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# GOLD & BLUE

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2023



## LEADING Ladies

Five women at the top of their fields help steward academic excellence at St. Mary's



# Caring for the land

## St. Mary's University gardener shares path to U.S. citizenship

by Norma Espinoza (B.A. '22)

At St. Mary's University, Jose "Luis" Sanchez doesn't just watch his garden grow. The groundskeeper's perseverance and care have helped the campus to blossom for nearly 10 years. In 2022, the University was able to return the favor.

Originally from Mexico City, he immigrated to the U.S., met his future wife in San Antonio and made it home. He began working at St. Mary's in 2014. In 2015, Sanchez received the President's Excellence Award, given each fall to employees who exemplify excellence.

After 30 years in the U.S., Sanchez had the opportunity to apply for citizenship but could not afford the process. With some additional assistance from the University, he became a U.S. citizen in February 2022.

*"Desde darme la oportunidad de empleo, a formar gran parte en obtener la ciudadanía Americana,"* Sanchez said, or in English, "From granting me the opportunity of employment to being a big part of obtaining American citizenship, St. Mary's has truly been a blessing to my life."

Visit [bit.ly/StMUGardener](https://bit.ly/StMUGardener) to read the full story.





# GOLD & BLUE

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

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

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[www.stmarytx.edu/magazine](http://www.stmarytx.edu/magazine)

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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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**ON THE COVER:** For the first time in 170 years, St. Mary's University has women in each of the four deans roles and the vice provost role. From left, Nancy LaGreca, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Patricia "Patty" Roberts, J.D., Dean of the School of Law; Teresa "Teri" A. Beam, Ph.D., incoming Dean of the School of Science Engineering and Technology; Rowena Ortiz-Walters, Ph.D., Dean of the Greehey School of Business; and Carolyn Y. Tubbs, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. *Read more on Page 12.* Photo by Josh Huskin.

## NOW and THEN

The University's first Executive Council is composed "of the Marianist men in black." Pictured from left, Brother Gerald Schnepf, Brother John Schuh, Brother George Kohnen, Brother Leo Banck, the Rev. Walter Buehler, Brother Tom Treadaway, Brother Joseph Rudolph, the Rev. Ralph Dyer and the Rev. James Young.



# HONORING OUTSTANDING LEADERS

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

One of the five Characteristics of Marianist Universities is our commitment to “Educate for Adaptation and Change.” This characteristic encourages the three Marianist universities in the midst of rapid social and technological change, to modify methods, policies and practices to meet the needs of our students and the larger community.

Among major changes at St. Mary's over its 170 years has been its transition from an all-male school to one that includes women as students, faculty and staff. In 1929, Helen Steele Broden and Alma Pond Carey were the first women to receive bachelor's degrees. The first women faculty member was Sybil Lightfoot, who began teaching Earth Sciences in 1956. That same year, Hattie Briscoe became the first African American woman to receive a law degree from the School of Law. And in 1963, St. Mary's opened its entire array of degree programs to women and enrolled 274 in number. Now, a majority of St. Mary's students are female.

Women throughout the University's history have held significant leadership roles too. Sister Ann Semel, SSND, hired as the third woman faculty member at St. Mary's in 1967, was a beloved teacher and mentor and chaired the English Department for many years. Janet Dizinno, Ph.D., led the School of Humanities and Social Sciences as the dean for 18 years between 1999 and 2017. And Donna Fields — a legend in her own time — is in her 26th year as the Rattlers Head Softball Coach with one national championship, four regional championships and 18 conference championships.

In this issue, we celebrate another first at St. Mary's. All four of the St. Mary's deans are women. We feature these excellent women, as well as Carolyn Tubbs, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

Each brings a background of leadership and a commitment to excellence. Patty Roberts, J.D., Dean of



Photo by Robin Jerstad

the School of Law and in her third year the most senior among the deans, previously served as Director of Clinical Programs and Vice Dean at William & Mary Law School, regularly ranked among the top law schools in the country. Rowena Ortiz-Walters, Ph.D., became Dean of the Greehey School of Business two years ago after leading the School of Business and Economics at SUNY Plattsburgh as the dean for six years. Nancy LaGreca, Ph.D., in her first year as Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, previously enjoyed an 18-year career at the University of Oklahoma, including as Associate Dean of the Graduate College and Faculty Fellow in the Provost's Office. Teri Beam, Ph.D., who in June will join St. Mary's as Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology, served as Associate Dean of Academic Programs at Manchester University. And Carolyn Tubbs, before becoming Vice Provost, served as Associate Dean for the St. Mary's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

More importantly, they are each here for the right reason — to deepen our mission. Beam was inspired to apply to St. Mary's because of its Catholic identity and values. Roberts stated in her interview that being the dean at the School of Law “is exactly where God intended me to be.” All five are working to advance the St. Mary's mission to foster the formation of people in faith and educate leaders for the common good.

I am proud and honored to work with such outstanding leaders. ■





## St. Mary's breaks ground on Innovation Center, plans Nursing bachelor's

St. Mary's University and its School of Science, Engineering and Technology broke ground on a three-story Innovation Center building in October.

The 30,000-square-foot center will be named the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center in honor of a \$2 million gift from Leland T. Blank (B.S. '67), Ph.D., P.E., and Sallie V. Sheppard, Ph.D. *Read more about Blank and Sheppard on Page 6.*

In January, the University announced it would also receive more than \$5.5 million in federal appropriations, secured by Congressman Joaquin Castro, to help fund construction.

The third floor of the building will be dedicated to educating students in a planned



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker

Thomas M. Mengler, J.D., President of St. Mary's University, announces the name of the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center at the October groundbreaking.

Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, pending approval by the Texas Board of Nursing and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

## St. Mary's leads joint \$2.5M grant for underrepresented STEM students

The National Science Foundation in October awarded four private, liberal arts universities in San Antonio a grant of nearly \$2.5 million to increase the number of historically underrepresented students and those from lower-income backgrounds obtaining bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering and math fields.

To implement the grant, St. Mary's will collaborate with Our Lady of the Lake University, the University of the Incarnate Word and Trinity University.

## \$1.3M grant to help students aim for Ph.D.s

The U.S. Department of Education awarded St. Mary's University a more than \$1.3 million grant to increase the number of historically underrepresented students earning undergraduate degrees, enrolling in graduate programs and earning doctorates.

The \$1,309,020 grant funds opportunities for research, summer internships and seminars to prepare students for doctoral study. The program also includes tutoring, academic counseling and activities to assist participants in securing admission and financial assistance for graduate programs.

## \$2.8M grant funds University projects to boost graduation rates

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded St. Mary's University more than \$2.8 million. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, St. Mary's will apply the funds to improve the student experience during the first year of study and to implement high-impact practices in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Betsy Smith, Ph.D., Chair and Associate Professor of Political Science, will oversee the five-year grant of \$2,834,710, including funding to upgrade five classrooms in Reinbolt Hall and create a new computer lab.



Donna M. Badowski

## Donna M. Badowski named Founding Director of Nursing

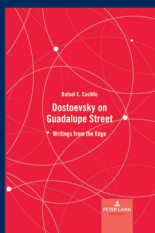
St. Mary's University announced Donna M. Badowski, DNP, will serve as Vice Dean and Founding Director of Nursing. Badowski

began her appointment in January.

Badowski was previously an Associate Professor and Associate Director of the RN to MS Nursing Program at DePaul University in Chicago. She holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh and a Master of Science in Nursing from Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois; as well as status as a registered nurse, certified nurse educator and certified health care simulation educator.

## SUMMER READS

Relax and learn with books by St. Mary's authors

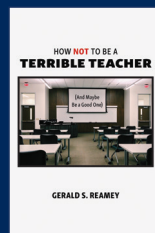


### Dostoevsky on Guadalupe Street: Writings from the Edge

Rafael C. Castillo, Ph.D. (B.A. '75)

Peter Lang Inc., 2023

How does 19th-century Russian literature impact a young Latino living in Texas in the present day? Castillo uncovers precisely that in his collection of essays.

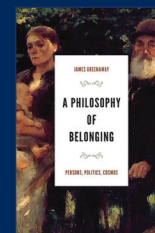


### How Not to Be a Terrible Teacher

Gerald S. Reamey, J.D., Professor of Law

Carolina Academic Press, 2023

Longtime professor for the St. Mary's University School of Law, Reamey shares his expertise with other educators in his latest book. Less about lofty pedagogy, this book, "written in a conversational, readable style," helps teachers avoid common pitfalls that inevitably distract students from the learning at hand.



### A Philosophy of Belonging: Persons, Politics, Cosmos

James Greenaway, Ph.D., San José-Lonergan Chair in Catholic Philosophy

Notre Dame Press, 2023

Drawing from his inspiring career studying and teaching philosophy, this St. Mary's professor explores the phenomenon of belonging and how it is "intrinsically philosophical."



Teresa A. Beam

## Teresa A. Beam named Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology

St. Mary's University announced Teresa "Teri" A. Beam, Ph.D., will become the next

Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology in June.

Beam currently serves as the Associate Dean of Academic Programs at Manchester University in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She has more than 25 years of higher education experience in teaching, research, faculty leadership and executive-level administration. She has developed undergraduate, graduate and online degree programs in STEM fields and has gained recognition for her career-forward work in genomic sciences. *Read more about Beam on Page 13.*



Jason King

## Jason King to direct Center for Catholic Studies

St. Mary's University announced that Jason King, Ph.D., will serve as the Beirne Director for the St. Mary's University Center for

Catholic Studies and a tenured member of the Theology Department beginning in June.

King is currently the Irene S. Taylor Endowed Chair for Catholic Family Studies and the Director of Core Curriculum at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.



Nelson W. Wolff

## University appoints Nelson W. Wolff to Professorship

St. Mary's University announced in January that it has welcomed the Hon. Nelson W. Wolff (B.B.A. '66, J.D. '66) to lead its

community in dialogue and civic engagement discussions as a University Distinguished Service Professor.

After serving as Bexar County Judge since 2001, Wolff retired at the end of 2022 after leading the county through the COVID-19 pandemic. He had previously served as Mayor of San Antonio, as a member of San Antonio's City Council and in the Texas House of Representatives and Texas Senate.

Wolff began lecturing in undergraduate, graduate and law classes and holding public conversations for students and community members about finding common ground for the common good.

## Alkek Foundation grants \$1M to renovate business building

The Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation has awarded St. Mary's University a \$1 million grant to renovate the Albert B. Alkek Building for the Greehey School of Business.

The renovations encompass redesigning learning spaces, upgrading the student-centric atrium and acquiring new and emerging technology.

## Fondest Farewell

### Melvin "Mel" Barborak (B.A. '53)

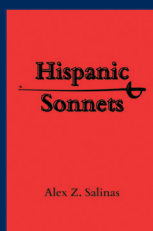
Former Baseball and Men's Basketball student-athlete and Coach Melvin "Mel" Barborak died at age 94 on Oct. 7, 2022. Barborak began his time at St. Mary's playing both sports from 1948 to 1950. He returned to serve as both the Baseball (1961-1963) and Men's Basketball (1962-1964) coach, leading the 1961 Baseball team to the Big State Championship title and the NAIA Regional Playoffs. He was inducted into the St. Mary's Athletics Hall of Fame in 1994.

### Lilly Kimbell

Assistant Men's and Women's Tennis Coach Lilly Kimbell died at age 31 on Feb. 5, 2023. Kimbell joined the Rattlers in June 2021 and immediately brightened the courts at Rohrbach Tennis Stadium with her positivity and energy. Kimbell brought with her a wealth of knowledge about what it takes to succeed on the courts after a standout career at the University of Georgia.

### The Rev. W. Franz Schorp, S.M. (B.A. '55, B.S. '55)

The Rev. W. Franz Schorp, S.M., died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Feb. 19, 2023, at the age of 91 and with 70 years of vowed life. In 1952, he professed his First Vows and continued his studies at Maryhurst in Missouri and St. Mary's University, graduating with bachelor's degrees in Philosophy and Math. Schorp made his Perpetual Profession in St. Louis in 1958. In 1973, he began a long teaching career in the St. Mary's Philosophy Department.

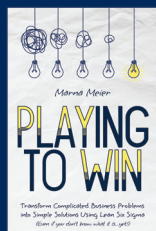


### Hispanic Sonnets

Alex Z. Salinas  
(B.A. '11, M.A. '19)  
FlowerSong Press,  
forthcoming 2023

Salinas' third book of poetry puts a unique spin of identity and structure

on the classic sonnet. Salinas is slated to publish another collection, *Trash Poems*, from Gnashing Teeth Publishing this year.



### Playing to Win: Transform Complicated Business Problems into Simple Solutions Using Lean Six Sigma

Marna Meier (B.A. '87)  
Niche Pressworks, 2023

Meier applies Lean Six Sigma solutions to show readers how they can improve everything from business processes to cleaning their garages.



### Asina is How We Talk: A collection of Tejano poetry written en la Lengua de la Gente

Eddie Vega (B.A. '99)  
FlowerSong Press, 2022

Deemed an "anthem of biculturalism," the poetry collection edited by Vega sheds light on the unique experiences of Mexican Americans who call Texas home.



# ENGINEERING FOR INNOVATION

## Trailblazing couple immortalized with new campus building

by Nathaniel Miller

**L**eland T. Blank Ph.D., P.E. (B.S. '67), never thought he would see his name on the side of an academic building — or any other structure.

Instead, Blank and his wife, Sallie V. Sheppard, Ph.D., both longtime educators now living in Austin, have given to the academic world through teaching.

There have, of course, been monetary donations to St. Mary's University, including an undergraduate scholarship endowment for Engineering students created in 2012, and a \$2 million gift to the University's newest School of Science, Engineering and Technology building last year.

Despite bestowing generous gifts, the couple said teaching has always been their reward. So, when they learned their names would be immortalized on the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center now under construction, both said they were "beyond surprised."

### FROM ONE BEGINNING TO ANOTHER

Blank, who earned an Industrial Engineering degree from St. Mary's in 1967, said he first started classes not long after that degree was founded in 1960 as the first Engineering program at the University. Having his name on the Innovation Center is a surreal moment, he said. It will be the future home of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program pending approval by the Texas Board of Nursing and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

"The aspect of having association with something that is going to house a new program is really something," he said. "We're not just expanding the Engineering Department, but also serving the population from a health care perspective."

After breaking ground in Fall 2022, the 30,000-square-foot building will also include laboratories and collaboration spaces focusing on advanced manufacturing, instrumentation, data science and machine learning. The building should be completed in 2024.

"It's really an honor," Sheppard said. "We both devoted the bulk of our professional careers to education, and this building will help students prepare to take on leadership roles as they graduate and get ready to go out into the world."

### EDUCATION STATE OF MIND

Blank is a St. Mary's University Trustee, Professor Emeriti of Texas A&M and Dean Emeritus of the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Sheppard is a Professor Emerita of Computer Science at Texas A&M and also concluded her academic career serving as Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the American University of Sharjah.

While not an alumna of St. Mary's, Sheppard said the feeling of family spirit on campus, in addition to the faith-based mission of the University, helps students develop both academically and spiritually.

"That type of structure is a vital part of educating the whole person, not just the mind," Sheppard said. "That's just a hallmark of attending St. Mary's."



Photo by Omarr Cantu

▲ Sallie V. Sheppard, left, and Leland T. Blank show off a rendering of the newest building under construction at St. Mary's University, now called the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center.

Back in the 1960s, Blank knew he wanted to be close to his parents in San Antonio while attending college. He said Turgut Ozan, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Engineering, persuaded him to attend classes at St. Mary's.

Blank also juggled work and the University's ROTC program. He received his undergraduate degree from St. Mary's, earned a doctorate and served in the U.S. Army.

After leaving the Army at the rank of captain, Blank took a job teaching at the University of Texas at El Paso before moving to Tampa, Florida, to work at what was then called General Telephone & Electronics Corporation for three years. After that, his travels took him to Texas A&M, where he and Sheppard met.

Sheppard, who was one of the first women admitted to Texas A&M, earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees there. She soon became the first woman to hold a top-tier position at Texas A&M and earned her doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh. She also worked at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston.

About 20 years ago, the two found themselves in the Middle East at the American University of Sharjah after being recruited by a fellow professor. Soon the couple, Blank's mother and their dog, Shadow, found themselves living in the United Arab Emirates.

"It was a hoot and we really enjoyed it," Blank said.

### **SOMETHING ABOUT ST. MARY'S**

Now that the couple finds more time to focus on giving back to St. Mary's, Sheppard said supporting the University was an easy decision for her because of how close faculty, staff and students work with each other.

"When Lee started working with St. Mary's on the donation, he didn't have to bring me along kicking and screaming," she said.

Blank agreed, adding the University has continued to explore ways to give students a quality education and engage alumni.

"The University is always looking at how to make students feel proud that they went to St. Mary's," Blank said. ■

“The University is always looking at how to make students feel proud that they went to St. Mary's.”



# PATHWAY TO Leadership

MBA/J.D. student finds a nontraditional path to success

by Michelle Mondo

A single teen mom. A successful business owner. A competitive bodybuilder. And now a dual-degree seeker at St. Mary's University, earning her Master of Business Administration in December 2022 and working on her Doctor of Jurisprudence.

Vanessa Ortega paved her own path to success and is helping others find theirs.

"I went back to school after 15 years because I wanted to finish what I had started, which was to pursue my dream of becoming an attorney," she said. "As a mother, it's important to me to show my son that society does not get to dictate when and where we do things in our life."

Ortega, an El Paso native, was 17 when she had her son. She managed to earn a bachelor's in Political Science at Arizona State University and, to be a part of her son's life, started two pet-sitting businesses and worked as a bookkeeper. During this same time, she began bodybuilding, a hobby that had her rising from bed at 4:30 a.m. daily and competing nationally.

As her journey brought her to San Antonio, Ortega sold her businesses for a profit, watched her son graduate high school and became an empty nester. It was the perfect time to go back to college.

Choosing the St. Mary's dual-degree program because she wanted to combine her business skills and a law degree, Ortega said she aims to help business owners secure their legacy through probate law.

School of Law Assistant Dean for Admissions and Recruitment Catherine Casiano (J.D./M.B.A. '07) got to know

Ortega through her work as a member of the Student Recruitment Corps, a group of students that volunteers at Law Admissions and Recruitment Office events.

"Vanessa embodies the Marianist spirit because she is genuine, caring and wants to truly help people learn, not only about St. Mary's, but about life as a law student," Casiano said.

Ortega's volunteerism with the Women's Law Association and First Generation Professionals, along with mentoring first-year law students through the St. Mary's 1L Edification (SMILE) Program, all registered student organizations, has garnered her awards and accolades.

She won the Leadership Service Award for the most pro bono hours served by a member of her graduating class — more than 240 hours. She has also received a Women in Law Leadership Award.

"I always want to give back to my class and my community," she said.

Jeremy Grace, who was the Greehey MBA Programs Director during Ortega's time in the program, said Ortega brought "a positive energy to all of her interactions and authentic care to her approach to engaging with the learning material."

Ortega said she will take the lessons she learned at St. Mary's back into the professional world.

"If I had not gone to St. Mary's, I would not have thrived the way I'm thriving here," Ortega said. "The University gave me the opportunity to learn what it means to be of service to others." ■



“The University gave me the opportunity to learn what it means to be of service to others.”



# ROCKETING AHEAD

## Basketball player plans to apply Mechanical Engineering to aerospace

by Rocky Garza Jr.

Just about everyone gets asked what they want to be when they grow up.

When Emmanuel Ewuzie got that question during his childhood in San Antonio, his response was: astronaut, doctor, NBA player and construction worker.

Now, as a St. Mary's University senior studying Mechanical Engineering and a forward on the Rattler Men's Basketball team, Ewuzie is on his way to achieving aspects of those goals.

"My mom always tells that story to her friends about how I wanted to be everything," Ewuzie said. "When I realized I couldn't do all of them, there was one thing that stuck with me — my fascination for outer space."

Ewuzie used to draw flying cars and told his mom he would create the first model someday. While he hasn't developed a flying car yet, Ewuzie's interest in space has propelled his plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Aerospace Engineering.

### A SCHOLAR IN THE CLASSROOM

Ewuzie is described as a leader on the hardwood by Head Men's Basketball Coach Bubba Meyer (B.A. '01) and a scholar in the classroom by Juan Ocampo, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering.

Ewuzie said the best part about the Mechanical Engineering program is learning how his studies apply to real-life scenarios. Job prospects for mechanical engineers are expected to grow 2% from 2021 to 2031, resulting in 6,400 more jobs, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"This field allows people to save lives, and that's something I want to do," Ewuzie said.

With an 11-to-1 student-to-faculty ratio and close-knit community, Ewuzie said the University atmosphere has contributed to his success. Ocampo echoed Ewuzie's views, adding that Ewuzie has been a perfect example of what Ocampo hopes his students achieve.

"Emmanuel has big dreams, and I'm confident he will accomplish them because he always puts in the extra work," Ocampo said. "If a student's goal is to change lives



or to make the world better by creating stuff, then they should consider an Engineering program."

Ewuzie has served as president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers registered student organization at St. Mary's and participated in a research program at another nearby university sponsored by the National Nuclear Security Administration. The program enables students to form a network of researchers, build soft skills and learn about national research programs and post-graduate options.

### A LEADER ON THE COURT

When talking about Ewuzie, Meyer uses the words "leader," "unique" and "hard worker" to describe him.

Meyer, a former student-athlete, said Ewuzie is a self-starter who never slacks off.

"I always joke around with him because he talks about building rocketships with me, and I tell him that I just want a ticket on the shuttle when he's working for NASA," Meyer said. "Whatever his future is, he will succeed."

But wherever Ewuzie lands, he wants to help people because it gives him a sense of fulfillment.

"My parents always gave back their whole lives, so I learned at a young age to always try to help others," Ewuzie said. "Whether they gave back to our family in Nigeria or someone on the streets, I always saw them lend a helping hand, and that stuck with me." ■



# SCIENCE

## PROJECTS AT SC

### Zack Valdez takes on chief of staff role at U.S. Department of Energy

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

**Z**ack Valdez, Ph.D. (B.S. '10), finds motivational fuel in explaining complex science and increasing public trust in scientific findings by everyone from community members to Congressional decision-makers.

In July 2022, Valdez became the chief of staff for the U.S. Department of Energy's newly created Office of Manufacturing and Energy Supply Chains (MESC). Valdez has helped hire dozens of employees and determine the best projects to allocate \$25 billion through new funding and tax credits.

These projects will help the U.S. modernize its energy infrastructure. For example, MESC has provided \$2.8 billion in funding to expand domestic battery manufacturing for electric vehicles and the grid. The office will also fund a unique facility to extract rare earth elements and critical minerals for energy technologies from unconventional sources, such as mining waste.

Valdez, originally from the Dallas area, learned over time that — in energy, science and beyond — being careful of one's convictions and being open to listening can generate the best outcomes.

"There's no way that I could be here without the support of many people," Valdez said. "As you're moving through life, always look back to see how you can help others get to where you are. There are Marianist ideals in focusing on the larger community, people and how you can help them. Be the person you needed to be where you are today."

#### From soccer fields to sustainable fuels

Valdez grew up in a multi-ethnic family with Polish and Hispanic parents and a love of soccer. But after his parents divorced, his mother had to work two jobs and could not afford to register him for high-end soccer clubs. Though he excelled at school, his oldest brother died suddenly, and his mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer before

his senior year of high school. College was the last thing on his mind, Valdez said.

When it came time to pick a college, he learned about St. Mary's University because a Rattler Soccer coach was recruiting one of his friends. When Valdez visited the campus, he found a welcoming, friendly environment.

"Everybody really wanted to get to know you," said Valdez, who joined the Rattler Soccer team. "I met some upperclassmen who immediately took me under their wing."

He began studying Engineering, later added a Physics major and a Mathematics minor, and joined the McNair Scholars Program. The McNair Scholars Program helps first-generation, minority and financially challenged undergraduate students to prepare for doctoral studies through research and other scholarly activities.

Through the McNair Scholars Program, Valdez interned at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, which showed him what physics applications could look like at a higher level and demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinary thinking.

Several professors stood out among his St. Mary's faculty experiences. Professor of Industrial Engineering Rafael Moras, Ph.D., P.E., connected theoretical learning to practical application. Professor of Environmental Sciences Evelyn Mitchell, Ph.D., thoughtfully mentored him.

"In class, Valdez was always ready to make an intelligent contribution and let his voice be heard," Moras said. "Zack has become an indefatigable force working for the common good."

After graduation, Valdez worked in engineering at Southwest Research Institute before studying clean energy and sustainability for his Ph.D. at Baylor University. He studied switchgrass, a biofuel, for its ability to store carbon dioxide in its roots, where it would decompose and increase the soil's health.

While in graduate school and trying to explain his research to his loved ones, he realized that he excelled at explaining complex science to various stakeholders. That realization propelled his future career moves.

#### Where science and strategy meet

To increase the public's trust in science and make discoveries more accessible, Valdez began the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science and Technology Policy Fellowship, during which he served on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee of the U.S. Senate.

After this Congressional experience, he worked at several nonprofits, such as Thriving Earth Exchange, which helped community members identify issues within their environments — from heat islands to flooding to water quality problems — and develop policy solutions.

"He's a good ambassador for understanding and relating the concerns of how environmental problems can affect individuals," Mitchell said. "He's a great example of St. Mary's students reaching forward to make changes to the world and embracing the Marianist charism of adaptation and change."

On his way to the Department of Energy, Valdez worked with fellow St. Mary's alumna Raquel Tamez (J.D. '98), while she was CEO of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. He also crafted science and technology policy at the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Office of Advanced Manufacturing.

Now at the Department of Energy's Office of Manufacturing and Energy Supply Chains, Valdez works to create a long-term strategy that moves the nation toward carbon neutrality. But he said small changes, like those happening at St. Mary's University to counteract climate change, remain essential.

"Change has to happen at a small level and prove it can grow," he said. ■



A L E



◀ Zack Valdez stands in the U.S. Department of Energy next to its 3D printed, all-electric Shelby Cobra.





# LEADING Ladies

**Five women at the top of their fields help steward academic excellence at St. Mary's**

*Stories by Nathaniel Miller and Leticia Romero, photos by Josh Huskin*

**S**t. Mary's University continues to make history. Since the University's origins as an all-male school 170 years ago, the faculty, staff and student body of St. Mary's has transformed. With the addition of a new School of Science, Engineering and Technology dean in June, women will hold all four dean's roles as well as the role of vice provost for academic affairs for the first time.

As a Catholic and Marianist university, St. Mary's fosters the formation of people in faith and educates leaders for the common good. One of the characteristics of Marianist universities is educating for adaptation and change. On these pages, you will meet some change agents helping shape the next generation of leaders.

# SET TO Succeed

## Teresa Beam gets ready to start new dean's role

Growing up in Columbia City, Indiana, Teresa “Teri” Beam, Ph.D., was an inquisitive child. Questioning how and why things worked in certain ways, Beam found herself fascinated with the sciences, specifically the subject of genetics, and longed to understand why some people were predisposed to certain ailments.

Beam said her first genetics course was difficult. Not one to give up, she continued pursuing the sciences and eventually earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology/Chemistry from the University of Saint Francis and a doctorate in Molecular Biology from the University of Notre Dame, both in Indiana.

“It can be challenging, but if you pursue something long enough, eventually it’ll click,” Beam said. “That’s what I love about higher education is helping others find ways to make things click.”

Beam’s life choices will bring her to St. Mary’s University as the new Dean of the School of Science, Engineering and Technology beginning June 5.

Currently serving as Associate Dean of Academic Programs at Manchester University in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Beam said she was drawn to St. Mary’s by its Catholic values and its focus on teaching students beyond their selected major.

As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, the University’s mission aligns with one of Beam’s personal goals: finding ways to make the sciences more accessible to underrepresented groups.

A Pew Research Center report stated that about half of the workers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics occupations are women, but they are primarily found in health care fields. Workers who identify as Black or Hispanic account for only 9% and 7% of STEM employees, respectively.

“People of color and women are underrepresented in the sciences,” Beam said. “St. Mary’s has a real commitment to changing that fact, and I want to be part of it.”

From her scientific background, Beam observed that genetic diversity can drive evolutionary changes.

“From a biological perspective, you don’t have adaptation and change without diversity at the start,” she said.

Citing the Marianist principle of educating for adaptation and change, a diverse group of leaders benefits the well-being of a university, she added.

“We’re really no different than the natural world in that, if there’s going to be adaptation and change and if we’re going to innovate, then we need as much diversity as possible,”

“People of color and women are underrepresented in the sciences. St. Mary’s has a real commitment to changing that fact, and I want to be part of it.”

Beam said. “Otherwise, we’re missing opportunities and possibilities.”

Beam added it’s essential that women in leadership positions show students how to interact kindly with each other while remaining truthful to themselves. For female students, especially those looking at STEM fields, she encourages kindness toward themselves.

“We as women are not afraid to be who we are, and we’re going to be accepting of one another,” Beam said. “When you do that, you’re living your own mission, and you’re living the St. Mary’s mission.”





# SHARING ALL Voices

## Nancy LaGreca seeks inclusivity through humanities

**N**ancy LaGreca, Ph.D., is no stranger to diversity. Growing up in Niagara Falls, New York, she heard multiple languages at home — from her father’s Sicilian to her mother’s Slovakian to their common language, English.

It was this melting pot, in addition to time spent working and studying in Spain and Latin America, that piqued LaGreca’s interest in how people speak. After earning an undergraduate degree in Spanish with a minor in French from the State University of New York at Geneseo, LaGreca then obtained her doctorate in Spanish with a doctoral minor in Women and Gender Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.



“It’s important for students to see themselves in their role models. That’s one way diversity can shape the next generation of students.”

Along the way, LaGreca noticed a lack of women and other marginalized writers in Latin American curricula. As the Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Spanish (Latin American Literature and Culture) at St. Mary’s University, she looks to share those voices to show different world views.

“I discovered my passion was within Latin American literature and culture, and rediscovering the voices of not only women writers, but also other marginalized writers of color who were economically or socially disadvantaged,” LaGreca said.

LaGreca said the University’s designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, as well as its mission of inclusivity, drew her to apply for the position, officially joining in 2022.

LaGreca also highlighted how the diverse backgrounds of the St. Mary’s deans allow the group to bring different perspectives to the table.

Using an example of her time previously working in the Spanish Department at the University of Oklahoma, LaGreca said she was the only woman in the department, working with male colleagues to make improvements to the undergraduate and graduate programs. She said her male colleagues supported her and she also honed her listening skills, learning how to pitch her ideas to different audiences based on their experiences.

With different experiences, she added, come new ways of tackling challenges.

“That diversity leads to new inquiries in meetings,” she said. “It’s great that we’re coming from different backgrounds because we’re constantly expanding each other’s minds.”

Wanting all students to receive a well-rounded education, LaGreca said it’s important for students to have educators who also look like them, giving them someone they can see as a mentor and an example of someone like them who reached significant career goals.

“It’s important for students to see themselves in their role models,” LaGreca said. “That’s one way diversity can shape the next generation of students.”

# EMBRACING Mentorship

## Rowena Ortiz-Walters looks to foster growth in business students

**R**owena Ortiz-Walters, Ph.D., will be the first to tell you about her competitive nature. As Dean of the Greehey School of Business and Professor of Management, Ortiz-Walters earned her undergraduate degree in Chemistry from the University of Connecticut. While working as a chemist, she heard the best way to move into a management position was by obtaining a Master of Business Administration.

“A lot of folks were getting MBAs, and back then, I didn’t know what an MBA was,” she said. “I’m competitive, so I thought, ‘If they’re getting an MBA, I need to get an MBA.’”

After attaining her MBA in Technology Management, she earned her doctorate in Management from the University of Connecticut.

As a first-generation college student, Ortiz-Walters, who grew up in the inner city of Bridgeport, Connecticut, said her family was not well-off and there were nights she went to bed hungry.

Avoiding financial challenges in the future fueled her desire for education — noting her mother and father did not complete high school.

As a high schooler preparing for college, Ortiz-Walters felt isolated and even declined a full scholarship from Dartmouth because she didn’t see others like her on campus.

Since joining St. Mary’s University as Dean in 2021, she said her mission is to find ways to be inclusive by fostering a program that welcomes students from all backgrounds.

“There’s this comfort that comes with a student walking over to you, whose skin tone is like yours and whose hair is like yours,” Ortiz-Walters said.

Ortiz-Walters also said she was fortunate to have female mentors throughout her career. As dean, she said she mentors female students who exhibit leadership qualities and encourages male students to be aware of the challenges their female counterparts might face in the workplace. She also said how important parental support is to student development.

During the 2021 Business Week Experience, a female student was scheduled to receive the best student in Marketing award. The student’s mother lived in Peru and could not afford to travel to the ceremony.



“The whole concept of what a leader is, who a leader is and the respect that you give leaders should be the same.”

Wanting to have the student’s mother there, Ortiz-Walters said they were able to find funds to bring the mother to San Antonio to celebrate with her daughter as a way of recognizing how “her mom was invested in her life.”

As a member of the all-female dean leadership at St. Mary’s University, Ortiz-Walters said the collaboration between the schools has been supportive and encouraging.

“The whole concept of what a leader is, who a leader is and the respect that you give leaders should be the same,” she said.





## FOCUSING ON Mission

### Patricia Roberts nurtures leaders as the School of Law Dean

**W**hen Patricia Roberts, J.D., first came to understand injustices, she was 12 years old. After finding out that some innocent people go to jail, she resolved to become a lawyer and help right some of those wrongs.

“Ironically, I only practiced criminal law for about a minute, but it made me want to go down this path of ensuring that there would be justice for all,” Roberts said.

Roberts was the first in her family to go to law school, an experience that has helped in her role as Dean of the School of Law at St. Mary’s University, where about 25% of first-year J.D. students identify as first-generation.

After earning her bachelor’s from what was then called Randolph-Macon Woman’s College and graduating from William & Mary Law School, both in Virginia, Roberts practiced law for a few years before returning to William & Mary to begin her more than 20-year career in legal education.

When applying for the dean position at St. Mary’s in 2020, Roberts said she was moved by the institution’s emphasis on the Catholic and Marianist mission and later became a Marianist Educational Associate.

“I feel very confident that this is exactly where God intended for me to be,” she said.

Roberts said she has seen the number of women in academic leadership positions in law schools increase and will continue to as they graduate more women.

More than 50% of the St. Mary’s Law student population identifies as female and 45% as Hispanic, which Roberts said creates role models who can pave new ways forward.

To meet the needs of the law school’s diverse students and serve the community, Roberts and her leadership team embraced a variety of efforts. Some of the highlights have included partnering with the Lawtina Network registered student organization to host a unique national conference for Latinas at various stages in their legal careers and their allies, as well as starting the First-Generation Law Student Pre-1L Boot Camp to prepare first-generation incoming J.D. students for legal studies.

Roberts said the women who preceded her enabled the opportunities she has today for leadership, and she hopes to invest more into fostering servant leaders in her next term as dean.

“The women who came before reached a hand back to pull me up, pull me along, and I want to make sure that I do that not only for our students, but also for our colleagues,” she said.

“The women who came before reached a hand back to pull me up, pull me along, and I want to make sure that I do that not only for our students, but also for our colleagues.”

# ENHANCING Collaboration

## Carolyn Tubbs relies on open communication as Vice Provost

Working with people of diverse backgrounds on topics requiring intense listening and understanding is something Carolyn Tubbs, Ph.D., has been doing most of her career.

As the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs since 2021, Tubbs has helped lead the reaccreditation process for St. Mary's University with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. This once-in-a-decade process involves working with department chairs, faculty and staff across campus to make sure the University meets the organization's standards.

As an Associate Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy, Tubbs teaches — and has worked — in family therapy, which requires communication, psychology and an understanding of the family unit.

Similarities between family units translate to academic units. Being open with faculty when asking for their help with the reaccreditation process has proven to be her most successful strategy.

“My leadership role is about serving the people around me and trying to encourage and enhance their success,” Tubbs said. “In terms of the administrative work, my goal is to work collaboratively with others to keep St. Mary's moving forward.”

After earning a bachelor's and master's from Texas Tech University and her doctorate at Purdue University in Indiana, the El Paso native, was invited to serve at St. Mary's as a Visiting Professor during a faculty member's sabbatical in 2010. The campus atmosphere convinced her to stay.

“I have always found St. Mary's to be a very warm and welcoming University,” she said.

Tubbs said she was fortunate to have female role models in academia who encouraged her to pursue leadership positions and be mindful of and helpful to others.

“I see my own work as one of serving the institution, the students and my colleagues,” she said.

Along with the four women serving as deans, Tubbs said their unique experiences bring exciting ways to advance the goals of the University.

“When we engage with those whose beliefs are dissimilar to ours, it helps us in terms of fostering the formation of faith,” Tubbs said. “Learning from others whose orientations to life may be dissimilar to our own educates us for the common good.” ■

“When we engage with those whose beliefs are dissimilar to ours, it helps us in terms of fostering the formation of faith. Learning from others whose orientations to life may be dissimilar to our own educates us for the common good.”





## Texas Facilities Commission director oversees a massive project at the Capitol

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

**A**round the majestic red granite dome of the Texas State Capitol building in Austin has been a flurry of activity in recent years — and it's not all been about politics.

Visitors likely have noted a massive construction project underway at the State of Texas Capitol Complex. In November 2022, the Texas Facilities Commission announced it was putting the finishing details on Phase One. More than 1,000 employees have filled two new state office buildings. A new central utility plant began operating. Grass and trees have enveloped several blocks of civic green space.

Overseeing \$1.5 billion in projects across the state, including the Capitol Complex, falls to Executive Director of the Texas Facilities Commission Mike Novak (B.B.A. '75).

The San Antonio native was a Texas Facilities commissioner from 2011 until 2018. Then he became the executive director, bringing extensive construction experience, entrepreneurial spirit, a commitment to public service and his faith to aid him in the role.

"When I get to the end of my time, I'm going to reflect back," Novak said. "I'm going to measure my success and get more satisfaction at the points of my career when I committed to public service."

He previously served as a Bexar County Commissioner in the mid-1990s. But his journey began well before that "tour of duty," as he called it.

Novak had initially intended to study law, which drew him to St. Mary's University, known for its School of Law. He soon found that St. Mary's provided an excellent business education as well and developed a relationship with the then-business school's dean, Brother Paul C. Goelz, S.M., Ph.D.

"Paul had a very interesting focus that got my attention," Novak said. "He developed specific classes on entrepreneurship and the Forum on Entrepreneurship. I was one of the founding board members of the Forum, and it is still going on today."

An industrial construction company where Novak had interned lured him away from the idea of law school to help them with a construction project in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I said, 'Bye-bye, law school. Hello, St. Croix,'" said Novak, adding the two years he spent there gave him the experience and cultural immersion that would prove invaluable in launching companies later.

Though he returned from St. Croix and spent a few more years with that construction company, he said the entrepreneurial spirit kept nagging him to start his own business.

"You cannot teach someone to be an entrepreneur," said Novak, who spoke of the risks and hardship of launching a company. "Either you are born with that spirit, or you are not. Entrepreneurship programs should develop that spirit."

At age 28, Novak started a construction group that initially built churches and, later, thousands of cell towers. He adapted that expertise to work with defense contractors to build radar towers, including those in the Caribbean, to help detect the low-flying aircraft of drug smugglers. He also worked to develop the cellular network in Venezuela before government instability led him to leave the country.

Several St. Mary's professors invited him back to campus to discuss his work, including Jeffrey E. Johnson, Ph.D., the Emil C.E. Jurica Professor of International Business.

"Mike Novak is not only a successful businessperson and entrepreneur, but also a gifted speaker who enralls his





# STRUCTION

After completing Phase One of the Texas Capitol Complex expansion in Austin, Mike Novak stands on a balcony of the new Barbara Jordan Building, housing the Texas Department of Insurance.

Photo by Omarr Cantu



audience with stories about his business pursuits,” Johnson said. “Our students who have attended his past guest lectures have been left with lifelong lessons on the challenges, perseverance and rewards of entrepreneurship. He is a true St. Mary’s success story.”

While raising three sons, Novak also extended his public service by chairing many

boards, including the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. Later, then-speaker of the Texas House of Representatives Joe Straus asked Novak to join the Texas Facilities Commission, and his role at the Commission evolved from there.

Even with the projects on his plate, Novak still has found time to advise the next generation of business leaders.

“We have an absolute first-class business school at St. Mary’s,” Novak said. “My message to the business students is just be true to yourself and don’t be afraid of testing whether you might have that entrepreneurial spirit. And, if you do, you need to develop it. St. Mary’s can help you do that.” ■





Photo by Lucero Salinas



# Caring for community

## Alumna received the U.S. Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award in 2022

by Michelle Mondo

From helping her community in her native Ghana by starting her first corporation at the age of 11, to years later receiving the U.S. Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award, Brenya Twumasi, J.D. (M.A. '98), has lived to serve.

"I was stunned when I heard that I'd been given the award," she said, adding with a laugh, "I was in the fetal position all day!"

The Caribbean and African Faith Based Leadership Conference nominated and vetted Twumasi for the award, which honors those who have contributed more than 4,000 hours of volunteer work in their lifetime. A University of Texas at San Antonio student who Twumasi mentors and who was interning at the White House at the time, received the award in Twumasi's behalf at the September 2022 gala and brought it back to her in San Antonio.

Like her education and career path, Twumasi's volunteering touches on three areas — law, criminal justice and psychology. Before earning a graduate degree with honors in Counseling from St. Mary's University, Twumasi received a bachelor's in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University and a J.D. from the University of Maryland School of Law.

Arriving in Maryland at age 19 marked her first trip away from her family in Ghana. She brought to America habits created from a strong family foundation, including listening to the advice of elders. They taught her about following a flow in life that adhered to her principles.

Growing up, her father would host community leaders at his home. Both her parents, who were nurses, taught her and

her siblings the importance of taking care of themselves and their community.

Her first venture in this regard was as a pre-teen when she and two friends created a corporation that they called the Perfect Peace Club. The organization continues today, called C4C:Kaleidoscope, which helps child victims of trafficking and sexual assault and other at-risk youths.

**"She integrates faith and her prodigious interdisciplinary learning in practical ways for service, justice and peace."**

Vulnerable children became her focus as she became an adult. Twumasi served as the State of Maryland's child abuse and neglect specialist. She's served on a number of local councils as well, such as the Bexar County Reentry Center, National Association of Professional Women and the San Antonio Criminal Justice Action Coalition.

St. Mary's Professor of Philosophy James Greenaway, Ph.D., worked with Twumasi on projects raising awareness of human trafficking and modern-day slavery in Texas. Greenaway, who holds the San José-Loneragan Chair in Catholic

Philosophy at St. Mary's, called Twumasi "inspirational" and said her work embodies the University's Marianist mission.

"This was evidence of the courage, the charitable demeanor and the authentic presence of Brenya in her conversation with survivors of sex trafficking," he said. "She integrates faith and her prodigious interdisciplinary learning in practical ways for service, justice and peace."

Twumasi's efforts include creating a business called Tactical Ops that helps businesses improve diversity and inclusivity. She is also a public speaker, an adjunct faculty member at Northwest Vista College and Texas A&M University-San Antonio, as well as a Psychology lecturer at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she helped create the Community and Restorative Justice Office.

She teaches her students that they need to be both educationally and socially aware.

Now married with two adult children, Twumasi continues those strong family bonds she knew as a child and said it's important that her students know fulfillment personally and professionally. She wants her students to learn and serve others while they have fun along the way.

"Enjoy the process," she said. "Enjoy the flow." ■



Jocelyn  
Torres  
studies  
Biology in  
a lab on  
campus.



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker

# AMBITIOUS BIOLOGY

Junior has sights on medical school and inspiring others

by Rocky Garza Jr.

Growing up in a single-parent household in San Elizario, a border town near El Paso, Jocelyn Torres said she did not have access to a wealth of economic or educational resources.

That didn't stop Torres from graduating toward the top of her high school class and striving to become the first in her family to earn a college degree. Despite having no connection to San Antonio, she was led to apply to St. Mary's University by a presentation at her high school. Now, she is a junior Biology major with plans to attend medical school.

"I always felt so underfunded and helpless growing up," Torres said. "When it came to SAT prep, I never had help from anyone. So other students and I helped each other and ensured we sent college applications and all that."

After spending her first year of college studying virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, Torres made the move to San Antonio her sophomore year.

"Living by myself for the first time was hard and still is sometimes," she said. "However, I have a couple of best friends here, so it's nice to lean on them."

Beyond the friendships she's developed, Torres added her future goal of giving back to her community as a doctor also inspires her to specialize in dermatology "to help my dad and workers who are out in the sun."

She said the tight-knit St. Mary's Biology community and accessible professors have aided her success.

"The professors have helped me discover many programs, internships and scholarships."

Thomas "Ted" E. Macrini, Ph.D., the Chair and Professor of Biological Sciences, oversees the Joint Admission Medical Program (JAMP) at St. Mary's. Torres went through the pre-medical summer camp for JAMP and continued in the program as a St. Mary's student.

JAMP is an undergraduate pipeline program across Texas that provides low-income students hands-on experience in a health care environment, personal and professional development skills, MCAT prep and scholarships to attend medical school.

"When I was in JAMP, students from other universities would tell me they were in 100-person classrooms. That's why I love it here," Torres said. "The professors have helped me discover many programs, internships and scholarships."

"Jocelyn is an excellent student who has very good grades, but she is also one of those students who works for everything," Macrini said. "I wasn't surprised when she got into JAMP as her hard work speaks for itself."

While students may see Biology as a daunting major, Macrini echoed Torres' message that the program sets up its students for success.

"We have a strong track record of students getting into medical school from St. Mary's," Macrini said. "We have rigorous courses that help prepare students for the future. Students who should pursue Biology are people who consider themselves high achievers and have big aspirations. That's why the major works for someone like Jocelyn, who has big dreams and is constantly working hard toward her goals." ■

# Leading the Marianist way

## Communications Studies and Political Science double major takes advantage of St. Mary's opportunities

by Michelle Mondo

Lily Schow is a leader. Whether it is through her Student Government Association presidency, as a member of the Marianist Leadership Program, a coach and staffer on the St. Mary's University's Esports team, or in her combined degree program that has her starting graduate Communication Studies classes as a junior, she's taking advantage of numerous opportunities.

For Schow, leading the Marianist way — as a servant leader — is one of the most important skills a student can learn. As Student Government Association (SGA) president, Schow puts that into action by being the person who helps students communicate with University leadership. She joined student government her freshman year, when she was elected as a senator, and has since helped rewrite the SGA bylaws and constitution and coordinated events with the deans and others across campus.

As part of the Marianist Leadership Program, Schow strives to be a servant leader by asking herself, "How do I make sure no one is left behind?"

"It is dedicating yourself to others as a leader that sets St. Mary's graduates apart," she said.

Moving from El Paso to San Antonio, a city where she only knew her great-grandfather, was more challenging because COVID-19 was in its first wave in 2020.

She did her best to get immersed in student life, despite restrictions, which is how she became involved with the Esports team. Applying for the team's community coordinator position, Schow was soon scheduling virtual game nights and promoting them on social media.

Over the next few years, she worked her way up to being a coach for the Call of Duty team.

Director of Esports Kaitlin Teniente, the first female head coach of a varsity esports program in Texas, said that Schow has been integral in creating a more inclusive environment.

"Video games and esports have traditionally been male-dominated, especially in college esports," Teniente said. "Lily has broken barriers for women and underrepresented genders within St. Mary's University and the collegiate esports community. Her fierce commitment to community and hard work have made a significant, lasting mark."

The marketing and public relations practice fits in with one of her majors. She's double majoring in Communication Studies and Political Science. Schow is not sure if she wants to work in corporate communications or for political campaigns but plans to explore her options through the St. Mary's Master of Arts in Communication Studies combined degree program.



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker

“It is dedicating yourself to others as a leader that sets St. Mary's graduates apart.”

As part of the combined program, undergraduate students begin graduate studies during their junior year. One of Schow's professors, Amanda Hill, Ph.D., encouraged her to apply.

"Lily has always shown immense drive and persistence," said Hill, Associate Professor of Communication Studies. "I have always admired Lily's commitment to her own learning and her peers' learning. Lily's ability to encourage others in the classroom, to take time to help others, while still learning the material herself is a great example of education in the family spirit."

Now that Schow has embarked on graduate coursework, she said, "I knew I would like St. Mary's, but I didn't know I would like it this much."

"You know college is going to be fun, but I didn't know I would have all of these opportunities," she added. "It would not have been the same anywhere else." ■



# PASSION FOR SERVICE



Photo by Robin Jerstad

◀ Laura Cabanilla visits the University Center and stops by the Career and Professional Development Center, which held a USAA Day to discuss student internships in Fall 2022.

## Alumna leads USAA corporate responsibility efforts to aid diverse populations

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

**L**aura Cabanilla (B.A. '01) says she has the best job in the world.

As the corporate responsibility director at USAA, Cabanilla has helped distribute tens of millions of dollars to philanthropic projects that make a difference in the San Antonio community and individuals' lives.

"What other reward can you ask for?" Cabanilla said.

The funded projects advance diversity and inclusion efforts, boost economic mobility for underrepresented populations and provide access to career opportunities. About a year ago, St. Mary's University benefited from

this program with a \$1.15 million grant funding the USAA Gateway to Graduation scholarship for Hispanic and Black students majoring in science, technology, engineering and math.

Cabanilla's work today builds on lessons she learned along the way — from studying at St. Mary's, playing and coaching sports, working in City Hall, building a consulting business, moving into the corporate world and serving on boards.

"I try to be grounded in experience," she said. "Volunteering and serving gave me opportunities to think differently and to pick up skill sets for leadership and engagement."

# “SERVICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT THE CORE OF THE ST. MARY’S APPROACH. HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?”

## EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Growing up on San Antonio’s South Side, attending Harlandale High School and not having the opportunity to travel beyond visiting relatives in California, Cabanilla reflected on the importance of education for her trajectory.

“You’re bound by your school, your friends and what you don’t know,” said Cabanilla, the first generation in her immediate family to finish college. “What you don’t know sometimes is what impacts you in the long run. Education is the key to economic mobility. It opens so many different doors.”

In high school, Cabanilla said college was a discussion, but it wasn’t *the* discussion in her household, which also emphasized their Catholic faith, love of sports and family.

But several other top students in her class were enrolling at St. Mary’s. So, she spent a night in a residence hall and said to herself, “Ok, I can do this.”

She joined the Rattler Basketball team during her first year and was soon followed by her similarly athletic sisters, Jennifer Hicks (B.B.A. ’03, M.B.A. ’06) and Christina Koucouthakis (B.B.A. ’04), both Rattler Volleyball players.

Cabanilla was studying Political Science when the war in Kosovo began. Her father, who was in the Navy Reserves, was called to active duty. She became driven to understand public policy and enrolled in a semester in Washington, D.C. — visiting the U.S.

State Department, hearing from those in Congress, and learning about foreign and domestic policy.

Professors at St. Mary’s, such as Professor of Political Science Sonia Garcia, Ph.D., deeply impacted Cabanilla’s interest in politics. She recalled Garcia’s class exercise during which students acted as members of city leadership to decide where to locate an imaginary medical center or jail.

“I remember Laura in our simulation for Texas Politics,” Garcia said. “She struck me as having a real passion for politics and attuned to issues surrounding social justice.”

## CONTINUING A PASSION FOR SERVICE

Those classroom discussions helped prepare Cabanilla for an internship with Ed Garza’s City Council office that rolled into working as the volunteer coordinator for his mayoral campaign and on to being chief of staff for Councilwoman Antoniette “Toni” Moorhouse and Councilman Roger Flores.

“Service has always been at the core of the St. Mary’s approach. How do you help your community?” Cabanilla said. “At City Hall, a lot of what we did was to help the district. So, when I started in District 3, it was a southeast area of the city, one of the areas with lots of need. When we asked individuals to volunteer, it was helpful to have that servant leadership background.”

After her time in politics, the mother of two daughters continued empowering others

as the director of the GoGirlGo! San Antonio program for the Women’s Sports Foundation. She also had a consulting company before helping establish a commercial and residential painting company with one of her sisters.

“Entrepreneurship is another opportunity for people to build their own wealth and drive economic mobility opportunities for their families,” Cabanilla said.

Her career also included working her way up to the interim CEO role of the economic development organization formerly called the West Side Development Corporation, starting an orthopedic device company with her former husband, and rising in the ranks in community relations for Wells Fargo. She then transitioned to USAA, which supports military families and veterans and focuses on scholarships to create a diverse talent pipeline.

“What I do now has allowed me to have a different lens to view how we can impact our community,” she said. ■



Courtesy photo

◀ Laura Cabanilla grew up in a sports-loving family that sent its daughters to St. Mary’s. Pictured from left, Christina Koucouthakis, Hilda Cabanilla, Lawrence Cabanilla, Jennifer Hicks and Laura Cabanilla.



# Common good, SHARED JUSTICE

## Congolese student connects with Criminal Justice major and St. Mary's mission

by Michelle Mondo

**C**hristine Nduhura is looking to her past to help make a difference in the future.

"I want to work within immigration services because of my immigrant background," she said. "Our process of obtaining citizenship was so smooth when I came here, but that's not the case for

everyone. I want to help ease the process for others."

Born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nduhura was a baby when her family fled to Rwanda amid the ethnic cleansing of her people. She was in middle school when they immigrated to the United States in 2010.

Nduhura is a junior majoring in Criminal Justice at St. Mary's University. She transferred from St. Philip's College, following the path of her older sister Joyeuse Nishimwe, a Biology senior at St. Mary's.

"When I was young, most issues (in Rwanda) were resolved via violence or bribes," said Nduhura of her interest in criminal justice. "I wanted to learn about the American process and how it differs from Rwanda and, most importantly, how I can play a part in improving the system."

Criminal justice is the study of the administration, organization, goals, processes, practices, roles, philosophies and histories of organizations created to prevent and control crime and delinquency.

After earning her bachelor's degree, Nduhura hopes to attend the St. Mary's School of Law. If she does not get a job working in immigration services, she wants to help children within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Criminal Justice Professor Milo Colton, Ph.D., J.D., has been teaching at St. Mary's for decades. Nduhura has taken several of his classes. He sees in her the kind of student that exemplifies the University's Marianist mission dedicated to serving the common good.

"She is definitely an empathetic individual," he said. "She cares about other people, cares about civil rights and civil liberties, all the things we want our students to keep in mind during our program so that, when they get out in the workforce, they don't forget the social justice mission that St. Mary's promotes."

Criminal Justice and Criminology Assistant Professor Colton Daniels, Ph.D., said the program allows students to take criminology, criminal justice and forensics classes. This prepares students like Nduhura to work in a variety of fields.

"We give students extreme flexibility in tailoring their degree to fit what they want to pursue in their career," said Daniels, adding that the course work trains students to see human behaviors through different lenses.

The St. Mary's mission was one of the reasons Nduhura wanted to attend. Before she became a student, she volunteered with her sister during the University's Continuing the Heritage Day of Service.

"That's why I wanted to study criminal justice," Nduhura said. "I want to make a difference and the St. Mary's mission speaks to me." ■



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker

# GROWING NEW LEADERS

## Finance and Risk Management senior brings love of St. Mary's to incoming students

by *Samantha Mendoza*

**Z**ane Smith fell in love with St. Mary's University the first time he set foot on campus for a college tour.

From McKinney, Smith said he was "the most introverted person you could have possibly met" in high school, and he didn't know which career path he wanted to pursue.

But he was certain of one thing — beginning his college journey at St. Mary's "just felt right."

Eager to take advantage of all the opportunities the University offered, Smith dove headfirst into a diverse array of student activities.

"I really hit the ground running," Smith said. "I was joining any organization that would let me in the door, trying to figure out exactly where I fit."

One of the organizations was Gamma Iota Sigma, the St. Mary's chapter of the international organization dedicated to promoting student interest in insurance and risk management careers. The group attracted Smith for its professional development events and, in three days, he was inspired to change his major to Finance and Risk Management.

"The major is really unique because it's almost like a double major," he said. "It gives you an understanding of risk management principles to work in the finance industry, but it's also useful in risk management insurance to have a financial toolset."

Smith became president of Gamma Iota Sigma, which allowed him to network with leaders and chapter members across the country to advocate for increased diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

"The insurance industry has historically not been diverse at all," he said. "I'm working to open those doors. It's been exciting to set a new standard for the industry that will impact future generations."

"Through Zane's efforts, our chapter has become one of the largest and most prominent of the 100 collegiate Gamma Iota Sigma chapters nationwide," said Professor of Finance David Sommer, Ph.D., who is the Charles E. Cheever Chair of Risk Management and serves on the board of trustees for Gamma Iota Sigma.

Smith committed to providing opportunities for students both on and off

the St. Mary's campus. With the national Gamma Iota Sigma chapter, he helped launch a foundation to provide direct financial support for minority students who are underrepresented in the insurance profession.

"Zane is going to change the industry," said Nikia Stowe, the national vice president for university relations and member services at Gamma Iota Sigma. "He always answers the call when needed and uses his platform to advocate for others."

Smith, who also gives University tours in his bright yellow St. Mary's spirit shoes and volunteers at events across campus as a President's Ambassador, plans to continue giving back to the St. Mary's community after graduation.

"The St. Mary's mission is about growing leaders who are transformational," he said. "I'm hoping to be able to live out those values in the next chapter of my life and continue doing whatever I can to uplift future St. Mary students to have the same opportunities and experiences I've had." ■



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker



# KOREAN POPS ON CAMPUS

캠퍼스  
대의 케  
이팝

San Antonio King Sejong Institute knits  
cultures together

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



Seongbae Lim helped bring the San Antonio King Sejong Institute to St. Mary's University.

**D**ifferent languages, unique cultures and more than 7,000 miles are just a few minor details separating Texas from South Korea.

But with the help of the San Antonio King Sejong Institute at St. Mary's University, the two cultures are brought together through Korean language, art, music, drama and history classes. St. Mary's students can earn credit by learning Korean and get inspired to study abroad, and community members can enjoy free courses in various subjects.

Eleanor Lee, a native San Antonian in her 20s with Korean heritage, said she was nervous about signing up for the community courses because she's an introvert but found the instructors to be more like "an extension of friends."

"Everyone at the institute is so welcoming, so caring, that you instantly feel at home," said Lee, who took five classes in Fall 2022 and worked her way up to the highest-level Korean language course offered during the Spring semester. "It's interesting to know that I'm not so far away from my culture, even though I am across the entire world."

## CREATING THE INSTITUTE

### 기관 설립

Housed in St. Louis Hall since 2020, the Institute is an interdisciplinary effort through the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, directed by Seongbae Lim, Ph.D., Professor of Information Systems Management in the Greehey School of Business.

The Institute is named for the Korean monarch who lived from 1397 to 1450 and who developed the phonetic system for writing that is still in use. The South Korean government supports the Institute, created through a partnership with Dongseo University in Busan.

It's one of about 250 such locations in nearly 90 countries, but only two in Texas. Lim's focus on improving cultural literacy among St. Mary's students and the San Antonio community was part of the draw for creating a St. Mary's location.

"South Korea is a very unique place because, in Korea, many cultures interact," Lim said. "Historically, the country was influenced by China, and then it went



Photos by Lucero Salinas

▲ St. Mary's student Mariana Mata learns Korean at the Institute ahead of a semester abroad in South Korea. Pictured from left, Mata gets tutored by Visiting Lecturers Sujin Kim and Bitsol Kim and Program Coordinator Woojung Lee.

through Japanese occupation. And after the Korean War, it was influenced by America strongly. But it still has a unique people. Learning the Korean language and culture is a good way to understand many cultures together.”

## ENCOURAGING KOREAN STUDIES

### 한국학 장려

Sujin Kim, a Visiting Lecturer from Daegu, Korea, teaches several of the Institute's language courses. She said some of her students were inspired to learn the language in order to watch Korean dramas, like *Squid Game*, without subtitles. Others want to understand the lyrics of K-pop music, a style of music emanating from South Korean musicians who blend Western pop, R&B and hip-hop sounds with Korean elements.

One of Kim's students, Mariana Mata, a St. Mary's International and Global Studies and Spanish double major, is among the K-pop fans. The junior took three Korean language classes before traveling to South Korea this spring to study abroad at Anyang University in Anyang.

“Learning Korean was scary at first, not gonna lie, because it is a completely different language from your usual Western language,” Mata said. “I had to learn a completely different writing script.”

But Mata said Kim was patient with the class and “encouraged us to break out of our shell.”

“When students actually use Korean in real life,” Kim said, “that is the most rewarding part of my teaching.” ■

“EVERYONE AT THE INSTITUTE IS SO WELCOMING, SO CARING, THAT YOU INSTANTLY FEEL AT HOME.”





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# Marianist mentorship

Program at St. Mary's University  
encourages partnership

by Nathaniel Miller

**B**rother Dan Stupka, S.M., and St. Mary's University first-year student Arely Reyes joke that the age difference in their friendship is more than just a generation gap — it's a generation chasm.

Age has not stopped Reyes and Stupka, in his 90s, from forming a bond that includes breakfasts starting promptly at 7:35 a.m.

Reyes, a Marketing major and a member of the Marianist Leadership Program — a faith-based program that cultivates and nurtures community — met Stupka through the SM Friends Program, which pairs students with a Marianist brother as part of their community service requirement.

In their first meeting, Stupka and Reyes realized they shared a common passion: music. Stupka has been a student of music since his youth, even studying at the Cleveland Institute of Music, while Reyes played French horn in her high school band in Texas City.

"The conversation went smoothly, and it was nice," Reyes said.



Photo by Darren Shiverdecker

Arely Reyes chats with Marianist Brother Dan Stupka at the Marianist Residence on campus.

Kristy Heerdegen joined the SM Friends program as a first-year student in Fall 2020. Paired with Brother Harry Cornell III, S.M., Heerdegen said Cornell — then a math teacher at Central Catholic High School — originally thought she was there for math tutoring.

The two became fast friends, with Heerdegen saying she would continue to see Cornell and the other Marianists long after she had met her required 15 hours of community service.

"I hate thinking of going to see them as just service hours," said Heerdegen, now a senior Math major who is also earning a teaching certificate. "The brothers became my close friends. I just loved going to see them."

This story originally appeared in *ALIVE* magazine. Read the full story at [bit.ly/SM\\_friends](https://bit.ly/SM_friends).