

**Proposal for a  
Saint Mary's College Honors Program**

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## Introduction

Saint John Baptist De La Salle used his privilege and ability to the advantage of others. He recognized that social change requires the dedication of dynamic, inclusive individuals of practiced intelligence, acting on reason and faith. By actively seeking the most able and by exposing them to rigorous coursework, and encouraging them to pursue education for the common good, we hope like De La Salle that our most able students embrace, each in his/her own way, the responsibilities born of ability.

The plan sketched in this report is designed to lend our most talented and dedicated students the support and mentorship necessary to develop their exceptional potential in all aspects of their collegiate careers. Of equal importance, we wish to create a program where integrity is not a choice but imbedded in the culture of the community. Saint Mary's Honors Students learn to view their own goals and achievements through a broader lens of personal and social responsibility. This outcome of contributing to the community is implicit in the Saint Mary's mission statement, the Lasallian Core Principles, and the recent learning goals developed by the Core Curriculum Task force, especially in the section "Habits of Being." This is articulated well in the statement by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) regarding aims of liberal education as leading to personal and social responsibility, which is defined along five dimensions:

- Striving for excellence: developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one's very best in all aspects of college;
- Cultivating personal and academic integrity: recognizing and acting on a sense of honor ranging from honesty in relationships to principled engagement with a formal academic honor code;
- Contributing to a larger community: recognizing and acting on one's responsibility to the educational community (the classroom and campus life), the local community and the wider society, both national and global;
- Taking seriously the perspectives of others: recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, for citizenship, and for work;
- Developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning: developing ethical and moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities; using such reasoning in learning and in life for the future.

The Saint Mary's Honors Program seeks to be distinctive for its commitment to honor students and for its expectation that honor students demonstrate their own commitment to the communities in which they live.

### **Foundation Program 2007-08**

Over the course of this inaugural year, thirty founding members of the SMC Honors Program, representing a variety of majors and interests and hailing from as far away as New York and Florida, have developed their own high moral, social and academic standards. Among our members are current class senators, Collegian writers, the President and Vice President in waiting for GSA, several young Republicans, at least one Progressive, and a good many active young Democrats. We have concert and pep-band musicians, Nightengals, Macken Speech and debaters, Jump Start(ers), Campus ministry and Intervarsity members. Throw in a skilled unicyclist, who was also a New Orleans relief worker, and an Improv club regular and you have a population of engaged students, actively and joyfully contributing their time and energy to the school and to the entire student body. They have embraced the College mission, and created a shared vision of what might well become a model for the college's academic and social justice objectives.

In fall 2007 Saint Mary's College welcomed the founding members into the Saint Mary's College Honors Program. To qualify for the program, students must have been awarded a Presidential or Honors at entrance scholarship and volunteered to become residents in the Honors Living Learning Community in Assumption Hall. In addition, each student took part in one of two honors sections of the freshman My SMC! course designed to introduce students to college history, establish a shared vision of personal and social responsibility, and introduce and explore issues of justice. Our goal was not always to agree with one another, but to open a conversation, which allowed us to explore, share, and intelligently develop our ideas and beliefs. At the heart of these discussions was the belief that neither personal potential nor true understanding of differences can be reached in the absence of shared experience.<sup>1</sup> The culmination of their freshman honors experience will be the Spring Symposium, a debate attended by all English 05 (Argument and Research) classes and concluded by a freshman class vote.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2007-2008 Co and extra-curricular schedule:**

- \*September 19, 2007: Social Justice Speaker Ruben Navarrete
- \*September 22, 2007: San Francisco History Walk
- \*September 27, 2007: A.C.T. production of Sweeney Todd.
- \*October 18, 2007: Social Justice Speaker Tim Wise (Community Time)
- \*October 20, 2007: Trip to the SF Farmers Market at the Ferry Building and SF MOMA
- \*October 22, 2007: Social Justice Speaker Rajiv Chandrasekaran
- \*October 26, 2007: Halloween Haunted House for kids (An Assumption Hall tradition)
- \*November 5, 2007: Social Justice Speaker Ralph Spinelli
- \*November 7, 2007: Hall sponsored academic advising (9:00pm)

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for 2007 MY SMC! syllabus and assignments and 2008's proposed reading list.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix A

\*November 18, 2007: Sustainable Thanksgiving Dinner.

Todd Kodet, an entomologist and field manager of Earth Bound Organic Farms, joined us for a meal students prepared from organic produce raised within a 200 mile radius.

\*December 2, 2007: Trip to Berkeley Rep's presentation of *After the Quake*.

\*February 27, 2008: Tea and Cookies with Woodrow Wilson Fellow Robert K. Musil

\*April 23, 2008: Spring Freshman Honors Symposium

\*April 26, 2008: Freshman Honors Banquet

Note: \*Informal spring outings not yet set in stone.

### **Goals of the Saint Mary's Honor Program**

Our goal is to extend the Honors Program to accommodate a four-year experience unique to Saint Mary's College. Large universities offer honors programs to simulate the small liberal arts experience Saint Mary's already offers all students—that is small class sizes, individual attention, seminar style courses. These programs also offer opportunities such as internship and scholarship and travel programs, designated honors courses, extended library privileges, and small private audiences with traveling scholars.

Most of these programs have benefits to students that are reasonable and feasible. The question remains, why join the Saint Mary's College Honors Program (or attend Saint Mary's College for that matter) if the same benefits are offered through a large university's honors college, and if many of the benefits unique to other institutions (e.g., small class size) are already part of the Saint Mary's experience?

The following goals define the Saint Mary's Honor program:

1. Provide honors students with opportunities and benefits common to peer honors programs (e.g., expanded studies, study abroad incentive, transcript designation).
2. Provide rigorous scholastic options aligned with our Saint Mary's setting and educational hallmarks (e.g., small class size, shared inquiry and research opportunities) in order to help them achieve their full potential in a chosen field.
3. Highlight our emphasis on community through the option of a first and second year living and learning community (overwhelmingly popular among current honors students).
4. Imbed both the curriculum and co-curriculum with emphases on collaborative inquiry, leadership, and social justice and expect them to demonstrate a commitment back to their community.

## Components of the Saint Mary's Honors Program

**Students who complete all required components of the Saint Mary's Honors Program will have a designation on their transcript. Those students who select the Honors Program Social Action emphasis and complete those requirements will have that designation on their transcript.**

### Curricular components:

- 1. Required first year partial credit course.** MY SMC! Course (.25 across the entire year without additional cost). This course is designed to introduce incoming students to college history, to establish a shared vision of personal and social responsibility, and to introduce the three areas of focus: collaborative inquiry, active leadership and social justice. College transition issues are also integrated into the course (these are also addressed in the co-curricular programming).
- 2. Two required upper division honors courses.** All graduating Honors Program students must have taken at least two upper division honors courses in their last three years, which **integrates their major with a secondary discipline.**<sup>3</sup> One of these courses must include a social justice emphasis. Providing the student achieves a B in the class, he/she will earn honors course credit on the student transcripts. [See below for Honors Course options].
- 3. Required collaborative inquiry project.** All students must pursue some form of collaborative inquiry; this might be an independent study during the semester or a summer research project. Students select a faculty member with whom they wish to work. The course/project is reviewed and approved by the Honors Program Director. This entails increasing awareness of existing internship and research opportunities outside of the sciences. Some funds exist already for all students in various forms (e.g., SOS Summer Research Awards, Student Research and Development Grants, and Student/Faculty Research Awards. Additional funds will be necessary to expand opportunities for honors students.
- 4. Required Senior Capstone Honors Thesis/Project.** Many majors already offer this option. In effect, students would complete a thesis in their chosen field. (This is similar to the current requirement in IAS, in which students have an independent study course).
- 5. Opportunity to participate in Expanded Studies Program.** The Expanded Studies Program allows students to take a 5<sup>th</sup> course each semester at no

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<sup>3</sup> This integration does become more difficult to accomplish in abstract science and math courses.

- additional tuition cost. The criteria are that a student must have completed nine courses and have attained a 3.75 GPA. Honors students admitted with the appropriate AP credit are eligible to begin this program in their second term.
6. **Assistance with study abroad.** Opportunity to participate in a study abroad experience with a \$500 scholarship for any Saint Mary's program, semester or January Term.
  7. **Opportunity to have a library staff personal liaison in the first-year.** The library staff has volunteered to mentor students individually to help them transition to college level research expectations.

### **Honors Course Distinction:**

i) Honors course contract distinction. Without separating our brightest students from traditional undergraduate courses we can offer honors level course work by creating "honors contracts" for upper division courses. UC Santa Barbara, a school big enough to offer separate honors courses, also uses a contract system in which a professor and a motivated honors student develop an enriched curriculum from the existing template. An honors contract demands that an honors student strive for greater synthesis and sophistication in both analysis and output (e.g., examinations, projects, or essays). The contract itself will be similar to the petition students complete if they wish to take a lower division course for upper division credit.<sup>4</sup> Note: Honors credit courses need not be taken within a student's major.

After the Advisory Committee establishes outcomes and criteria for evaluation for honors contract courses in general, the Director, in conversation with each participating student, and with appropriate approval from the participating faculty member, will help develop and review each honors contract course.

NOTE: Honors Interdisciplinary Seminar. Although this is not included in the proposal at this time, we would like to include mention of the interest by some faculty to develop an Honors Interdisciplinary Seminar, which is being explored as a possible experimental course proposal. Programs might pursue an elective course for honors students. Examples which may be built out of recent course offerings include: The History and Philosophy of Biology; South American Thought; Food and Sustainability; Math in Sports; The Politics and Ethics of Water; American Utopian Movements; and Medical Ethics Seminar.

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<sup>4</sup> Most professors I spoke with are eager and willing to work with motivated honors students. Some voiced a preference for the contract over the independent study system because best students would remain in their upper division classes.

**Co-Curricular components:**

1. **Required participation in Saint Mary's Honors Student Outreach Programs, first year:** The Saint Mary's Honor program encourages student achievement and leadership, especially in the area of social action. Participation in these with the group is expected in the first year, and encouraged throughout a student's Saint Mary's career.

The Saint Mary's Honors Program participates annually in Haunted House and Carnival 4 Kids; it also sponsors a Greek Day event for all first-year students in the fall, and a first-year symposium in the spring.

2. **Opportunity to live in the first year students' Honors Living and Learning Community.** It is not guaranteed that all honors students will live in the living learning community, nor is it required that honors students live in the community to participate in the program. This community, however, creates a central space for all members of the Honors Program. In addition to dorm wide extra and co-curricular activities—weekly tea and cookie nights, haunted house for kids--students study, play and often dine together. Assumption has resident directors who are live-in faculty members; there are also live-in tutors specializing in Physics/Math, Chemistry/Biology, and a designated honors tutor.
3. **Opportunity to live in second-year housing dedicated for honors students.** It is not guaranteed that all honors students can live in this housing, nor is it required that they live here to participate in the program.
4. **Opportunity for continued outreach and leadership.** After their first year, students are encouraged to pursue leadership in their own area of interest on campus or in the community. This might include mentor and tutor opportunities; continued participation in the first-year Honors Program sponsored activities for the campus; participation in a service-learning course or program in the community; club participation or leadership through AASMC. The Director of the program helps each student determine what are appropriate levels of outreach and leadership.
5. **Opportunity for Social Action Emphasis.** This emphasis is one option for students to demonstrate their outreach and leadership, and might also serve as a foundation for the thesis project. It includes an intense and selective program for those students moved to work for social change by personal and social responsibility.

At the end of their sophomore year, those students who wish to graduate with a Social Action Emphasis will meet with a committee of three to construct a two-year

“social action plan,” which integrates a significant service project with the student’s academic interests. The committee, chosen by the student—comprising members of the Honors Program Advisory Committee and a community representative from the constituency with which the student hopes to volunteer--advises, counsels, and offers final approval on the proposal and on the outcome, and individually advises the student whenever the need arises.

The detailed specific requirements for graduating from the Honors Program with “Social Action Emphasis” will differ from student to student, but the broad expectations are as follows:

\*With the help of the committee, such students will: develop a Social Action Plan that integrates a specific service project (an expected 100-200 hours of service) into their academic schedules as rigorous as that of their fellow honors students.

\*A specific social justice focus will be integrated into both of the required honors level courses.

\* The service project will be incorporated into the student’s academic capstone project.

\*Students must maintain a 3.5 GPA in their last two years of study. (Should the students slip below this benchmark, they would not graduate with an honors, but might still graduate with a social justice emphasis).

**6. Opportunity to attend National Collegiate Honors Council conference.**

Students will be invited and encouraged to submit proposals to the conference organizers, and if those are accepted, the students will be supported in attending and presenting at the conference. 1-2 faculty per year will also be supported to attend with them.

**Matriculation Standards:**

After the freshman year, the honors mark would remain 3.5. It might be that of our incoming freshman honors program members, only twenty graduate with that distinction. The success of a program depends greatly on the accomplishment and commitment of its students.

Below are proposed academic and co-curricular standards both for entering and continuing honors students.

**Admission into Program**

First-year students are admitted into the program by virtue of their admission to Saint Mary's College as honors-at-entrance students. The Director of the Program will be in communication with these admitted members about the expectations and opportunities of the Saint Mary's Honors Program, and during the orientation process, students will be able to designate their interest in participating (or not) in the program.

First-year: Admission by honors-at-entrance status (determined by Admissions Office).

Sophomores: GPA 3.5; evidence of engagement (clubs, Jump Start, plays, campus ministry etc); application and interview.

Juniors: Overall GPA 3.5; GPA in major 3.5; evidence of engagement; application and interview.

Transfers: Overall GPA 3.5; evidence of engagement, application and phone interview

Note: All students must join the Honors Program by the fall of their junior year.

### **Continuing Honors Students**

Sophomores: GPA 3.5; participation in MYSMC! and Honors outreach programs, and a statement of intent to continue

Juniors: Overall GPA 3.5, GPA in major 3.5; participation in Honors outreach programs, and a statement of intent to continue

Seniors: Overall GPA 3.5; GPA in major 3.5; Senior Honors thesis; have met all curricular and co-curricular requirements.

### **Administrative Structure of the Saint Mary's Honors Program:**

The Saint Mary's Honors Program has both required and optional components. It is overseen by the Director of the Honors Program, who reports to the Dean of Academic Advising and Achievement. The Director also collaborates with the Dean of Students and the Director of Residence Life. The Saint Mary's Honors Program has an Advisory Committee, comprised of the director (chair), a faculty member from each school, an Admissions Officer, the Dean for Academic Development, the Dean of Students, the Assistant Dean for Leadership, Involvement, and Diversity, the Director of CILSA, and two honors student representatives.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to provide support to the program in such tasks as the reviewing of Honors Program applications, student course and thesis petitions (by a subcommittee), and of funding requests for collaborative inquiry projects; assisting with Honors Program outreach and leadership activities; reviewing the Social Action

Emphasis projects; advising students; and establishing a cycle of assessment for the program.

## Resource Needs:

**1. Director:** Most small colleges appoint some kind of program director. Very often Honors programs in small colleges are overseen by an administrator or faculty up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  or full time release. These programs tend to focus on academics to the exclusion of a co-curricular program or areas of emphasis. The primary purpose of this person is to help students in the program. Also, the person will coordinate activities of the various administrators, staff, faculty involved in the program directly or peripherally.

## 2. Budget

a. Administration and oversight. A Director will require an appropriate salary and benefits. Also, there will be a formal structure of reporting and administrative support.

b. Annual Programming budget. The program will need an annual operating budget. This year the hall operating budget came from two sources: \$7,000 from the Vice Provost and \$2,000 from the Science Themed living budget. The recommendation is that that program has an operating budget of \$7,000-10,000.

c. Stationary and letterhead are required, as well as a logo and brochures for the program.

d. Collaborative inquiry funding. Students may pursue the independent study option or the summer research opportunity. We would like to increase funding for both of these, as needed. Students will apply with a faculty member by submitting a budget of expected costs.

For summer research projects: currently, SOS funding exists for summer research projects. For SEBA and SOLA students, there are funds available through the Student Research Grant program. These do not all target honors students, however and we will need to increase funding to accommodate roughly up to 10 honors students per year, for which they would apply/compete (\$50,000-\$60,000). [NSF standard rate for summer research for student plus researcher is \$6,000-\$7,000].

e. Study abroad funding/incentives for those who wish to travel abroad. Many honors programs include a "travel scholarship" for honors students who study abroad and represent their institution. We are requesting that honors students receive a \$500 scholarship to apply either to a Saint Mary's semester course or a January Term course. We would like to secure funding to accommodate up to 20 honors students per year (\$10,000).

f. Space improvements.

A few relatively minor improvements would enhance Assumption Hall's shared facilities.

i) New tables, chairs for the lounge.

New carpets in lounge and corridors.

ii) New floor for the kitchen.

iii) Paint corridor, entrance areas.

iv) New windows, blinds in lounge/kitchen

v) Remove breakfast bar in kitchen (this may be part of a bigger renovation of the entire kitchen, which is badly in need of repair.)

vi) Frames for pictures.

vii) Comfortable chair for the nook.

viii) Artificial plants.

We estimate the top five items can be done for around \$1,000, with perhaps \$6,000 needed for the kitchen renovation mentioned.

**draft date: April 22, 2008**

**This proposal was drafted by Mary Vollmer, coordinator of the foundation program.**

**It is based on the program of this year, as well as the pilot of 2006, and discussions for three semesters among a working group of the Campus Deans and Directors Committee, with input from interested faculty.**