at age 6 and vividly recalled watching with his dad the Los Angeles Dodgers win the 1988 World Series, a moment that inspired him to swing for the professional ranks.

Wigdahl (B.S. '10), whose later career curved into unexpected territory — from minor league baseballer to dedicated researcher for a biomedical company specializing in eye and foot care — chose to play pitcher because he said he “wasn’t much of an athlete.”

“Mentally, if you’re tough, you can outthink the hitters,” he said. “Back then, I was fiery. I wanted to make every hitter look bad.”

That toughness signaled his future success in academia too — an arena in which he has a master’s degree in Electrical Engineering and a Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering.

### ◆ FIRST BASE

In his senior year at Taft High School in San Antonio, Wigdahl received baseball and academic scholarships from St. Mary’s University and clicked immediately with the coaches.

Charlie Migl, Head Baseball Coach, said he knew “right away that Jeff was a really smart guy.”

“He was quiet, but when he said something, you knew he’d thought it through,” Migl said.

Wigdahl acknowledged he had “no clue” what he wanted to do beyond baseball, though he felt he was decent at math and science. He majored in Electrical Engineering, a program in which he struck lasting connections with St. Mary’s professors.

Wigdahl wound up for a miraculous first season with Rattler Baseball, helping

the team win the 2001 NCAA Division II National Championship and propelling a number of players into the MLB.

Standing 6 feet tall and pitching lefty, Wigdahl played for Rattler Baseball until 2004 and holds the career record for strikeouts per nine innings at just over 11.

“Jeff had an outstanding career here,” Migl said. “He’s one of our best leaders and best players to come through.”

### ◆ SECOND BASE

In 2004, the Houston Astros drafted Wigdahl in the 23rd round and he put his college education on hold.

Wigdahl’s first stop in the minor league was with the Tri-City ValleyCats in upstate New York. He also logged time with the Lexington Legends in Kentucky, the team formerly called the Salem Avalanche in Virginia and the Corpus Christi Hooks before retiring in 2007.

Meanwhile, Wigdahl stayed in touch with Electrical Engineering Professor Bahman Rezaie, Ph.D., who’d planted the seed for him to finish what he started at St. Mary’s.

### ♥ STEALING HOME

“While Jeff was in minor league, he visited me in my office and brought me his baseball card that he was very proud of,” Rezaie said. “To this day, his card sits on my wall of honor in my office.”

This winning bond with a mentor led to Wigdahl’s return to St. Mary’s in 2008 to finish his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering.

Wigdahl said professors, such as Rezaie and Djaffer Ibaroudene, Ph.D., Professor of Computer Engineering, “didn’t pull any punches,” teaching him valuable programming knowledge he incorporates to this day in developing software for medical use.

After graduating from St. Mary’s in 2010, Wigdahl, with Rezaie’s assistance, landed

a paid internship at New Mexico-based VisionQuest Biomedical, which develops image-based technology for patients with eye disease and diabetes.

Wigdahl was quickly promoted to researcher and has remained with VisionQuest Biomedical. The company funded his master’s degree from the University of New Mexico and supported his three years at the University of Padua in Italy to earn his doctorate.

Recently, he worked on software for an iPhone app for doctors that alerts them to retinal problems in premature babies.

“We look at retinal images of the inner eye,” he said. “Several eye diseases can be detected through digital images, and we, ultimately, teach computers how to detect those diseases through the images.”

“From home, I write code for hours and hours,” said Wigdahl, who lives in Dallas. “It’s not baseball, but I take pride in my work knowing we’re helping people keep their vision and their feet.”

Wigdahl credited much of his vision for success to St. Mary’s.

“I did so much better the second time around,” he said. “I hit the engineering books hard and received a top-notch education. It’s a credit to the professors, who are all available to you.” ■

“I take pride in my work knowing we're helping people keep their vision and their feet.”



# PIVOTING WITH EXCELLENCE

ST. MARY'S COMMUNITY ADAPTS IN RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC

**T**eams succeed because their members are connected and committed to each other — because one person can bring different skills and abilities to a shared mission.

At St. Mary's University, at no time in our history has our ability to succeed as a team been tested as it has amid the COVID-19 pandemic. At no time has our ability to come together ensured the future of the University and our region as we have this year. Faculty, staff, students and alumni each contributed in their own way — made *one degree* of positive difference — exemplifying the depth of our family spirit.

## MASK SQUAD TAKES ON SAFETY MEASURES

**N**ot all heroes wear capes. Some wear masks. The Mask Squad — a group of about 80 St. Mary's University students who were trained and are committed to the health and safety of every member of our community — have worked to stem the spread of COVID-19 on campus this fall.

The students encourage the University community to be safe and to practice the elements of the Protect St. Mary's Pledge, which include wearing a mask and social distancing.

"Being in the Mask Squad is very important since it is a key piece in keeping campus open for students," said senior Regina de la Parra, who is from Mexico and is double majoring in International and Global Studies, and Environmental Science. "I feel like I am helping the St. Mary's community stay safe and as normal as possible."

Amid the pandemic, fellow Mask Squad member, Francisco Olivas Carmona, an Industrial Engineering senior, said, "We get to help our residents and campus community try and stay safe in the best possible way."

To adapt, Olivas Carmona has had to scale back on visiting the brothers in the Marianist Residence in person as well as traveling home to Mexico to see his parents, but he's also embraced a new online learning style and technologies to benefit from the continued level of quality teaching at St. Mary's.

Similarly, Zyania Seijas, a senior from El Paso studying Finance and Risk Management, has adapted to the seeming isolation of virtual classes by pushing herself to leave her residence hall room and meet a friend outside in the garden to log in to class together.

"St. Mary's has taken a lot of good measures when planning to bring students back to campus," Seijas said. "And the campus, in general, has been good about safety — especially the residents. If you want to stay on campus, you must follow the rules and behave a certain way."

De la Parra said seeing those on campus become aware of the necessary safety practices has been a defining moment for her.

"It is amazing to think that we all consider each other part of this great community and are willing to sacrifice some comfort in order for everyone to be safe," she said. "I know I will never forget this."





## ALLISON GRAY, PH.D.

Associate Professor of Theology

**Q: What was your approach in switching to online learning in a short period of time?**

**A:** To address issues of access, I chose to make my courses mainly asynchronous. Each week, students work independently to complete a checklist of tasks through Canvas, with the option to meet with me during a daily office hour. I didn't want to require synchronous class meetings in case there was competition for a household's computer or students who traveled to places without internet (or in very different time zones). But I still wanted to make space so that students could engage with important theological concepts and talk about entertaining early Christian literature or ancient art. I transformed some assignments from papers into collaborative Google Docs so students could not only practice writing skills, but also see each other's reactions to the material. I've also tried to focus more on tasks that invite students to apply new concepts to our shared current experience or to think about how ideas expressed in our texts might impact living communities.

**Q: What are some new teaching methods you've picked up along the way?**

**A:** I've appreciated the challenge of boiling down each lesson into a few major takeaway points that I can summarize in a very short video lecturette, which students can watch before doing the reading, working through a PowerPoint, and completing a quiz or post. ... I'm now planning to incorporate these sorts of introductions into my regular teaching so students can read or watch them alongside their reading assignments.

## ALUMNA'S ADVICE AS NURSE DURING PANDEMIC: 'BE KINDER TO ONE ANOTHER'

**J**une 23, 2020. Riverside, California. A makeshift emergency room without air-conditioning inside the small Parkview Community Hospital serving mostly nursing home patients before the pandemic.

Marcie Alvarado (B.S. '11) is on her very last shift as a nurse there. That day, "we had three deaths and two codes (cardiac arrests) in the COVID-19 intensive care unit," she said.

Alvarado was caring for a patient with the novel coronavirus whose blood pressure and oxygenation were "textbook-perfect at the start of my shift," she said.

But, "something about her overall presentation did not sit well with me," Alvarado recalled.

She later checked the patient's cardiac monitor to devastating results.

"I knew she was leaving soon."

Alvarado phoned her pastor, then — for the first time in her career — served as a "vessel for giving the last rites" while the pastor prayed over speakerphone as she held her dying patient's hand.

"Throughout my conversations with (my patient), I paid attention to her steadfast faith, her gratitude," Alvarado said. "I noticed how she always said to me, 'Dios te bendiga, mija (God bless you, my daughter),' for just a simple cup of water."

Alvarado's journey to becoming a nurse began at St. Mary's University, where she discovered a perfect fit for her education and spiritual life. After St. Mary's, Alvarado earned a Master of Science in Nursing from Rush University in Chicago in 2013.

During a stint working in El Paso, she met her husband, who is a nurse anesthetist. This summer, the couple moved back to El Paso, where Alvarado is taking time off as a nurse to spend with her family.

"Life can be very hard, so be kinder to one another," Alvarado said.



## JUAN OCAMPO, PH.D.

Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering and Co-Director of the Community for Teaching and Learning

**Q: What are some new teaching methods you've gained this year?**

**A:** Flipping the classroom and asking students to be prepared before they showed up to class so we can use class time for discussions and active learning. I also used Zoom breakout rooms to do project-based learning, which is to give a prompt or an activity to students so they can solve it as a group. They then come back to the main section in Zoom to share their ideas with the whole class.

**Q: What has been your biggest area for growth in teaching online thus far?**

**A:** To create assessment activities to better engage my students in an online environment. Some of those activities include coming up with no trivial, or single-solution, design problems, which students will discuss as a group and find the best solution for an engineering problem. For example, I asked my students to design a machine to build tall structures without using a crane using the principles of strength of materials. I was very happy with how creative they were in developing their designs.



## ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY SERVICES STAFF STEP UP TO ENSURE SEAMLESS ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Prior to Spring 2020, Academic Technology Services provided Online Teaching Certification to about 12 faculty members each semester. Between April and the start of Fall 2020 classes, a staggering 170 faculty members completed the training.

"I don't know how many hours we slept," Executive Director Jeff Schomburg quipped. "I need about a year's worth of rest and recuperation."

The small team worked tirelessly to prepare as many professors as possible for online instruction.

"If we do everything we can to support the passion to teach, St. Mary's will continue to scale to whatever challenges it has ahead," Schomburg said.

Felicia Cruz (B.A. '12, M.A. '14), Ph.D., Director of Online Learning and Curriculum Innovation, felt blessed to give back to the faculty who once helped her.

"It was our time to really step up and show everyone that we're here to help," she said. "We did everything we could with the amount of time and resources that we had. All with a smile on our faces."



Jeff Schomburg, left, and Felicia Cruz





## NELSON W. WOLFF (B.B.A. '66, J.D. '66)

Bexar County Judge

**Q: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your personal life?**

**A:** I do a daily broadcast (with San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg), and we've been doing this since March, can you believe it? Seven days a week for a while; now it's five

days a week, every night at about 6 o'clock. Before the pandemic, I'd never heard of WebEx or Skype, and now, I'm able to do all of that. It's changed my life in the sense that I get a lot more done in a relatively short period of time. I do a lot more work at my library at home, which is cool.

**Q: How has the pandemic impacted your professional life?**

**A:** We expect about one-fourth of our workforce to continue to work at home after the COVID-19 pandemic. It's going to change our economy from low-end jobs that were in hotels and motels, and some of the jobs that automation has taken.

We'll be focusing on job training programs that will fit into industries like advanced manufacturing, health care and technology that are going to change the dynamics of the economy.

**Q: How have you reflected on your role in continuing the St. Mary's mission during this time?**

**A:** I'm big into therapeutic justice. The pandemic shows that when our jail population went down, we didn't have any more crime, because they (our police force) weren't charging people with minor

offenses. ... When I became Bexar County Judge, there were 4,000 people in jail. Twenty years later, we have 3,800 in jail and 500,000 more people moving to San Antonio. And that's because we've created therapeutic justice by creating specialty courts. We now have drug courts, veterans courts, where you work with somebody and you get them out on probation where they don't go into the jail. We have a reentry center. We have 80 or 90 social service agencies helping people when they come out. We're trying to put a lot of money into programs dealing with mental health and drug-use prevention.

**Q: How do you feel your St. Mary's education helped prepare you for your leadership role, especially in a time of uncertainty?**

**A:** St. Mary's is about compassion — caring for everybody, caring for the poor. St. Mary's taught me to be compassionate. I've noticed people walking around their neighborhoods, sitting on their front porches. They're making meaningful connections with other people who they never met before in their neighborhoods. There's some good coming out of this pandemic.

## MEN'S SOCCER CAPTAIN CONTINUES STUDIES FROM BRAZIL

**D**eni Cresto, a junior from Curitiba, Brazil, studying Exercise and Sport Science, often refers to a message from St. Mary's University Men's Soccer Head Coach Johnny Clifford when times get tough during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Control what you can control." The St. Mary's Men's Soccer captain has used the pandemic to take control of his academics, health and faith, even as the Men's Soccer competition was postponed in the fall on the heels of a Lone Star Conference winning season.

"In my own experience adapting to this new situation, I am in control of my daily training, study schedule and strengthening my relationship with my family and God," Cresto said. "I try to keep up with a daily schedule, going to bed and waking up at the same time, training in the morning, and studying and having online classes in the afternoon."

Despite taking classes virtually from Brazil, Cresto feels right at home in the St. Mary's community.

"Although I miss being on campus, going to in-person classes and interacting with people, I like how the online system is working," he said.

Cresto, who transferred to St. Mary's, said his first year taught him as long as he works hard, smart and with a purpose, he can achieve anything in life.





**ALEJANDRA  
“ALEX” LOPEZ**  
(B.A. '99, M.P.A. '02)

**Economic Development Director,  
City of San Antonio**

**Q: What have you learned about yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**A:** The pandemic has made me appreciate interactions with people much more. ... As an introvert, I often find prolonged interactions, especially with strangers or only casual acquaintances, quite exhausting. Initially, physical distancing measures did not bother me much. But as the months have gone by, I feel more disconnected from friends and work team members, even though we are on video calls nonstop. The energy from human interaction cannot be replicated on the screen. ... I have also appreciated the opportunity to spend more time with my daughter. She is a senior in high school and will be going away for college next fall. Of the many challenges this pandemic has created, I will always remember this extra time I'm getting with her.

**Q: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your professional life?**

**A:** Our Economic Development team is quite nimble and effectively navigated through technological challenges. But there was no way for us to fully prepare for the magnitude of impact the pandemic has had on our economy. It has been especially challenging to see the disproportionate impacts the pandemic has had on our neighbors who already experienced the most barriers.

For the first couple months, it felt unreal to see the unemployment figures. I would brace myself on Thursday mornings, when national unemployment claim numbers are announced. Our work eventually shifted from response to recovery and has not slowed since April. I helped staff a COVID-19 Community Response Working Group that identified small business and workforce development recovery strategies. I was also part of the team that developed the City's Recovery and Resiliency Plan, which was approved by the San Antonio City Council in early June. I now have the privilege of executing the critical work associated with small business support and workforce development strategies included in that plan.

**Q: How have you reflected on your role in continuing the St. Mary's mission during this time?**

**A:** A commitment to service, focusing on those most in need, remains at the core of my personal and professional work. In particular, from an economic development perspective, I always remember that my work is in service to the people, our residents. We do what we do — help entrepreneurs launch new ideas, support small business owners, recruit and retain corporations that create well-paying jobs — centered around our residents, their well-being and economic inclusion.

**Q: How do you feel your St. Mary's education helped prepare you for a leadership role, especially amid uncertainty?**

**A:** I have often remembered the following concept from an introductory philosophy class: flexibility is a sign of life; the human body stiffens after death. This pandemic has required extreme flexibility, which doesn't always come easy for analytical, systems-oriented people like me. The need to execute at the speed of relevance is critical, pivoting and iterating along the way.

I have grown weary of the phrases “new normal” or “post-COVID,” maybe because I don't think we have reached either of these milestones. In my heart and in my mind, I firmly believe we will emerge from this pandemic as a stronger community by closing the gap between those who experienced growth and prosperity and those who, for generations, have been excluded from it.

**ROBBIE BISHOP-  
MONROE, D.B.A.**

**Assistant Professor of Accounting**

**Q: What was your approach in switching to online learning quickly?**

**A:** First, to immediately adjust my mindset and accept that I would not be able to see my students in person and capture the in-person synergy from our class sessions. This was difficult to embrace. However, it challenged me to be creative with developing a remarkable virtual classroom experience.

Overall, my primary focus was on making the transition smoother for my students while incorporating the mission of St. Mary's University into the new online learning experience. I achieved this goal by adapting to a change in academic instructional delivery. For example, I've implemented multiple methods of engagement in my online courses. I was able to educate students in the family spirit by exhibiting flexibility and understanding while holding standards of educational excellence to provide an integral education.

**Q: What are some new teaching methods you've begun using?**

**A:** I created a lightboard video presentation to teach a bank reconciliation concept, launched polls during the virtual teaching sessions to engage students, created a virtual Zoom background based on a real picture from my classroom, and hosted guest speakers on Zoom for our class.

**Q: What has been most beneficial about virtual experiences?**

**A:** I was able to expand my availability to the students through flexible options. For example, I hosted virtual expanded office hours through Zoom including some weekend timeframes.





## SUNG-TAE (DANIEL) KIM, PH.D.

Assistant Professor of Finance and Quantitative Management

**Q: What has been your biggest opportunity for growth in teaching online thus far?**

**A:** I got used to speaking to the monitor. It felt awkward in the beginning and I always told my students (when they make presentations), “Do not speak to the screen.” But now I feel very comfortable talking with no audience! Additionally, I am planning on producing videos for other courses that I will teach in later semesters even after we go back to normal operations.

**Q: What has been most surprising about how society has responded?**

**A:** Organizations in many sectors are making full use of these technologies to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools were able to go online and governments are utilizing technologies, such as big data or artificial intelligence, to identify, track and forecast outbreaks. Businesses are developing apps to facilitate services like delivering food and groceries. In addition, drone delivery is being used to deliver medical supplies.

## THE RATTLER IMPACT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS OVER \$1.2 MILLION TO NEARLY 1,000 STUDENTS

In July, through the generosity of the St. Mary’s University Alumni Association, President Mengler and his wife, Mona, combined with University funds, St. Mary’s offered the Rattler Impact Scholarship to further support nearly 1,000 students in Fall 2020.

The Rattler Impact Scholarship was a direct reflection of the Marianist family spirit and the St. Mary’s commitment to taking care of their community in the midst of a pandemic.

When Carlos “Antonio” Rangel, a junior Criminal Justice major from San Antonio, first heard about the scholarship, his dad was in a rehab hospital after being on a ventilator for days due to contracting COVID-19.

“When I told my mom I got the scholarship, she was relieved. It was one less thing to worry about,” Rangel said.

After moving back home to Brownsville at the beginning of the public health emergency, Aracely Ortiz, a junior Biology major, was faced with uncertainty, like so many others. As a result of the pandemic, her mom lost her job, relying solely on her father’s income.

“The Rattler Impact Scholarship allowed me to continue to afford my education at St. Mary’s,” Ortiz said.

“2020 just keeps taking and taking,” said Sarah Nguyen, a junior Electrical Engineering major and recipient of the one-time scholarship.

Her great-aunt died of the coronavirus and, shortly after the semester began, her mom was diagnosed with cancer.

“This semester has been really challenging,” said Nguyen, who added a silver lining: “spending extra time with my mom, dad and even my brother,” since they are all home together.

After losing her paid internship due to COVID-19, Nguyen worried she might have to take a gap year. Luckily, receiving the Rattler Impact Scholarship gave her “the ability to focus on other things,” Nguyen said, “a real blessing.”



Sarah Nguyen, left and Aracely Ortiz



## GEORGE HERNANDEZ JR. (B.A. '74), J.D.

President and CEO, University Health System  
St. Mary's University Trustee

### Q: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your personal life?

**A:** One of the wonderful traits of being human is our ability to adapt rapidly to a changing environment. We do this by our ability to communicate, socialize and plan with others to achieve common goals. The pandemic has limited our personal interactions and social outlets because of its global nature. So, like many others, my personal life centers on the immediate family. The most difficult personal issue has been the inability to go to Mass regularly.

### Q: How has the pandemic impacted your professional life?

**A:** Like other health care workers, we have had to address the pandemic directly. Thus, our professional lives are busier than ever. I can say that all the health systems in San Antonio have done an outstanding job in working together, sharing COVID-19

containment strategies and caring for persons with COVID-19. This is classic San Antonio — we all work well together even if we're competitors.

That said, the biggest challenge we face is a surge of COVID-19 patients, which outstrips our hospitals' resources. So, we work on messaging aimed at convincing the public that good prevention practices, like face masks, social distancing and proper hand-washing are essential.

### Q: How do you feel your St. Mary's education helped prepare you for your leadership role during this uncertain time?

**A:** Life is always uncertain, so COVID-19 did not create uncertainty but additional complexity instead. One of the great benefits of a liberal arts education is its emphasis on a broad education in a variety of core disciplines that develop a wide range of skills. The role of a CEO requires a variety of skills to help juggle issues and eventually resolve them. The best analogy I have for a CEO is that of a symphony conductor. You don't play an orchestra instrument, but how you move your baton makes a big difference in whether your organization plays great music.

## COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSOR PUTS STUDENT NEEDS FIRST

Taking advantage of the flexibilities of online learning, Communications Assistant Professor Amanda Hill, Ph.D., has made virtual learning more beneficial for all her students.

"Virtual teaching has given me space to encourage students to focus on the research and endeavors that they have a lot of zest for, hopefully keeping their curiosity on a topic throughout a semester," said Hill, who taught class from Colorado this fall. "Being asynchronous online has allowed me to better focus on the students as individuals with individual goals."

Being a relatively recent student and Co-Director of the Community for Teaching and Learning, Hill had a head start in the transition to online learning as a professor. She implemented a new grading system so that her students could dive into learning the material, rather than completing work solely for a passing grade.

"I adopted a specifications grading system so that the focus isn't on a one-shot attempt to get the highest grade," Hill said. "Students work from a list of specifications that each assignment needs to meet; if the work doesn't meet the expectations, then we discuss ways to revise. The emphasis on revision means that students have the chance to grow and learn from their experiences and use the tools and techniques learned in class to a greater effect."

Hill quickly recognized that her students' priorities shifted during the pandemic and put their needs first.

"For some students, classwork might not be their main focus anymore," she said. "I tried to allow for flexibility in my course requirements so that students could complete their work within their own time frames."





## HUGO P. SALAZAR JR., M.D.

St. Mary's University Student Health Center Physician

### Q: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work?

A: The University itself began to talk about COVID-19 when we finished with the winter break. We were already discussing things like what if something happens, what if it starts creeping into the United States, Texas or San Antonio? We were able to think through some basic planning. Later in the spring, the school decided to send everyone home and keep everyone safe.

I've had to apply my knowledge and help the University figure out plans when plans weren't coming from anyone. We didn't know much about the virus and tried to get everything done as quickly as we could and as safely as we could with the little information we had.

### Q: What was your approach in switching to things like virtual services in a short period of time?

A: We are fortunate to have electronic health records instead of paper charting. It made it relatively easy to transition to providing telemedicine visits for our students. ... Since we could provide telemedicine visits, our students could refill their asthma inhaler or get a rash seen. That was a considerable adaptation.

### Q: How have you reflected on your role in continuing the St. Mary's mission during this time?

A: I think the part of the mission that stands out the most for me is adaptation and change. ... We kept reminding ourselves that, even though things are changing, it's in our mission. It's on us to not only adapt to these situations, but adapt to them safely. To see everybody, early on, recognize this as something we need to do for our community's betterment was exceptional. We know we need to re-evaluate, adjust and live the mission to keep everyone safe.

## RATTLER SUCCESS CENTER SUPPORTS STUDENTS IN ONLINE LEARNING

As the University made the transition to online, the Rattler Success Center (RSC) was one step ahead, having already begun online tutoring earlier in the 2019-2020 academic year.

"We were ready from Day One," said Patricia Medina, Director of the Rattler Success Center and Academic Success Programs.

The RSC houses the offices of Academic Advising and Academic Support Services, the writing and tutoring center, academic peer coaching and other student support services. When the pandemic hit, its staff immediately began focusing on what students needed in the move to an online learning environment.



Patricia Medina, left, and Graciela Lopez-Fuentes

The RSC staff worked with the STRIVE Career Center to hold several virtual workshops, helping students who were unfamiliar with taking online classes or utilizing tools like Zoom. Staff also offered tips for students to set up online learning environments.

The advising team prepped for priority advising and registration, which normally requires students to meet in person with

advisers. Advisers reached out to students via Zoom, email and phone, and made themselves available on the weekends.

"We want to make sure that students still feel connected," said Graciela Lopez-Fuentes, Director of Academic Advising. "We're there virtually for them."

## HOUSEKEEPING STAFF CONTINUE THEIR SPOTLESS RECORD

During a pandemic, proper cleaning is crucial. Fortunately for the St. Mary's community, the Housekeeping Department went above and beyond even before COVID-19.

When Housekeeping Superintendent David Campos received coronavirus disinfectant protocols, his response was clear: "We already got it covered."

Despite the pressure to keep thousands of students, faculty and staff healthy, the team used it as an opportunity to support one another.

"I'm the type to work side-by-side with my staff," Campos said. "We're a family around here — we have to make sure we help each other out."

Housekeeping Team Leader Terry Clemons and Housekeeper Mary Leal were among those who stepped up.

"If you work as a team, you'll get nothing but positive results," Clemons said.

For Leal, she sees her role as part of a bigger mission: "We have to be like ants. We pick up that little crumb and carry it together." And her dedication continues to be unwavering.

"If we have to clean something 10 times in a day, that's what we're here for," Leal said. ■

Left to right, Terry Clemons, Mary Leal and David Campos




# READY, PLAYER ONE

NEW ST. MARY'S COACH  
AMONG FIRST FEMALE  
VARSITY COLLEGIATE  
ESPORTS COACHES

▶ BY TOM NORRIS



▲ Rattler Esports Head Coach Katilin Teniente scopes out the new Spectrum Esports Arena in the University Center.



**B**reaking into the world of esports has been a challenge for women. Leadership opportunities in the rapidly growing industry often are not available or the barriers are too steep. At St. Mary's University, Kaitlin Teniente found her chance to become the first head coach — leading the new varsity Esports Program.

Teniente, a San Antonio native, is among the first women to lead a collegiate esports program across the country.

Early in her esports participation as a competitive League of Legends player, Teniente saw first-hand the challenges women face in the male-dominated landscape. Fellow male gamers would tell her not to be aggressive when she offered feedback during the mostly male-led student club meetings or went against the “way things have always been” in esports. Rather than deter her, the experiences propelled Teniente into leadership opportunities beyond the level of student clubs.

Esports teams participate in competitive, organized gaming commonly played in teams that vary depending on the game. Team members may all be present in an arena during competition, but often players connect online to compete remotely. At St. Mary's, each player locks into one game: Fortnite, League of Legends, Overwatch or Rainbow Six Siege.

## **ENCOURAGING TEAMWORK**

Teniente got her first taste of coaching as a student at the University of Texas at San Antonio when she and a classmate ran their own events for players of all skill levels. Promoting a zero-tolerance policy on toxicity, she helped coordinate five esports events in conjunction with the school's club — each event yielding more than 40 players.

“My vision is to see the Esports Program at St. Mary's be more than ‘competitive video games,’” she said. “I want the program to be a source of pride for both students and the University.”

For players especially, she said, “I want them to walk away from the program having a positive and memorable college experience where they felt included and valued.”

“This is not just about gaming,” said St. Mary's University Director of Athletics Robert Coleman. “Engaging students in esports can help them build critical-thinking skills, encourage teamwork and innovation, and promote self-directed learning.”

For senior Forensic Science (Criminology) major and student-athlete Teresa Lee, being a part of the Esports Program is about competing and connecting. After injuries ended Lee's basketball career, her competitive spirit stuck with her, turning her attention to competitive gaming playing Fortnite.

“When I received an email about St. Mary's adding an esports program, I thought, ‘This is my moment to prove to myself and my family I can play a collegiate sport,’” Lee said.

Lee hopes to build lifelong connections and help lay the foundation for future generations of Rattler Esports athletes.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY**

When named the first St. Mary's Esports Head Coach, Teniente quickly realized the lack of a gaming community on campus. She saw her new position as an opportunity to build that community from the ground up.

Teniente hopes that growing community will bridge new friendships and an everlasting love for the sport.

“As we continue building the community, we want it to be inclusive and diverse,” Teniente said. “We want everyone to feel like they have a place here, regardless of whether they are going to be a competitive gamer.” ■





# BRIDGING THE GAP

*Sociology professor helps launch new  
Public Health certificate*

*by Jennifer R. Lloyd (M.B.A. '16)*

Photo by Robin Jerstad

Discrimination. Income level. Access to health care. Occupation. Housing. Education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into stark view America's health disparities based on these and other factors outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“**This certificate will reinforce the need to love and respect people.**”

At no time in modern history has the need for public health expertise been more striking, nor has the call to rectify inequities in the nation's public health system been louder.

“It's just a prime opportunity to get students to understand how important the health of various groups of people is,” said Assistant Professor of Sociology Sue P. Nash, Ph.D., whose expertise and courses will provide part of the framework for a new Certificate in Public Health launching in Fall 2021.

Nash will co-direct the new 12-credit hour certificate program — offered by the

Sociology Department in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences — with Janet Armitage, Ph.D., the Chair and Associate Professor of Sociology who has pushed for the new certificate for several years.

“This certificate is important because it allows students to connect what's happening in their families to what's happening in their city, San Antonio, to what's happening beyond them,” Nash said.

She worked in public health before earning her Ph.D. in sociology, which she said extended that interest because sociology is the study of groups and public health efforts require analyzing the health of groups as well. For instance, she studied intimate partner violence and, through sociology, gained the tools to understand the public health issues she had observed.

Her students often start “boxed in” to understanding their own personal lives. Through her courses, she helps them situate their perspective in a broader social context to recognize they are not alone in these issues common to groups of people, families and communities.

“Take obesity as an example. Students may think, ‘I'm obese because I'm not eating well,’ or ‘That's just how my family is.’ But let's go beyond that to what's happening in

your community,” Nash said. “Do you have access to fresh produce? Is there fast food surrounding you and you don't have access to farmers markets? Those factors will really impact your personal health.”

Diamond Estrada, a senior Sociology major, was so hooked on the topic that she's begun an accelerated Master of Public Health at the University of Texas Health Center at Houston too.

“With everything that's going on recently, I felt like it was necessary to get into the health industry,” said Estrada, who aspires to better connect those with less income with public health resources. “My family has always dealt with health issues as well, so that was kind of an initiative to get started.”

For Nash, sharing the understanding of people from different age and background groups with students like Estrada prepares them to serve the public through cultural competence.

“Public health is in essence that — educating for service,” Nash said. “This certificate will reinforce the need to love and respect people.” ■