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Fall 2021

Gold & Blue Law, Summer/Fall 2021

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GOLD & BLUE LAW EDITION

SCHOOL *of* LAW

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

SUMMER/FALL 2021



Opening the way

Mentorship connects J.D. students with the legal community

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On the cover: From left, mentor Eric Michael Garza (M.B.A. '15, J.D. '16), third-year J.D. student Farid Seyyedi and mentor Alicia Grant (J.D. '16) catch up in the Law Classrooms Building after the first year of the new Mentor Circles Program. Read more on Page L6. Photo by Josh Huskin.



On May 22, St. Mary's Law celebrated in several small ceremonies the accomplishments of 247 new School of Law graduates, including 28 receiving their Master of Jurisprudence (M.Jur.), 206 receiving their Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and 13 students receiving their Master of Laws (LL.M.). Photos by Robin Jerstad.

LAWNEWS

U.S. News and World Report ranks Law Advocacy Programs among top in the nation

For the second year in a row, the St. Mary's University School of Law Advocacy Programs ranked in the top 20 in the nation by U.S. News and World Report — moving up to a No. 17 spot in the 2022 Best Graduate School Rankings.

The St. Mary's Law Advocacy Programs, which consist of the National Champion Moot Court Team, the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Team, the National Trial Team and the International Jessup Moot Court Team, prepare students for real-world litigation through the development of their trial and appellate courtroom skills.

"It's one thing to get to the top echelon with all these other wonderful schools, but to be able to do it three years in a row is a validation of what we're accomplishing here, and I couldn't be more pleased," said Assistant Dean for Advocacy Programs A.J. Bellido de Luna, J.D. "This ranking has just as much to do with our work with all of our partner schools as it does the amazing students we have at St. Mary's."

Since the 2020 rankings, the St. Mary's Law Advocacy Programs' U.S. News and World Report ranking continued to climb — from being a top-25% program to a top-20 program in the 2021 rankings and now tied with the University of California, Berkeley, for the 17th-best program in the country as of the 2022 rankings.

"In a year where nothing was normal, our advocacy programs modeled skill and servant leadership by hosting virtual tournaments that allowed law students from across the nation to compete at the highest levels despite the pandemic," said School of Law Dean Patricia E. Roberts, J.D.

The American Bar Association also ranked St. Mary's Law in the top-five advocacy programs nationwide in 2020 and then a top-four program in 2021.

St. Mary's Law also tied for the No. 49 ranking on the U.S. News and World Report 2022 list of part-time programs and ranked for its clinical program.

St. Mary's Law celebrates five-year anniversary of Master of Jurisprudence Program

This year marks the five-year anniversary of the St. Mary's University School of Law Master of Jurisprudence Program.



Left to right, M.Jur. student Linda Hernandez and M. Jur. grad Joseph Liu.

Photo by Robin Jerstad

The 30-credit-hour program was designed for those who do not wish to practice law but are interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the American legal system.

It benefits professionals practicing in areas that intersect with the law such as human relations, criminal and juvenile justice, health care, technology and business, the court system, journalism and social work, among many other fields.

Because St. Mary's Law is the only Texas university certified by the Compliance Certification Board (CCB), M.Jur. students who complete the CCB eligibility requirements can sit for a credentialing exam without having to meet the typical work experience requirements.

"The key to the program's success has been its accessibility for working professionals. We offer a variety of concentrations that are appealing to a number of industries, but even the most attractive degree means nothing if a working professional can't fit the courses into their busy schedule," said Colin P. Marks, J.D., Associate Dean for Innovative Programs and Strategic Partnerships. "Our online asynchronous format gives those working full-time the flexibility to complete the degree on their schedule."

Read more about M.Jur. alumni on Page L2 or online at law.stmarytx.edu/magazine.

St. Mary's Law named a 2020-2021 'Best Law School' by The Princeton Review

The St. Mary's University School of Law is one of the nation's most outstanding law schools, according to The Princeton Review. The education services company included the school in its list, *Best Law Schools for 2021*.

"Every one of the 164 law schools we chose for our 2021 Best Law Schools project offers outstanding academics," said Rob Franek, The Princeton Review's editor-in-chief.

The schools were selected based on an analysis of institutional data covering topics from academic offerings and admission requirements to financial aid and facts about graduates' employment.

Texas Access to Justice Commission honors St. Mary's Law for pro bono service

In recognition of the St. Mary's University School of Law's pro bono efforts, the Texas Access to Justice Commission awarded both institutional and individual awards to the St. Mary's Law community.



Leslie Alvarez

During the New Lawyer Induction Ceremony in the fall, the Texas Access to Justice Commission recognized this culture of service, presenting the 2020 Law School Commitment to Service Award to the law school. Leslie Alvarez (J.D. '20) received the 2020 Law Student Pro Bono Award.

"St. Mary's University School of Law has created a culture of service for pro bono leadership through social justice programs, law review journals and social-justice-minded curricula," said then-Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman, J.D., during the virtual award announcement. "To continue their partnership with legal service providers across Texas, the school pivoted from in-person to virtual services over the past year."

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, student engagement in public service rose to new heights in the 2019-2020 academic year. More than 9,880 pro bono and community service hours were recorded, an increase of over 5% from the previous year.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

*San Antonio's City Clerk uses Master of
Jurisprudence degree to advance
her career*

by Melanie Skaggs (M.A. '02)



Photo by Vincent Gonzalez

Tina Flores stands in the City of San Antonio's Council Chambers where one of her duties is to swear in new city council members. ▶



“I BEGGED THEM TO LET ME LIVE AT THE BAPTIST CHILDREN’S HOME.”

At age 12, desperate for healthy home life, Tina Flores (M.Jur. '17) fought to be in foster care. Her mother was battling drug addiction, unable to care for Flores and her siblings. Her father was in prison. They had no food, electricity or hope. Even as a child, Flores knew she had to escape the toxic environment and sought emancipation from her parents to begin her life anew.

“Once I realized I control my destiny, I had to leave and learn how to live a better life,” Flores said.

Flores instinctively knew education was a key to improving her future, but her learning curve was steep. She lacked the mindset, self-confidence and basic comprehension of the content presented in textbooks or a classroom to take a college course.

“I think people get discouraged and quit because they are not willing to take the remedial classes necessary to gain the skills to succeed in a college-level class,” Flores said. “When I began my career with the City of San Antonio in 2001, I only had a GED diploma.”

However, Flores was just starting her educational journey. After working toward an undergraduate degree on a part-time basis for over 10 years at the University of the Incarnate Word, Flores finally graduated and quickly thereafter attained a Master of Business Administration at UIW.

“I credit my education at St. Mary’s Law for opening these doors for me because knowing the law is critical to the work I do.”

Flores applied to the Master of Jurisprudence (M.Jur.) program at the St. Mary’s University School of Law when, after 16 years of working for the City, she ascended to Assistant City Clerk.

“I needed a foundational knowledge of the law and the confidence to sit at a table with attorneys and understand the discussion,” said Flores, whose M.Jur. included a dual concentration in Compliance Law and Commercial Law.

“We struck gold when we recruited Tina to our inaugural M.Jur. class. She is driven, hardworking and one of the friendliest students we have seen come through the program,” said Colin Marks, J.D., the School of Law’s Associate Dean for Innovative Programs and Strategic Partnerships and the inaugural Director of the Master of Jurisprudence Program, now celebrating its five-year anniversary.

“I love St. Mary’s and credit everyone in the M.Jur. program for helping me succeed,” Flores said. “As a single mother going back to school and supporting four children, it was hard.”

Flores’ career began to skyrocket after completing the M.Jur. She received a promotion to Compliance Auditor, advanced to Deputy City Clerk and, in September 2020, was appointed to the prestigious position of City Clerk. Only four positions in the City of San Antonio are appointed by the Mayor’s Council and “obtaining a M.Jur. helped them make their decision to hire me,” she said.

“I credit my education at St. Mary’s Law for opening these doors for me because knowing the law is critical to the work I do.”

Today, Flores positively impacts the lives of the community she serves through initiatives like the San Antonio ID Recovery Program. This program helps homeless people obtain their birth certificate at no cost, which is necessary to get a Social Security or identification card and, in turn, allows them to receive essential services like housing or food stamps.

“My upbringing helped me learn about unfair circumstances, how to persevere and pay it forward,” she said. “If people do not have an education, they do not have a seat at the table. Now, I bring their perspective to the table as a public servant and feel I am making a difference.” ■

POLICING

for justice

St. Mary's lawyer heads new civil rights division in Bexar County

by Frank Garza

One of alumnus Daryl Harris' favorite quotes comes from Charles Hamilton Houston, an attorney who played a role in dismantling the Jim Crow laws: "A lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society."

As the recently appointed chief of the Civil Rights Division in the Bexar County District Attorney's Office, it's this mindset that guides him as his office investigates officer-involved shootings, injuries or deaths caused by law enforcement, and claims of excessive force.

Following the 2020 death of George Floyd in Minnesota, Bexar County Criminal District Attorney Joe Gonzales (J.D. '88) formed the Civil Rights Division in January with two prosecutors, one investigator and one advocate/paralegal. By March, the legal team was reviewing six cases.

Harris (J.D. '04) has been working for the DA's Office since 2002. He started as an intern while still in law school. When a position opened, the then-Assistant District Attorney quickly tossed his hat in the ring.

Harris remembered watching coverage of the officers involved in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, and he closely followed the facts of the shooting of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri.

Harris understands that police work can be difficult, but it is important to conduct police business as appropriately as possible, he said.

Harris credits his understanding of criminal law to St. Mary's University Professor of Law Geary Reamey, J.D., LL.M., with whom he still keeps in touch. They shared a

common bond, both having served as officers in the U.S. Army.

"Daryl is and always has been more interested in the public service aspect of law, and so I think the position appealed to his desire to improve the system and to do some good and help society generally," Reamey said.

Like Harris, Reamey also strives to make change in policing, and as part of the Members Consultative Group on the American Law Institute's Principles of the Law of Policing project, he and other criminal law experts tackle some of the hardest questions for which courts, legislatures and police most need guidance.

The project will include 14 chapters on several areas of policing, such as use of force and police questioning.

"My fondest hope is that this will be a useful guide for all of the important actors in the criminal justice system, that they can get a sense of the way policing ought to be done, that it will be thoughtful and that it will reflect the concerns of the law enforcement community and the needs of society," said Reamey, who has also served as the legal adviser to the Irving Police Department.

Harris understands that emotions can run high with the types of cases his office investigates. Even so, he is prepared for the challenge.

"Every district attorney's office is mandated by law to see that justice is done. It's in that spirit that Joe started this division and approach," Harris said. "We are going to be as thorough as we can, and as open and disclosing of how we get to our results." ■

"We are going to be as thorough as we can, and as open and disclosing of how we get to our results."

Daryl Harris stands in front of the historic Bexar County Courthouse. ►



Photo by Vincent Gonzalez



Photos by Josh Huskin

From left, mentor Eric Michael Garza (M.B.A. '15, J.D. '16), third-year J.D. student Farid Seyyedi and mentor Alicia Grant (J.D. '16) visit the Law Classrooms Building and discuss the relationships formed during participation in the new Mentor Circles Program.

Opening the way

Mentor Circles Program connects J.D. students with the legal community

by Frank Garza

When he first started law school, third-year J.D. student Farid Seyyedi immediately felt the gap between himself and non-first-generation law students.

“But the beautiful thing about St. Mary’s is that they give everybody an opportunity to close that gap quickly, especially with the Mentor Circles Program,” Seyyedi said. “It’s a great opportunity to put your name out there and get to know the legal community.”

Last fall, St. Mary’s University School of Law Dean Patricia Roberts, J.D., led the law school in a new effort to partner with its alumni and the San Antonio Bar Association and connect second- and third-year J.D. students with experienced lawyer mentors. As of Spring 2021, the program had engaged 223 students and 81 mentors. This effort, called the Mentor Circles Program, gives students and experienced lawyers a chance to discuss different practice areas, work settings, real-world ethical dilemmas and career strategies in a confidential, small-group setting.

Sara Dysart (B.A. ’74, J.D. ’81), University Trustee and President of the School of Law’s Board of Visitors, along with Mary Stich (B.A. ’78, J.D. ’81), a member of the Board of Visitors, also played a vital role in the development of the program.

“As someone who benefited greatly from mentors throughout my education and my career, I was excited about the possibility of offering formal mentorship from attorneys and judges in the community to our second- and third-year students,” Roberts said. “Mentor Circles allow for networking with members of the bench and bar, as well as fellow law students, further expanding a student’s resources and support. Mentor Circles are now part of our tradition.”

“I wish this was around when I was in law school, because it definitely would have been something I’d have signed up for,” said Alicia Grant (J.D. ’16), associate at Norton Rose Fulbright and mentor in the program. “It provides space for a student to talk to their mentors, but also to learn from their peers and get guidance on their law school career and just generally.”

Each Mentor Circle pairs two or more lawyers with groups of up to eight students. Each group has a student leader, who coordinates with the mentors on which topics students want to discuss, how the discussion format should look and scheduling meetings. During the pandemic, the groups met at least once a month on Zoom. Topics covered included Things I Wish I Had Known Earlier in My Law Career; Practice Areas, Work Cultures and Career Options; and an anything-goes Q&A session, among others.

David Louis (J.D. ’20), a law clerk for the Texas Supreme Court, said Mentor Circles might prevent students who don’t feel they fit in from dropping out.

“It’s a huge step in the right direction,” Louis said. “We need to lean in more and find other ways to provide mentorship.”

In his circle of budding lawyers, Albert Gutierrez (J.D. ’94) emphasized the sense of community that exists between all St. Mary’s Law graduates by sharing some advice his cousin, then a third-year J.D. student, gave him during his first semester at St. Mary’s Law.

“We are all in the same boat,” Gutierrez recalled his cousin saying. “We’re perhaps at different levels now, but if you just work hard and stay focused, you’re going to be ok.”

The mentors also learned from the students. Before participating in Mentor Circles, Catherine Hilliard (J.D. ’99) had never heard about imposter syndrome. She understood that some students felt doubts about their ability to practice law, but encouraged them to remember they will have earned their law degree and license.

“An imposter is someone who is trying to be something they’re not,” Hilliard said. “Don’t underestimate the power of that degree and that license because you will be a lawyer.”

By the end of the semester, Eric Michael Garza (M.B.A. ’15, J.D. ’16) wanted to impart a final lesson for his circle: not everyone will see your value. One firm for which Garza worked only graded associates based on years of practice, rather than looking at the number of depositions, for example.

“It doesn’t mean your experience or your value is discredited, it just means that particular firm isn’t placing the same value on it,” Garza said. “You have to decide whether you’re OK with that.”

Continued on next page

Continued from page L7

Mentor Circles also provide students with a sense of what's waiting beyond law school and the lessons that new lawyers will discover as they progress through their career, said former Texas Supreme Court Justice Paul Green (J.D. '77).

With his Mentor Circles students, Green recounted an experience from early in his legal career when he defended a personal injury case and learned from it. In the case, the plaintiff claimed she had a number of terrible injuries and was unable to function because of a brain injury. He recalled flying to Portland, Oregon, to get the plaintiff's deposition, but opted not to do a video deposition. At the trial, the opposing counsel was able to convince the jury of the plaintiff's claims because Green didn't have the video deposition showing she was perfectly coherent, and the plaintiff was not present to testify.

"School tries to prepare you for practice, but there's so much you don't know. It takes time to get over that," Green said.

Third-year J.D. student Elizabeth Pliego said Mentor Circles allowed students to have more in-depth conversations with attorneys compared to a typical networking event.

Pliego found common ground with one of her mentors last fall, Artessia "Tess" House (B.A. '04, J.D. '14), who was also a first-generation student and shared similar legal interests.

"I'd never thought about the idea of opening up my own firm, but she instilled that in me," Pliego said. "She planted a seed."

Pliego's time in the program also reassured her about her decision to become a lawyer.

"They showed me that I could find my happiness in this profession while also helping others," she said.

Second-year J.D. student Barbra Gazo had no doubt the Mentor Circles Program would be one of her most valuable experiences at St. Mary's Law. Her circle included prominent San Antonio criminal defense attorney Gerry Goldstein, J.D.

"I saw this as an opportunity to have a one-on-one interaction with some of the profession's top professionals and learn how they began," Gazo said.

Seyyedi was the student leader for Gazo's circle last fall. He said the group ended up meeting twice a month because the students and mentors enjoyed the experience so much.

"The Mentor Circles Program is just one more affirmation that I chose the right school," Gazo said. "Everyone in the leadership at the law school and in the legal community is just on fire, asking what more they can do." ■

 Watch a video about Mentor Circles at stmarytx.edu/magazine.

“
Your value is important,
because **it gives purpose
to your work.**”



“A legal education makes you more knowledgeable about the law, improves your writing skills, improves your negotiations skills, and it provided me with added legitimacy to pursue a legal tech venture.”



CLEARING THE RECORD

Legal tech CEO invents new approach to common legal service

by Frank Garza

Even before becoming an expert on expunctions as CEO of San Antonio-based Easy Expunctions, Yousef Kassim (J.D. '13) was familiar with the process of removing information pertaining to an arrest, charge or conviction from a person's record.

Prior to law school, Kassim was arrested for a minor offense. The charges were dismissed, but the arrest still appeared on his record when applying for an internship.

“I couldn't afford an attorney at the time, so I thought, 'I'll try this on my own,’” Kassim said. “I didn't have any confidence going into court ... but that feeling when I left the courthouse was really unforgettable.”

Inspired to provide a service to others, he enrolled at the St. Mary's University School of Law in Fall 2010.

“A legal education makes you more knowledgeable about the law, improves your writing skills, improves your negotiations skills, and it provided me with added legitimacy to pursue a legal tech venture,” Kassim said.

In one of his favorite classes, Corporate Planning taught by Professor of Law Angela Walch, J.D., he learned the legalities of starting and financing a company.

“Yousef identified a real problem that many people face and was able to build a company that addresses that need, allowing people to move on with their lives as enabled by the law,” Walch said.

During law school, Kassim noticed more jurisdictions digitizing criminal history information. He also noticed increased consumer demand for alternatives, such as

online tools, to professional services. So he filed a patent and launched the business with his brother in 2015.

Easy Expunctions checks first whether individuals are eligible for the service. Those eligible pick a package, fill out relevant information and continue with an automated process to remove the charge from their record.

Historically, individuals would seek an attorney for this service, but even after the expunction was granted, many private companies had the record in their database. Kassim's company takes care of that issue too, he said.

“Technology's only going to make an attorney more effective, and we need to find ways to incorporate that for the benefit of our clients,” Kassim said. “It gets us closer and closer to justice.” ■

GOLD & BLUE

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

SUMMER/FALL 2021



IN THE Lead

Transformational leadership enhances academic programs, student development and faith formation

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CAMPUS BUZZ



St. Mary's University launched the new Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Laboratory in March with an Opening Ceremony and Blessing. The facility will support the new UAS concentration under the B.S. in Engineering Science program, house new summer camps for high school students and also welcome St. Mary's students of all majors into a Drone Club in the fall.

"We have this amazing facility where students can not only learn, but also apply the knowledge that they are learning in their classroom," said Assistant Professor of Computer/Software Engineering Dante Tezza, Ph.D., adding that lab space has already become a hot commodity among students working on projects, such as redesigning a quadcopter and developing parachutes for drones.



GOLD & BLUE

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.

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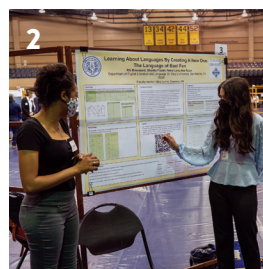
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@StMarysU Social

1. A week of Homecoming events ended with the crowning of the St. Mary's King, Steven Castillo, and Queen, Remy Levy. To read more about Castillo, turn to Page 12.
2. Students from all majors took time to answer questions about their research projects during St. Mary's Research Week.
3. St. Mary's Dean of Students, Tim Bessler, joined St. Mary's Esports for a special game night on Twitch.
4. Parents and perspective students put their legs to work for the new Pedal Party tour of campus.
5. Graduating seniors came together for a socially distanced Rattler Ring Ceremony.
6. A late-season snow blanketed the St. Mary's campus.

On the cover: Recent graduates Cody Miller, left, and Steven Castillo, center, join Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Sheri King on the stairs of the University Center and discuss their experiences with transformative leadership at St. Mary's University. Castillo, who is applying to medical school, said his journey at St. Mary's being a student leader in unprecedentedly trying times instilled in him "compassionate presence." Read more on Page 12. Photo by Robin Jerstad.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Finding transformational leadership — in the classroom and beyond

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

In this message, one year ago, I wrote about how the Marianist Educational Characteristics uniquely prepared us to deal with the change, uncertainty and disruption brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic. After the Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 semesters became almost completely virtual, we — like other Texas universities — were eager to get back to something closer to “normal” in the Fall 2020 semester.

It was not to be, as we now know. While it was hard to imagine it in the Summer of 2020, the pandemic continued. The extraordinary efforts that our faculty, staff, students and alumni have undertaken over the last year are evidence of the value of our Marianist heritage and our organizational commitment to ensuring that we can adapt and change to continue to provide an academically excellent St. Mary's University experience.

But all of us know too that while academic excellence is a foundational element of a St. Mary's education, so too is developing leaders who are prepared to respond and deliver exceptional, transformative leadership even in — and especially in — the most challenging of times.

Not all learning happens in the classroom, and I am proud of how the University's Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), which includes seven dedicated men and women, have worked strategically, collaboratively and faithfully while modeling transformative leadership to our community and our students. The decisions they made were not always easy, but they always were reached with courage and compassion.

As we have highlighted in the last few issues of *Gold & Blue*, the St. Mary's community has continually over the past year found ways to respond, as we continue to provide the education and experience that our students deserve and expect, now and for many years to come.

This issue takes that one step further, looking at ways that the concept of transformational leadership is taught, modeled and learned at St. Mary's University — inside the classroom and out. (See Page 12.)

While we had hoped to be closer to normal long ago, we now are looking forward to returning to in-person learning, teaching and community as we prepare for the fall semester, just as the University has done for almost 170 years. God calls us all to continue the work of our Marianist founders as we prepare the next generations of transformational leaders. As St. Mary's faculty and staff have done for decades, our community in Fall 2021 will work together with care and compassion. ■



St. Mary's appoints new Vice President for Mission and new Rector

St. Mary's University has named the Rev. John Thompson, S.M., Ed.D., as Vice President for Mission; and the Rev. William J. Meyer, S.M., D.Min., as Rector.

Both appointments began June 1, but Thompson delayed transitioning to campus until July 1 as he finished fulfilling his commitment as pastor of Holy Rosary Parish, which is adjacent to the University.

"Because we have two outstanding professed Marianists with significant leadership experience, including in Marianist higher education, I and my colleagues are delighted that the Marianist Provincial Council and the St. Mary's Board of Trustees have approved these appointments," said President Thomas Mengler, J.D. "Father Thompson and Father Meyer will enable the University to continue its strong commitment to educating for formation in faith in significant new ways."

In recent years, Thompson has worked closely with the University to build the local community's Catholic faith and to integrate St. Mary's students into that outreach.



Photo by Robin Jerstad

The Rev. John Thompson joins in a Holy Rosary Church summer camp.

Sheri King named Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

St. Mary's University announced in April that Sheri King, Ph.D., will serve as the first Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. King served as co-chair of the President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), which was established in Fall 2020 to advance St. Mary's efforts to become an anti-racist University.



Sheri King

"She understands diversity, equity and inclusion and how these facets are integrated into a Catholic university context," said President Thomas Mengler, J.D. "In her nine years at St. Mary's, she has gained a deep understanding of what it means to work at a Catholic and Marianist university that educates leaders for the common good and advocates for social justice. She embraces the St. Mary's mission and its Marianist charism in her work while striving to infuse diversity, equity and inclusion in her student programming and her teaching and mentoring."

In April, King began working to establish the new Office of DEI in St. Louis Hall.

Five join Board of Trustees

St. Mary's University welcomed five new trustees to its Board this summer. New trustees are:

- Rev. James Fitz, S.M., Vice President for Mission and the Rector at the University of Dayton.
- Brother Francisco González, S.M., M.D., president of Colegio San José, Rio Piedras in Puerto Rico.
- Stuart Parker (M.B.A. '95), a 2017 St. Mary's Distinguished Alumnus. Parker is the former chief executive officer of USAA, a San Antonio-based financial services company that serves the U.S. military.

- The Honorable Sandee Bryan Marion (J.D. '80), former Chief Justice for the Fourth Court of Appeals. Marion was named a St. Mary's School of Law Distinguished Graduate in 2008.
- Joseph Diaz (B.A. '79), M.D., president and physician for Allergy Asthma & Immunology Associates of South Texas PA. Diaz is a member of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology Advisory Council Executive Committee and a 2015 St. Mary's Distinguished Alumnus.

St. Mary's partnership creates a Korean language and culture center

St. Mary's University has launched the King Sejong Institute, which fosters and supports education in Korean language and culture through academic and non-academic courses and programming. The Institute is supported by the South Korean government and is in partnership with Dongseo University of South Korea.

There are 213 King Sejong Institutes in 76 countries around the world, but only 13 locations in the United States, including the newest institute at St. Mary's.

"The St. Mary's King Sejong Institute, by providing Korean language and culture educational and programming opportunities for our campus and for the community, will play a major role in improving our students' ability to understand cultural diversity and how to collaborate with people from different backgrounds," said Professor Seongbae Lim, Ph.D., of the Greehey School of Business, who directs the Institute.

Esports excel in back-to-back semesters

After six weeks of regular season play, the St. Mary's Rainbow 6 Siege team successfully qualified for the second Collegiate Esports Association (CEA) Open League playoffs. Rainbow 6 Siege involves teams of five players working to eliminate the opposing teams using equipment, tools and traps.

Continued on Page 6

Enjoy a summer escape with *St. Mary's authors*

by Kendra Rainey

Ready to finally leave your home this summer? Here's a list of Rattler reads to help your mind escape to another place for a few days — books recently written by our very own St. Mary's University students, alumni, faculty and staff.

The Perfecting of Nature: Reforming Bodies in Antebellum Literature

Benjamin "Josh" Doty, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English, Literature and Language
The University of North Carolina Press, 2020

Doty calls attention to a set of reformist ideas — including dietary management, exercise culture and the hygiene movement — that affirmed the body's ability to change and be changed for the better.

Migration Through the Mirror/La Migración a Través del Espejo

Edited by: Roberto Rosas, J.D., J.S.D.
Research Professor of Law
Full Court Press, 2020

Rosas' bilingual collection of reflections by women from different backgrounds and professional experiences recounts different scenarios where migrant Mexican women thrive in America.

Human Dignity, Education, and Political Society: A Philosophical Defense of the Liberal Arts

Edited by: James Greenaway, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Lexington Books, 2020

A life of liberty and responsibility requires a particular kind of education, one that Greenaway refers to as liberal arts education. Keeping in mind what can be lost when liberal arts education is lost, this volume makes the case for why the liberal arts always has a role to play in human flourishing.

Slaves, Freed and Free/Escravos, Libertos e Livres

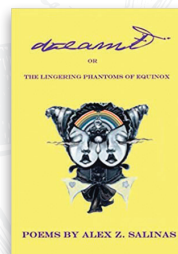
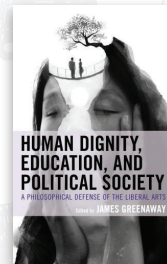
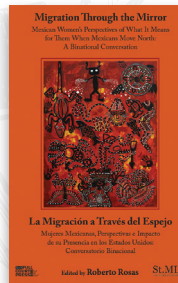
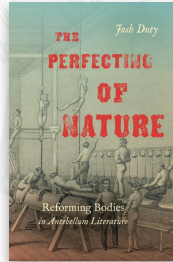
Edited by: Eva Bueno, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita of Portuguese and Spanish
Mentes Abertas, 2020

The work toward unconditional freedom is still not complete. Follow Bueno as she discusses how racism, oppression and repression continue against Brazilians and Argentinians of African descent.

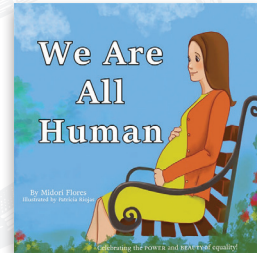
DREAMT, or The Lingerings Phantoms of Equinox

Alex Z. Salinas (B.A. '11, M.A. '19)
Hekate Publishing, 2020

Join Salinas, an alumnus and the University's Associate Director of Communications Writing and Storytelling, on an adventure through his dreams, demonstrating feelings of compassion and pain through poetry.



Kid-friendly reads



We Are All Human

Midori Flores
IngramSpark, 2020

Celebrate the power and beauty of equality in this children's book by Environmental Science major Flores. This conversation-starter introduces various topics of diversity to children, emphasizing that no matter our cultural differences, we should all be treated equally.



Alebrije! Alebrije! Alebrije!

April M. Salazar (B.A. '08)
RAZALAS Publishing LLC, 2020

Explore how Salazar, an alumna, captures Mexican traditions and legends in this dual English- and Spanish-language children's read. Passed from generation to generation, the symbolic message this story presents will continue its mission of enlightening children and parents alike, and solidifying a part of Mexican culture throughout the world.

St. Mary's University confirms plans for new Innovation Center

St. Mary's University announced in May that as part of The Defining Moment Comprehensive Campaign, the University and its School of Science, Engineering and Technology plan to erect a new Innovation Center to support the School.

The two-story interdisciplinary facility will be an incubator for new ideas and programs. Some of the areas of focus of the new center include innovation, entrepreneurship, data science and machine learning, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, 3D printing and reverse engineering, logistics and supply chain management, human/computer interaction, smart devices, and augmented and virtual reality.

The space next to the Richter Math-Engineering Center is expected to be about 18,000 square feet and will include seven laboratories, two large collaboration spaces and also faculty offices.

A \$1 million gift to the University from the Charles E. Chewning Irrevocable Trust made in 2019 will aid in the creation of the new building. The gift from the late Charles E. Chewning of St. Louis recognized his brother, the late Brother William "Bill" Chewning, S.M., who taught Chemistry at St. Mary's.

St. Mary's University appoints Greehey School of Business Dean



Rowena Ortiz-Walters

Rowena Ortiz-Walters, Ph.D., began her tenure as the first Latina dean of the Greehey School of Business in June.

Ortiz-Walters came to St. Mary's from SUNY Plattsburgh, a public liberal arts college that is part of the State University of New York (SUNY) System, where she served as Dean and Professor of Management in the School of Business and Economics.

"It is an exciting time to be embarking on this new role as the next dean of the Greehey School of Business. I admire the School's focus on ethical and global business, and I believe I can add a more intentional focus on equity to complement the academic portfolio and reinforce the mission of St. Mary's University," Ortiz-Walters said. "As a Hispanic professional, I am also uniquely positioned to engage the Hispanic business community in Texas, which may be an untapped resource for the Greehey School."



Renderings depict plans for the Innovation Center.

Ian Martines named Interim Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology

Ian Martines, Ph.D., has accepted the position as Interim Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology, which began June 1.

Martines joined St. Mary's in 2009 as an Assistant Professor and is now a Professor of Mathematics. He was Chair of the Mathematics Department from 2014 to 2018 and, in 2019, began serving as the Associate Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology. Martines completed his formation as a Marianist Educational Associate in 2015, and has served on several committees to advance excellence and the University's Catholic Marianist mission.

Squeeze it like toothpaste: marsupial mammals evolved flexible brains

Being stretchy and squeezable may be the key to finding space for the brain in mammals, including humans.

An international study, co-led by Vera Weisbecker of Flinders University in Australia, has revealed that marsupial mammals like possums, kangaroos and wombats appear to have a lot of flexibility when it comes to accommodating their brains into their skulls. The paper, published in the journal *Evolution*, included contributions by Ted Macrini, Ph.D., Chair and Professor of Biological Sciences at St. Mary's.



“This study examines the evolution of brain shape in marsupial mammals and provides some new insight as to how the brain co-evolves with the skull of mammals,” Macrini said. “The most interesting finding is the great degree of malleability of the marsupial brain, allowing it to fit into a variety of skull shapes and still do its job.”

Rattler Athletics in the rankings

St. Mary's Athletics continue to compete on a national level, having multiple teams ranked in the top-25 in their respective sports. The Women's Golf program has the highest ranking of the year, coming in at No. 6 in the Golfstat rankings. The team also won the 2021 NCAA Division II West Regional in May. Men's Soccer came in at No. 10 in the first United Soccer Coaches Top 25. The St. Mary's Volleyball team broke into the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) top-25 for the first time since joining the NCAA in 2000, coming in at No. 21. Women's Tennis captured the NCAA South Central Regional crown.

Rattlers welcome USA Basketball Team

USA Basketball's Women's National Team stopped by Greehey Arena for a practice session in April.



Courtesy USA Basketball



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A *Legendary* Lifer

*With nearly six decades serving
St. Mary's, Political Science professor
concludes a legendary career*

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

▲ Charles Cotrell began his St. Mary's University teaching career in Reinbolt Hall, Room 4.

Charles Cotrell, Ph.D., aka Charlie. To generations of St. Mary's University alumni, his name signals a jaw-dropping 55-year teaching career, or serving as the University's first lay president from 2000 to 2012.

Students may recognize him — the President Emeritus and Professor of Political Science — as the person for whom the Cotrell Commons, located on the first floor of the Blume Library, is named.

"A student once told me, 'Oh, you're Cotrell! I thought that guy was dead!'" Cotrell recalled, laughing loudly.

After Spring 2021, Cotrell, age 80 — a St. Mary's mainstay since 1966, taking on roles as department chair, director of graduate programs, dean and mentor to generations — retired, though he isn't fond of that word.

"My wife, Abbie, and I plan to take bucket-list road trips, visit our (four) sons and spend more time with grandchildren," of whom there are six, Cotrell said.

Spiritual conversion

Born in South Side San Antonio, Cotrell spent time in the Hill Country before graduating from Comfort High School.

Raised Presbyterian, yet deeply influenced by an aunt, he converted to Catholicism at age 13. His spiritual turning point prompted his uncle to inform him about St. Mary's, where Cotrell enrolled in 1958.

"There were about 1,000 students," he remembered. "It was all male, and the law school was downtown. The Brothers really were the people who were the instructors, wearing their traditional black coats."

After receiving his bachelor's in Government and master's in Political Science from St. Mary's in 1962 and 1964, respectively, Cotrell earned his Ph.D. from the University of Arizona in 1970.

“ What I think of most is his innate generosity, the gentleness of his personality and the strength of his moral convictions. ”

By then, he was already establishing an enduring legacy in the classroom at St. Mary's.

Enduring legacy

José Angel Gutiérrez (M.A. '69), J.D., Ph.D., founding member of the civil rights group Mexican American Youth Organization. Arturo Vega (B.A. '81), Ph.D., and Sonia Garcia (B.A. '84), Ph.D., Political Science professors at St. Mary's. Cary Clack (B.A. '85), columnist for the San Antonio Express-News and 2017 inductee of the Texas Institute of Letters.

These are just a sprinkling of the many illustrious alumni Cotrell influenced.

"The classes I took with him forever changed me and my professional trajectory," Garcia said. "His long-lasting legacy is in his role as mentor to so many St. Mary's students, who went on to have successful careers as political scientists, elected officials, civil rights leaders and community activists."

Vega called Cotrell, "one of the youngest and coolest professors on campus," when he first met him in the late 1970s — back when Cotrell drove an orange Volkswagen Beetle.

"His hair was a tad longer then. He wore blue jeans, a sport coat and an occasional tie," Vega said. "He accepted students as they were and wherever they came from."

Aaron Hanna (B.A. '10, M.P.A. '11, M.B.A. '13), St. Mary's Vice President for Administration and Finance, said Cotrell "encouraged each of us to use the gifts God gave us to better our community and the lives of those around us."

This embodiment of servant leadership factors into why Clack felt Cotrell "was the best classroom teacher I ever had."

"But it's outside the classroom, in the 36 years since I graduated from St. Mary's, that he's had the biggest influence on my life," Clack said. "What I think of most is his innate generosity, the gentleness of his personality and the strength of his moral convictions."

Among Cotrell's proudest achievements is his quarter-century devoted to being an expert witness in constitutional law cases, in which "political science came alive" to help indigenous tribes, including the Navajo and Hopi.

He credited the "heart of the St. Mary's mission" as a driver of his efforts — stemming from a "regenerational love" of teaching.

"We're a place people come to for high-quality education, whether they're Catholic or not," Cotrell said. "Our philosophy is focused on the whole person, and that ethos continues to endure." ■



Watch a video of Cotrell at stmarytx.edu/magazine.

No. Limits

Management majors launch woman-owned fashion businesses

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

For some St. Mary's University students, like Management major Nadia Carrasco-Vasquez, who graduated this May, owning a business is a lifelong dream — in her case, since childhood days in her mom's coffee shop in Arizona.

Others experience their entrepreneurial eureka moment in a flash, like Management senior Azucena Rangel Olvera did minutes before pitching a business idea for a class taught by Associate Professor of Management Sergio Palacios, Ph.D.

Today, Vasquez and Rangel Olvera — both age 20 — are proud small business owners, fusing interests in fashion and St. Mary's education to put their visions in the form of products before customers, which Palacios called, "actual innovation."

EYE(LASH) FOR FASHION

Vasquez hadn't been at St. Mary's a full semester before thinking, "I'm tired of being broke. I need to do something with my education."

Driven by her affinity for makeup and fashion, she started her own luxury eyelash business — VAS Cosmetics — in September 2019.

Vasquez's eyelash products are made of vegan, cruelty-free silk — an expression of her being pescatarian (a person who eats seafood but not meat) since age 8.

"I always knew I wanted to start my own business," the Phoenix native said.

Having enrolled in the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Track, she captured the attention of Palacios, who mentored Vasquez and called her success the result of "outstanding problem-solving skills and her dedication to learning everything she needs to continue growing her startup."

VAS Cosmetics has expanded to 12 styles of lashes and will soon include brushes, Vasquez said.

"I fully embrace being a Latina business owner, but also a woman business owner," she said. "I want to be a brand that's relatable for all types of women and people who wear makeup."

BRIGHT IDEA

In Fall 2019, Rangel Olvera was about to present a business idea for Palacios' class when at the last minute she changed her mind.

"I was wearing a Mexican artisanal shirt and thought, 'Why not a business selling these?'" she said, having long worn the embroidered shirts. The judges and class agreed.

With help from her older sister, the first-generation college student from Mexico launched La Tiendita Boutique in October 2020.

Starting with just 12 artisanal shirts, Rangel Olvera's line now includes seven colorful designs for women, an option for men, huaraches (a type of sandal), purses and coin holders.

"The meaning behind my fashion business is cultural awareness," she said. "I want people to know they're sharing their experiences with me via our clothing."

Rangel Olvera said her hand-knitted products are manufactured primarily in Oaxaca, Mexico.

"I donate 25% of revenues back to the Mexican workers," she said.

"Azucena's business is another great example of capitalizing on opportunities," Palacios said. "She had an idea, she worked with what she had available in her tools and resources and then started her store."

With Rangel Olvera slated to graduate from St. Mary's in December, both she and Vasquez plan to continue growing their businesses — one eyelash and artisanal shirt at a time.

"I finally purchased a vending machine for my eyelashes, and spray-painted the inside baby pink," Vasquez said. "It's all about staying relevant." ■

“ St. Mary’s
has given me
courage and
confidence.
The professors
remind me
I don’t have
any limits. ”



Photos by Robin Jerstad



▲ Azucena Rangel Olvera has created a fashion business called La Tiendita Boutique (latienditaboutiquesa.com).

◀ Nadia Carrasco-Vasquez has launched a luxury eyelash business called VAS Cosmetics (vascosmetics.com).

IN THE Lead



◀ Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Sheri King joins May graduates Steven Castillo and Cody Miller on the stairs of the University Center.

Through transformational leadership, St. Mary's enhances academic programs, student development and faith formation

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



Photos by Robin Jerstad

More than a year into the global pandemic spawned by COVID-19, it's easy to forget the times before face masks and social distancing inundated and separated us. With new challenges arising daily, and old ways of life coming into question, St. Mary's University believes one answer to uncertainty remains one of the bedrocks of a Marianist university — educating for transformational leaders.

Expanding and enriching online instruction. Building out new courses to address evolving challenges students face. Forming a President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and leading campus-wide discussions on creating an inclusive learning environment. Reshaping how and why students pursue careers as servant leaders.

Multiple stakeholders at St. Mary's are leading the way to continue delivering excellent education to students, helping them become "leaders for the common good in the communities in which they will live, work and worship," said President Thomas Mengler, J.D.

Through transformational leadership in academic programs, student development and faith formation, Mengler said St. Mary's students gain not only a premier education, but also — in the spirit of the University's 169-year-old Catholic and Marianist identity — a "commitment to serving others."

TIMELY COURSES

When the pandemic hit last March, rupturing society seemingly overnight, faculty and staff at St. Mary's responded quickly by transitioning the University's signature small-fee classroom experience online.

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Graduate International Relations, showcased her leadership by creating new classes centered around issues and inequities exposed by the coronavirus.

Her Fall 2020 course, Asian Security Studies, and her Spring 2021 course, Social Suffering and the Scholarship of Bearing Witness, were formed partly out of an "emphasis on service and attention to the disenfranchised," said Gallagher, who spent years living and working in Nepal's squatter settlements.

Continued on next page

“Leaders are people who seek challenge and discomfort, and who grow through these experiences.”

President Thomas Mengler says many individuals at St. Mary's help students become leaders for the common good. ▶



Continued from page 13

“If Blessed Mother Mary is the heart of our Marianist charism, we must ask ourselves, are we being service-oriented? Are we other-centric?” she asked.

According to Gallagher, her students “appreciated having a vehicle in real time to process this life-changing event.”

“It’s important to create a sense of community where students can feel comfortable to share any struggles, discomforts and hurt about their faith lives and perspectives,” she said.

REFRESHED CURRICULUM

With a fresh way of approaching education while enhancing the community experience, the University in Fall 2021 will premiere a new Core Curriculum — the result of a three-year research, review and development process.

The new Core includes updated degree programs across the schools with fewer hours allowing students to more easily pick up additional majors and minors while still being able to graduate on time.

There is also a new course designed for incoming freshmen, the First-Year Experience (FYE), “to inspire multidisciplinary intellectual development,” said William Buhrman, Ph.D., Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

“It sets the stage for the exciting new academic, social and personal journey available to students when they join the University,” Buhrman said. “Most of all, the FYE encourages students to be confident in their ability to successfully complete their studies and embark on their career vocation.”

DOING RIGHT

When Cody Miller of New Braunfels arrived at St. Mary’s from a high school with a graduating class of 19, he was scared to make new friends.

However, Miller — who in May earned his bachelor’s in Marketing — immediately discovered at St. Mary’s “really involved students who I wanted to be like.”

In joining the Honors Program, Greehey Scholars Program and Enactus — all of which focus on academic excellence and transformative ethical leadership development — Miller befriended an ambitious classmate, Guillermo Avelar (B.B.A. ’18), and “made him my mentor.”

In his freshman year, through Enactus, Miller traveled to India to assist people in poverty alongside the Marianist brothers working there — an experience he called, “humbling and unforgettable.”

Leaving St. Mary’s with three internships under his belt, the last of which was at Planoly, an Austin-based social media marketing company Miller completed remotely from his parents’ house in New Braunfels during the stay-home period, he said his undergraduate education taught him “doing good things for people, doing them more than just for profit, feels right.”

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Hailing from Peru, Marketing senior Ximena Barbagelatta Grau got on a plane, alone, for the first time at age 17 to come to St. Mary's.

Initially homesick — “I didn't know how to do laundry or cook,” Barbagelatta Grau said — she remembered her mom's advice about putting faith in God. Through joining the Marianist Leadership Program (MLP) and later the President's Ambassadors (PA), she felt empowered “to become ambitious.”

Barbagelatta Grau, who in March attended the opening and blessing of the new Drone Lab as a PA — clad in the members' signature navy blazer — said community outreach opportunities such as Continuing the Heritage and volunteering as a Confirmation class leader for high schoolers at neighboring Holy Rosary Parish showed her “how to be a servant leader.”

“St. Mary's has given me a way deeper perspective on what leadership means, how to express it with faith and spirituality,” she said.

“Transformational leaders lead by example while maintaining human dignity.”

COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

Before graduating in May, Biology major Steven Castillo served two years as a resident assistant (RA) in Marian Hall.

Entering Fall 2020, the Amarillo native faced his biggest challenge in making the living experience for other student residents a memorably positive one.

“Leaders are people who seek challenge and discomfort, and who grow through these experiences,” Castillo said.

Taking a cue from his favorite writer, Mark Twain, in Castillo's words “to not talk more than listen,” he and his fellow RAs established resident activities, such as meditation sessions after midterms, painting succulents and ice cream socials — all via Zoom — “to be present for other people's trials, as the quality of our presence is more important than our work,” he said.

Castillo, who was accepted into medical school, said his journey at St. Mary's being a student leader in unprecedentedly trying times instilled in him “compassionate presence.”

“Make every moment count,” he said. “Every single memory is precious.”

IN THE FAMILY

At St. Mary's, you often hear people refer to the community as a family. In fact, one of the five elements that characterize the Marianist approach to education is educate in the family spirit.

For some, this is strictly metaphorical; for others, like English and Theology senior Sarah Uhlig, it's literal.

Uhlig's father — Chair and Professor of Mathematics Paul Uhlig (B.S. '90), Ph.D. — signifies her presence at St. Mary's as familiar as it is familial.

“Here at St. Mary's, I have a support system of faculty and staff, some of whom have watched me grow into the person I am today,” Sarah Uhlig said.

As a member of the MLP, she was one of the students responsible for organizing a six-week program for this year's 40 Days of Lent and Service, which consisted of virtual and limited in-person events including student-led prayer services, volunteering at the San Antonio Food Bank and discussions on social justice.

“St. Mary's has helped me grow as a young adult by helping me get involved, find ways to challenge myself and network with professionals so I'm prepared for the world after college,” she said.

VOCATIONAL CALLING

Yasamin Sadreddinimehrjordi, second-year J.D. student in the School of Law, said she had always wanted to study law, “but doing law school back in Iran as a woman didn't really make sense.”

In 2015, she earned her bachelor's in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas at Arlington and had her first child. She later pursued her dream of becoming a lawyer by enrolling at St. Mary's.

Sadreddinimehrjordi discovered a mentor in Vincent Johnson, J.D., LL.D., South Texas Distinguished Professor of Law, who helped her land a clerkship in Spring 2021 with practicing law faculty member U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez, J.D.

Through her clerkship, Sadreddinimehrjordi attended hearings, drafted summary judgments and picked the judge's brain about criminal cases.

Sadreddinimehrjordi said faith was something she never felt she had prior to attending St. Mary's Law, but “amazing” events, such as the annual Red Mass celebrating the start of the judicial year at San Fernando Cathedral, changed her.

“What I learned is, from a criminal aspect, most people can't afford an attorney so they end up with a public defender,” she said. “I want to do something that's fair to the people I can help. If that's taking pro bono cases here and there, or being a quality public defender, a lot of people deserve to have better representation.”

Continued on next page

“Being transformational leaders ensures we evaluate our workplaces and communities on a continuing basis.”



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EMBRACING DIVERSITY

In June 2020, amid national attention on violence toward people of color rooted in systemic injustices, St. Mary's formed a President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to advance the University's efforts to become and stand firmly as an anti-racist university.

In April, longtime Director of Student Life Sheri King, Ph.D., accepted a new role as Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Since then, King has worked tirelessly on establishing the new Office of DEI in St. Louis Hall.

“I have had many conversations with students to broaden their cultural knowledge. In addition, I've advocated for the inclusion of events to embrace our diverse student population,” King said.

Chipping into this effort is Marianist Brother Allen Pacquing, S.M., Associate Director of

Marianist Student Initiatives for the Office of Community Engagement, who leads the MLP.

“In every opportunity I have, I encourage students and those around me to always be considerate and intentional of their neighbors, always look at ways to promote dialogue on social justice areas that tug at the heart,” Pacquing said.

In fostering these conversations, St. Mary's works to promote world conscientiousness among its faculty, staff and students.

“As we educate students to be global citizens who advocate for justice and peace, we must understand we live in an ever-changing world. Being transformational leaders ensures we evaluate our workplaces and communities on a continuing basis,” King said.

▲ Marianist Brother Allen Pacquing reflects in Assumption Chapel.



▲ Vice Provost for Vocation and Career Services Stephanie Ward stands with a view of Alkek Plaza.

VIRTUAL PRAYER

Outside the St. Mary's classroom, staff members work long hours to maintain a culture of family and, by extension, transformational prayer life.

When the pandemic first hit, Jessica Uhlig, Ed.D., Associate Provost for Academic Administration and Mission Integration (and, you guessed it, Paul Uhlig's wife), placed her faith in technology, transitioning her normally in-person Tuesday morning prayer meetings for interested faculty and staff to Zoom.

"I developed it to remind colleagues and friends that we could still gather together for prayer and reflection," Uhlig said.

Kathe Lehman-Meyer, Director of the Academic Media Center, said virtual morning prayers have helped her "stay focused on why I'm here working at a Marianist institution whose charism focuses on balance and community."

Jessica Uhlig, who has overseen the President's Ambassadors (PAs), also assisted in modifying, with Mengler's blessing, the start of virtual St. Mary's University Board of Trustees meetings, which occur four times an academic year.

The meetings now commence with a prayer led by PAs followed by a Q&A through which the Trustees engage directly with the students they serve.

"To be a transformational leader is to align one's personal and professional mission to the mission of the organization the person is affiliated with," Uhlig said.

BEING GROUNDED

Transformational leadership at St. Mary's takes many forms.

Professors checking on students' welfare. Students checking on one another. Community service aiding those in need. Treating everyone respectfully. Cultivating the common good.

"I believe the common good is continuously working toward acceptance and love of our neighbor," said recent graduate Zyania Seijas (B.B.A. '21). "It is an individual, yet collective effort."

"Educating in the family spirit doesn't mean we always agree," said Stephanie Ward, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Vocation and Career Services. "Leadership begins at home. It begins with being grounded in who you are, knowing yourself, striving for consistency.


"At the end of the day, before sleep, ask yourself: 'Did I make a difference today? Did I make somebody else's day better?' If your answer is yes, you're on the right track."

Or as Leticia "Leti" Contreras (B.A. '89), Chair of the Board of Trustees, put it: "Am I going to leave someone better off?"

"Transformational leaders lead by example while maintaining human dignity," Contreras added.

For Mengler, the University he leads will continue to churn out servant leaders as it has for generations, through dark times and better. Why?

"Because God invites each of us to use the unique medley of gifts and talents we have received — to lead by serving others as best we can," he said. ■

 Watch a video about transformational leadership at St. Mary's at stmarytx.edu/magazine.



CRITICAL RESEARCH

A groundbreaking medical team — featuring St. Mary's alumni — changed the way we treat COVID-19

by Brooke Blanton Leith

It's April 2020 and a team of researchers at Houston Methodist are studying the effects of convalescent plasma — blood plasma donated from recovered patients — in treating the complicated COVID-19 virus. One day, the group began discussing where they attended college.

"I went to St. Mary's University in San Antonio," said the principal investigator, Eric Salazar (B.A./B.S. '03), M.D.

Surprised, the clinical research coordinator, Bevin Lopez (CL '02), responded, "So did I!"

"Wait, who did you have for biology?" Salazar asked. He knew she looked familiar and he would soon discover why.

More than 20 years before that day, Salazar and Lopez took the exact same college course.

They weren't the only former Rattlers involved in the research. Shortly after, Brian Castillo (B.S. '04), M.D., joined the team, which was the first in the nation to infuse critically ill COVID-19 patients with convalescent plasma. A few months later, the researchers concluded it was a safe treatment option for those severely infected with COVID-19.

As the study's lead, Salazar's responsibilities were to write the clinical trials, coordinate the details and collaborate to analyze the data, while Lopez and

Castillo did the groundwork. They recruited patients to donate, as well as receive, convalescent plasma.

In just a month and a half, the team recruited more than 350 patients for the study, a difficult task considering they were so ill.

So ill, in fact, that the researchers "didn't want them to cry or laugh because their oxygen levels would drop," Lopez said. "Many of the patients were even intubated."

The work took a personal toll on the researchers. To protect their families, Lopez and Castillo isolated as much as they could. Lopez didn't see her 7-year-old daughter for four months, while Castillo kept a strict distance from his.

"I just needed to hug my daughter," Castillo said. "It was difficult."

Despite the sacrifices, Salazar knew they were doing the right thing.

"It was a lot of work. But if it helps in any way, then it's obviously worth it," Salazar said.

In addition to his Biology course at St. Mary's, the MARC U*STAR program, which provides opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in biomedical research training at institutes around the country, solidified Salazar's career goals.

"I can't overemphasize the impact that it had," Salazar said. "After my first summer dissecting hawk moth brains at the University of Arizona, I knew research is what I needed to do."

Castillo's experience at the Marianist Residence, located near Treadaway Hall, spending time with the Brothers, especially the older ones, and hearing their stories, factored into his decision to go into medicine.

"It was the human aspect," Castillo said. "Seeing how they needed assistance ... motivated me."

The trio agreed: the fact that three former students were involved in the historic study of effectively treating COVID-19 is a testament to the quality of education at St. Mary's.

"You don't get that investment in you as an individual anywhere else," Lopez said, while Salazar attested that Rattlers are taught to rise to the occasion.

While their work treating the coronavirus isn't over, the team has reflected on what they've accomplished.

"I'm most proud of being part of something bigger than myself," Lopez said. "We've really come full circle from sitting in the same classrooms to sitting in the same offices." ■

From left to right, Bevin Lopez, Eric Salazar and Brian Castillo pose in a convalescent plasma donation bay at Houston Methodist in March. ▶

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