

Seeking the Highest Point

*Inspiring a Stronger Brand
for Saint Mary's College*

Prepared for Saint Mary's College of California
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and Pentagram Design

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You teach differently when you see God in your students.

– Faculty member

*In the Romanesque cathedrals of Europe, inside next to the doors,
it's common to find lions gnawing on something.
It's meant to make you stop and pause.
There are things to be taken seriously here
What's inside is great beauty, it can make you grow intellectually,
spiritually, humanly. When you exit, pay attention.
Take this with you ... be transformed.*

– Faculty/staff leader

*When you're trying to be inspirational or aspirational,
you look to the highest point.*

– Faculty/staff leader

[Identity] has to be something more than just a cross on a chapel. Do people – students, alumni, faculty, friends – feel it, breathe it, and just as important, can they articulate it? Can they tell a connected, coherent story about the college? If you asked 100 people to tell you what the place is about, would you be able to recognize the institution from their descriptions? And would it be clear they're all talking about the same place?

– Academic opinion leader

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About this Report

In April 2008, Peterson Skolnick & Dodge (PSD) and Pentagram Design embarked on a comprehensive research project exploring the brand identity of Saint Mary's College of California (Saint Mary's). Our goals were to:

- Identify the distinctions and qualities that define the Saint Mary's brand today.
- Identify misperceptions and challenges that currently cloud the Saint Mary's brand.
- Explore how the brand might evolve to communicate not just what Saint Mary's is – but what Saint Mary's wants to become.
- Develop options for a new visual expression of the Saint Mary's brand.

Our exploration combined conversations with Saint Mary's constituents, a review of research previously commissioned by Saint Mary's, a benchmark assessment of Saint Mary's among cohort/competitor and aspirational institutions, and an audit of communications materials, looking at visual expressions of brand.

To hear the diverse voices of the Saint Mary's community – as well as views from beyond campus – we conducted:

- In-person and telephone interviews with 11 staff and faculty leaders
- Telephone interviews with 8 Saint Mary's alumni/current and potential donors
- Two conversation groups with a total of 17 faculty members
- Telephone interviews with 4 academic leaders outside Saint Mary's

Reviewing data from recent Saint Mary's brand work, we looked at more than 400 pages of research, marketing materials, and strategic documents, including:

- Saint Mary's Athletic Marketing Plan
- Strategic Plan 2007-12
- Presidential Vision document
- Core Curriculum documents
- BigBad, Inc., Web Site Redesign Strategy Brief
- 2006 Alumni Survey Summary
- Admitted Student Questionnaires, 2006-07
- Results from the Audit and Positioning Recommendations
- Board of Regents Strategic Planning Session Summary
- Girvin's BrandQuest Summary Book, School of Education
- Adult Student Market Analysis
- Saint Mary's marketing materials: View book, financial aid guide, magazine, Web site, commencement program

In our benchmark analysis we looked at:

- 4 colleges and universities that could be considered competitors/cohorts of Saint Mary's: Santa Clara University, Sonoma State University, UC Davis, and University of San Francisco
- 4 colleges and universities whose strong brand identities could provide models for Saint Mary's: Cal Poly, Davidson, Holy Cross, and Santa Clara University

Finally, we conducted a comprehensive visual audit of Saint Mary's print and Web-based materials, looking at the variety of ways the college expresses its identity graphically. Materials examined included uses of various Saint Mary's logos, publications from various schools and departments, and the Saint Mary's Web site. We also looked at visual identities for the cohort/competitor and aspirational schools identified by Saint Mary's.

The report that follows blends insights generated across our research methodologies to offer what we consider an authentic picture of the Saint Mary's brand today – and an inspiring view of Saint Mary's brand as it could be articulated to and understood by key constituencies, including prospective undergraduate and graduate students, parents, current students, alumni, faculty and staff, and academic opinion leaders.

As our report will show, strengthening the Saint Mary's brand (including its visual representation) will require strategic decision-making by Saint Mary's leadership and committed follow-through across the organizations responsible for communicating the Saint Mary's brand. Much of this work has already been identified and launched as part of the college's strategic plan implementation. We believe the effort will result in a more compelling, more inspiring, more deeply embraced identity for the college – one that reflects its aspirations as well as its current realities.

We'd like to note: In our experience with college and university brand assessments, it's not unusual for our team to be impressed by a client's distinct identity. It's always satisfying to delve into a community and emerge with a strong sense of its unique nature – and a plan for expressing that character to the world. At Saint Mary's we experienced the *unusual*: As we explored Saint Mary's identity, we were inspired to consider many of the great questions the college puts before its community every day – questions of values, spirituality and faith, service and community, as well as academics. We are grateful for the opportunity to go deeper.

Key Findings

I. Saint Mary's Distinctions

What qualities and achievements set Saint Mary's apart from other colleges and universities? Our conversations with Saint Mary's constituents and our review of previously commissioned research revealed:

- *A warm, welcoming community* that embraces students, makes them at home, nurtures them like family, and builds bonds through meaningful and enjoyable shared experiences – from social events to Jan Term adventures. Particularly from alumni, we heard that one of the greatest take-aways from Saint Mary's is deep, lasting friendships and memories that shape values and an optimistic approach to life. Constituents sometimes described Saint Mary's as “loving” – and in Saint Mary's definition, “loving” comprises both acceptance of who one is and the inspiration to grow, change, evolve as a person, take risks. The warmth of Saint Mary's manifests in the way students become friends for life, in the way faculty and staff make themselves available well outside the bounds of the regular college schedule, and in the way faculty challenge and inspire students to look within and step outside familiar boundaries.

What strikes me is the warmth of the people, the fierce engagement of people with the entire college community. They feel they belong. – Faculty/staff leader

We will nurture you to become that which you want to be. You will be challenged to become your best. – Faculty member

People see this place as nurturing, warm, friendly, with small classes. And they are small, but I want them to know that the smallness means you can't hide in the classroom. You're held accountable as you wouldn't be in large lecture settings. – Faculty/staff leader

- *A values-based education* that draws connections across intellect and faith, academics and spirituality, personal achievement and service. Students are encouraged and equipped to find and follow an internal compass. Saint Mary's faith tradition – Catholic and Lasallian – makes it a place that invites students, faculty, and alumni to seek meaning, ask big questions, and live with a diversity of answers.

Two big ideas are important here: A living faith community and a “holistic” approach to education. – Faculty leader

[At a Catholic college] you don't have to worry about separation of church and state; there is freedom to explore them together. — Faculty member

Saint Mary's is liberal arts and faith bound to each other. — Faculty member

[Lasallian means] comfort with raising moral discourse; it's welcome. — Faculty member

You can have conversations here you can't have other places. — Faculty/staff leader

- ***Personalized education and “cultivated opportunities.”*** Saint Mary's guides students to look within for their path and helps students find opportunities to follow that path. This is no one-size-fits-all approach; Saint Mary's goal, we heard, is to cultivate opportunities that help each student fulfill his or her unique potential.

[Only at Saint Mary's do you find] a place where people are willing to cultivate your passion before they match you with a career that allows you to act on your passion. You're not expected to know what you want to do and then just fall into a track. Saint Mary's is about helping you find out what your passion is, then preparing you to pursue it. — Alumnus

[At Saint Mary's] you will be helped with coming to know and love yourself. — Faculty member

- ***Transformative experiences*** — intellectually, spiritually, socially. By encouraging engagement, reflection, open discussion, and creative approaches to teaching, Saint Mary's catalyzes eye-opening, life-changing learning — for students and faculty alike. Students can arrive with varying levels of motivation and sometimes less-than-ideal academic preparation and be transformed by the kind of education they receive at Saint Mary's. Students who are already academic high-achievers find an inquisitive and supportive community in which to expand their perspective, test and refine their skills, and explore possible paths. Many Saint Mary's learning opportunities, such as Jan Term, are hands-on and take students beyond their familiar sphere — and not just geographically. Community service, carried out in the true spirit of volunteerism, is a key contributor to transformative education at Saint Mary's, showing students how they can have an impact in the world. While other institutions make service learning mandatory, Saint Mary's students volunteer because they catch that ethic from the community and carry it with them for life.

[I've seen] students go from caterpillar to butterfly because of the experience they've had at Saint Mary's. — Faculty/staff leader

We will help you become the person you were meant to be — and give you the skills to go out in the world and contribute in your own unique way to making the world a better place.

— Faculty member

You're not transformed and then you're done when you leave. It's a lifelong process. It instills a way of thinking, exploring, and engaging in the world — for life.

— Faculty/staff leader

Through Jan Term, they get people to do community service or things outside their majors. My daughter [a student] had to do a research paper on a general topic, and was given 20 places to choose from to do volunteer work. She worked at a food pantry, and from the experience wrote a paper on underprivileged youth, what poverty is, and what it means to make ends meet. Through it she learned something meaningful, and she helped mankind and reached out to another community. — Alumnus

- **An egalitarian learning environment** in which everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner. Saint Mary's is a place where leadership and teaching are distinctly nonhierarchical and where "selectivity" has a different meaning than the one embraced by most colleges and universities, based on the Lasallian mission to "teach who's in front of you." As one faculty member succinctly put it, "We're all learners here." And as we heard from many members of the Saint Mary's community, Saint Mary's learners are passionate about learning.

There's a philosophy among the Christian Brothers: We teach whom God gives us, the ones who are sent to us. But our vision of education and its umbrella is the same: You learn to know students individually, and shape your teaching to them. You modify how you react to each student, learn how to lead each student ... — Faculty leader

We make sure this education is accessible, with particular emphasis that people who might be overlooked are somehow brought in ... — Faculty/staff leader

With faculty and students, I always have the feeling we're sharing this wonderful conversation. — Faculty/staff leader

When we spoke to Saint Mary's president, Brother Ronald Gallagher, he noted that he doesn't see himself at the top of the hierarchy of the organization, rather at the center. He isn't passing his leadership downward, rather radiating outward. This resonated with us in the sense that it's not about being self-centered, but centering one's self to serve others and radiate outward. — BigBad, Inc. Web site Redesign Strategy Brief

- *The foundation for a truly diverse community*, by many definitions. Cultural, academic, religious, socioeconomic – Saint Mary’s strives to cultivate diversity in many forms. The college has made a commitment to increasing its cultural and ethnic diversity, and many in the community already perceive it as “diverse.” Twenty-five percent of students qualify for Pell grants, bringing people with a wide range of backgrounds to campus. Diversity of talent and intellectual interests already defines Saint Mary’s. In the tradition of liberal arts education, students and faculty are encouraged to cross the boundaries between academic disciplines. Surrounded by an inclusive community – guided to bridge differences through compassion – they are inspired to test preconceptions and seek common ground.

[About] this WASC report on diversity – my daughter [a student] commented that it was not true. SMC was diverse; people made the wrong comments and were not looking at all aspects. She was upset. People think it’s for rich white kids. But there are lots of people in need. – Alumnus

There was an email that went around about [how Saint Mary’s isn’t diverse]. My friends [alumni] saw that and said “What?!?” – Alumnus

[Only at Saint Mary’s College do you find] a place where chemists teach Great Books. – Faculty member

- A place that values the *learning journey*. A Saint Mary’s education is about the shared search for knowledge and universal truths, about learning the skills of inquiry and applying them across a lifetime, about exchanging ideas. By providing a broad “liberal arts” program, Saint Mary’s gives students access to knowledge in many forms and gives them the opportunity to draw enlightening connections across disciplines and mediums of expression. Programs like Collegiate Seminar are about recognizing the “universal” across eras, cultures, literary styles, and academic fields and actively communicating about these ideas. These programs are also about the journey of personal development students embark on as they search for universal truths and their own place in the world.

We have a vision of education that is rooted in the long tradition of the European university, which sees a unity to knowledge. It’s not by accident that people start to see connections that tie things together. If you look for connections you’ll find them. It goes to the literal meaning behind Catholic/universal. That’s appealing to students; they like making connections. – Faculty/staff leader

Professors took a lot of time to cultivate critical thinking and to cultivate me as a person. At Saint Mary's I became what I would call a developed person. — Alumnus

- A place that emphasizes **responsibility and accountability** as keys to citizenship and leadership. Starting freshman year, Saint Mary's cultivates skills and values that prepare students for "connected lives" in which they maintain strong, responsible relationships; participate in the lives of their communities; take opportunities to lead; and accept accountability for their actions.

[Our goal is that students begin] to develop a culture of commitment. They're collectively responsible and accountable to each other — raising the issues of membership and leadership in a community. ... We're trying to focus on academic conduct, integrity, balance, inclusive communities, responsible communities, healthy decision-making.

— Faculty/staff leader

I say to students: If you're not interested in active learning, in being put into some connection with the larger world, then don't come here. If what you want is taking some responsibility for your own learning, this is the place. We can make this happen for you. ... No one can do it for you, but you don't have to do it alone. — Faculty/staff leader

Our conversations, in particular, revealed that the values that guide undergraduate learning at Saint Mary's — students and faculty together raising and exploring deeper questions, being unafraid to look at values-related issues, treating each other as colleagues worthy of both great expectations and respect — also color the graduate programs. Students of all learning levels and specialties learn to ask questions they hadn't known to ask before. And graduate school teaching, in the Lasallian tradition, aims to change the world by changing the possibilities for graduate students and their families.

II. Feedback on Saint Mary's Core Values – Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts

We asked participants in our interviews and conversation groups what role Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts – the three traditions Saint Mary's currently uses to define itself – play in day-to-day education and the student experience. Do these traditions resonate equally with community members? Are they acted out in the life of the school? How central is each to Saint Mary's public identity? Here's what we heard:

- **Catholic:** Saint Mary's Catholic identity is evident in both the name and the appearance of the college. There's a chapel. There's a "mission" feel to campus architecture. But is Catholicism experienced as something deeper? Is it an integral part of a Saint Mary's education? Our research yielded mixed responses to these questions. Among alumni, we found a stronger connection to Saint Mary's Catholic nature among older (and Catholic) alumni; they told us Catholic traditions were an important part of their Saint Mary's experience. (In fact, any perceived move away from Catholic self-definition could be seen as a betrayal by those who identify with Saint Mary's Catholic traditions.) Non-Catholic and more recent alumni tend to see Saint Mary's as a liberal arts college that just happens to be Catholic.

The question "what does 'Catholic' mean at Saint Mary's?" also prompted mixed responses from faculty and staff. Some relate personally to the college's Catholic mission; others don't. Some see being Catholic as central to Saint Mary's external identity – perhaps critical to a student's choice to attend; others consider it incidental – and perhaps detrimental, causing some students who might otherwise flourish on campus to shy away. But all seem to agree that uncertainty surrounds this aspect of Saint Mary's identity, whether the question is "Do I have to be Catholic to go there?" or "What does it mean to be a Catholic college?"

The mystery is, what does it mean to be a Catholic college? The lack of knowledge I see and the questions I get demonstrate that people don't understand what it means to be a Catholic institution. – Faculty/staff leader

The big question is what does Catholic do to inform and make us different? It's because of the faith behind the actions – the love. – Faculty member

Catholic had no real impact on me. I'm not a Catholic, but I didn't have any reservations about making a move here. – Faculty/staff leader

- **Lasallian:** While our discussion of Saint Mary's Catholicism unearthed confusion and some controversy, our discussion of Lasallian values revealed something else: lack of consistent awareness, lack of consistent impact, but (among those who understand them) generally positive responses to the values and traditions embedded within "Lasallian" education. Although they told us the Christian Brothers figured prominently in their Saint Mary's experience (confirmed by 2006 alumni survey results), alumni who graduated some years ago said that, in their day, "Lasallian" was not an articulated part of the college's identity. In their perception, it's only in the last decade that the Lasallian mission became actively expressed. However, we heard that, even when Saint Mary's didn't promote itself as "Lasallian," Lasallian values were part of the learning experience — passed on through the Christian Brothers, the value they place on accessible education, and their teaching style. Faculty, too, expressed different levels of connection to and understanding of the Lasallian tradition.

Lasallian — that's a term that just surfaced in the past 5 to 10 years. When I was at Saint Mary's in the '70s, it was just about being taught by the Christian Brothers. The Lasallian theme wasn't obvious or articulated. It wasn't a label we used back then.
— Alumnus

It wasn't until I went back with my daughter that I was reminded of those three values. It was like, oh yeah, we had them but they did not strike me. It's good to have them, and they really refer to being good to humanity, understanding right and wrong ... it's about outreach and broadening one's horizons. — Alumnus

... Lasallian — I didn't know much about it ... but I completely buy into that whole tradition. We don't know enough about it coming in. — Faculty/staff leader

I did not even remember what Lasallian meant, and it was not a factor in my attendance. ... I don't think it's until your junior or senior year that you start to understand what it means. They need to explain it better. — Alumnus

I'm not Catholic, but the liberal arts and Lasallian values were a definite undertone in my education. The Catholic and Lasallian values are evident in the compassion among people at the school... So I would say the Catholic and Lasallian nature are evident in practice at Saint Mary's. — Alumnus

[RE admissions] Lasallian doesn't factor so much and the Catholic thing doesn't really factor as well. Some admitted students will think "Do I fit in?" "Will I be comfortable at a Catholic college?" — Faculty/staff leader

- **Liberal Arts:** Constituents agree that Saint Mary's embodies the values of a Liberal Arts college. Both the curriculum and the spirit of the college – emphasizing critical thinking, equipping students to explore any subject using basic tools of inquiry, cultivating lifelong learners – reflect this priority. Most interesting, though, is the unique way Saint Mary's brings Liberal Arts to life, through programs like Jan Term and Collegiate Seminar. Intensive, immersive, boundary-breaking programs like these turn a Liberal Arts education at Saint Mary's from just an academic experience into a mind-expanding, transformative opportunity. In addition, discussion of the term Liberal Arts surfaced an important question: As a label usually reserved for undergraduate education, what does Liberal Arts say about Saint Mary's graduate programs?

We are in a world that has finally begun to realize that specialization is not the best kind of education. Saint Mary's takes the best of classic liberal arts and gives students the ability to think conceptually, break boundaries, and synthesize something of value. This is a more contemporary kind of education. The classics have become contemporary.
– Faculty/staff leader

[What's different about liberal arts at Saint Mary's?] Jan term and seminar – We have a core educational experience that prepares them independent of the discipline they choose. And it happens in an intentional way. – Faculty/staff leader

The liberal arts attracted the undecided part of me to the school. – Alumnus

III. Misperceptions and Perceived Challenges

What misperceptions have an impact on Saint Mary's brand? Constituents we talked to, plus previously commissioned research, told us that Saint Mary's is often mistakenly perceived as:

- All Catholic
- All women
- All men
- White or not diverse enough in students or faculty
- Expensive/rich
- Elitist/"country club"
- Smaller than it is
- Not academically rigorous
- "Dead" on campus
- Traditional/out of step with the times

There's a misperception about the Catholic nature of the college. ... Students think everyone's Catholic, there's curfew and Mass every day, no one's having sex, no one's ever doing anything wrong ... There's a misperception that we're not connected to the real world in the 21st century. — Faculty/staff leader

The image of Saint Mary's is bucolic, safe, serene, a beautiful place to be and work. Students may think it's too vanilla. But look at the mural in Dante. There's a lot of liveliness here. — Faculty/staff leader

Saint Mary's faces a few challenges that grow from the way it is perceived — and in some cases, perceptions reflect reality. Constituent conversations reveal the following trends of opinion:

- ***Not selective:*** We heard that Saint Mary's is seen as not selective in admissions, and the people we heard from would like to change that perception. (As one faculty/staff leader put it, "The shorthand for Saint Mary's in the outside world is ... 'They'll take anyone.'")
- ***Idyllic but isolated:*** Although Saint Mary's sends students out into the world for immersive experiences and explores the world through its Liberal Arts tradition, the campus itself is seen as isolated, insular, and provincial.

This place feels parochial. We're part of an international church, and international order ... and we don't take enough advantage of that. — Faculty/staff leader

- **Undervaluing scholarship:** Some faculty members expressed the perception that Saint Mary's does not value scholarship as much as service — and that the college's academic strength and intellectual culture are underappreciated in the world. The 2007 ASQ reports that nearly 25 percent of students admitted to Saint Mary's rate the college's academic reputation as good or fair/poor (only 2 percent).

In terms of scholarship, I would be on my own. I have no mentors. — Faculty member

Most people don't realize the caliber of the faculty here. We get outstanding faculty who are truly teacher-scholars. They do serious research, but they don't see their passion for teaching getting in the way of their scholarly work. They see it as an enhancement and a great pleasure. — Faculty/staff leader

- **Lacking focus:** We heard — particularly from faculty, but also from some alumni — that Saint Mary's is perceived as unfocused, lacking in strategy, confused/conflicted, and in need of better communication and outreach. Words that came up in describing the character of Saint Mary's today include self-absorbed and self-centered, complacent, awkward, confused, "all things to all people," schizophrenic, dysfunctional, bipolar, ambiguous, defensive, unfocused. In addition, only 36 percent of respondents to the 2006 Alumni Survey strongly agreed or agreed that they had a good sense of Saint Mary's future direction. These perceptions stand in contrast to the way faculty groups, in particular, told us they would like to see Saint Mary's perceived: clearly defined, aware, confident, complex, intentional, mature, assertive, self-reliant, and embracing some sense of humility.

Overall agreement is lacking here about who we are and what we stand for. People are very focused on negatives and deficiencies and neglect the positive. What is that about? Is it a leadership issue? It might be cynicism, some disappointment, and it might be an empowerment issue. — Faculty/staff leader

We need to enhance communication within the community. The downside of having an informal network is that when problems get solved, there's no mechanism for disseminating the news. ... There's a lack of communication around important issues. If you're not part of the privileged group — particularly junior faculty and students — you may never know. — Faculty/staff leader

We have received two newsletters, one that came in a timely manner and addressed some of the issues at hand, but then there was a long lag before the other, and that one did not address all the issues. Some of the unanswered questions ran rampant. If a newsletter had come out sooner and addressed it, that digression would have been avoided.

— Alumnus

There is no definition of who we are. Having an image that appeals to various audiences is not working. — Faculty member

I think stories about Saint Mary's are getting distorted through the rumor mill. A good leader would respond to real evidence, look at the data, pull together a five-year plan with a mission and objectives, and tell us where Saint Mary's is going, then build a bridge to reach it. Tell us what Catholic and Lasallian mean in the context of today's environment. It is about seeking the truth, not the way we want things to be in a narcissistic, distorted way. — Alumnus

- ***Unclear on nature of Catholic identity:*** As discussed in our review of Saint Mary's three traditions — Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts — the question “how Catholic do we want to be?” is top-of-mind for many in the Saint Mary's community. And many of those considering the question perceive the college as unclear on the answer. Some in the community (e.g., older alumni) perceive the college as moving away from Catholicism; Saint Mary's calls itself Catholic, we heard, but doesn't “walk the talk.”

Saint Mary's has lost some of its distinction. ... It has had a significant deterioration of values and behaviors ... a loss of Catholic values. In an effort to be PC, Saint Mary's has gone to the extreme to violate the Catholic values to appease others. It's upsetting. I have stopped giving money. They are more interested in promoting values for non-Catholics at the tremendous expense of Catholics. ... Either it is a Catholic Christian college or it is not. ... The bottom line is are they walking the talk or are they violating their own rhetoric? — Alumnus

Our distinctiveness needs to be in our focus on “Catholic,” involving our students in social action activities. — Faculty/staff leader

Some students come here for the capital “C” in Catholic, and leave when they don't find it. — Faculty member

[People think] Catholicism means evangelizing for the Roman Catholic Church. ... Some [faculty] are in conflict with the Catholic view/tradition. They are more comfortable with Lasallian. — Faculty member

The following challenges are noted in previously commissioned research or were raised in conversations as noteworthy one-off points:

- **Costs:** Saint Mary's is challenged to persuade parents "to pay more ... than they will for other well-known, less expensive public institutions." (Audit Positioning Review)
- **Perceived geographic scope:** Saint Mary's is challenged with broadening its reputation from that of a very local or Western college (California-centric) to that of a regional/national/global institution.
- **Sports connection:** National perceptions of the school, as well as student school spirit, are often tied to how sports teams are doing.
- **College vs. university:** Saint Mary's has a reputation as a small, liberal arts college – and calls itself a college – but has the scope of a university, with the need to promote strong graduate programs. (Some in the community wonder if referring to Saint Mary's as a college rather than a university undervalues the graduate programs.) The challenge is maintaining a reputation that bridges both labels, delivering the intimacy and intensive focus of a college, but with the academic and geographic scope and reputation of a university.
- **Future of the Christian Brothers:** With the population of Christian Brothers expected to dwindle in coming years as fewer new members join, some in the community wonder what the impact will be on the student experience, the distinctiveness of Saint Mary's educational approach, and the college's ability to fulfill its Lasallian mission.

IV. Aspirations

We asked research participants how they would like Saint Mary's to be perceived. Their responses, combined with findings from Saint Mary's strategic planning documents, paint a picture of a college that is:

- Clearly and confidently defined (a message we heard from both constituents and Saint Mary's strategic plan)
- Diverse – ethnically, culturally, intellectually, and socioeconomically
- Inclusive, with a strong feeling of community, based in “harmony, civility, and respect”
- Perceived as strong academically, both locally and nationally
- Connected to the world; globally aware and engaged
- Communicating proactively, effectively, and consistently, internally and externally
- Attractive to men and women alike, across academic, cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds
- Recognized for its transformative impact on students
- Respected for its dedication to quests both intellectual and spiritual
- Renowned for nurturing confident individuality in students while cultivating deep and long-lasting relationships
- Renowned for social justice that is far deeper than the “compulsory service learning” culture of other colleges
- Appreciated as a place where students flourish by any measure imaginable, including strong career paths, successful admissions and performance in graduate and professional schools.
- Not afraid of risk and conflict
- Known and appreciated beyond the Bay Area
- Taking an evolved approach to sustainability and technology

[What three words would I write on the Saint Mary's front door] Challenging. Supportive. Surprising. – Faculty member

[I would like Saint Mary's to be seen as] a real gem in the Bay Area. I would like it to be seen as an open college, not just a Catholic college. I would also like Saint Mary's to be more associated with San Francisco, which is an international and cosmopolitan city, as well as with Silicon Valley ... it's not just an isolated, private place. – Alumnus

I'd like Saint Mary's to think “expand,” not “contract.” You want to be able to say this is a beacon of light, not just a little place in Moraga. – Faculty/staff leader

I would like Saint Mary's to be seen as a place you can go to that cultivates personal greatness. Whatever your passion is, it will be teased out of you, and you will be equipped with the skills to pursue it. Saint Mary's should not be a "best kept secret."
— Alumnus

I'd like the world to see the college as a place to unite for four years and come out a better person. ... I'd like it to be known as a place you can't help but fall in love with, where people have your back and care. — Alumnus

[I would like Saint Mary's to be seen as] a place where truth is the standard, and the search for truth, however joyous or painful, is welcome. — Alumnus

[How would I like to see Saint Mary's described?] ... distinctive, recognized ... People are using the word "engaged" – that's a current strength. We can even use edgy. We have a beautiful, relaxing campus, but we're competitive, and want to be.
— Faculty/staff leader

V. Input on Visual Identity

We asked research participants to weigh in on Saint Mary's current visual identity. Here's what we heard about the college's main identity mark, which shows a chapel next to the name "Saint Mary's College of California" in block letters:

- Although the chapel has many fans, two trends of opinion emerged from our conversations on the subject: Some considered the chapel a strong, positive icon of Saint Mary's. Others felt the chapel is not distinctly meaningful, since many colleges and universities have chapels. (One constituent mentioned that the chapel depicted in the Saint Mary's logo is not even the Saint Mary's chapel.)
- We notice a similarly divided opinion on the presence of "of California" in the college's logo. Some considered it critical to understanding Saint Mary's and distinguishing it from other "Saint Mary's." Others felt it gets in the way of Saint Mary's being perceived as a regional rather than a local resource.

Opinions were also divided on the athletic logo – perhaps a reflection of differing perspectives on athletics:

- On the positive side, constituents thought the athletic logo conveys some authentic Saint Mary's values and distinctions: common goals, equality, spirit, enthusiasm, loyalty, passion, strong community spirit. They also liked the cultural meaning of the Celtic knot.
- On the negative side, some felt the logo is not representative of the entire college, and reflects an athletic culture that is out of date, sexist, arrogant, revolving around "*drinking and yelling insults.*" The majority of negative feedback was centered on the "God is a Gael" phenomenon.

We asked research participants what other images or icons could represent Saint Mary's. Suggestions heard most frequently were:

- The experience of entering campus – the drive in, the view of the chapel and white-washed/red-roofed campus against blooming trees, green rolling hills, with cross on the hill in the background. As one research participant told us, "the drive in gives the feeling that you're entering a sacred place."
- Spanish mission architecture – an image that clearly says "California"

A few research participants pointed out that, in conveying its identity at a glance, Saint Mary's faces a unique challenge: Traditional symbols of Saint Mary's (chapel, crosses, rolling hills) clearly communicate the faith-based values and the physical setting of the college, but do not reflect the academic mission, the value placed on learning, the liberal arts tradition, or the lively intellectual life on campus.

The chapel is the most prominent part of the image for me. Even though I didn't go to chapel while I was there, I'll be getting married there. — Alumnus

When you see the chapel you get a sense of tradition. It's parallel to the tower at Yale, or Hoover Tower at Stanford. I would like Saint Mary's chapel to be seen like those towers. — Alumnus

When you turn into the entrance you are entering a "sacred place," making a conscious effort to enter. — Faculty member

How do you get liberal arts into the imagery? I'm not sure, but I have a video playing in my head of students studying outside or having class outside. That says "liberal arts." — Alumnus

I think of the chapel. ... It's not a religious thing, but a focal point of the campus, historic, traditional. ... When someone says "draw an icon of the school" I would draw a chapel. — Alumnus

However the college is [depicted], I think it's important to convey a sense of warmth, community, belonging. — Alumnus

[What image conveys the intellectual nature of Saint Mary's?] A book? — Alumnus

VI. Feedback from Academic Opinion Leaders

To understand how Saint Mary's is perceived within the world of higher education, we talked with four academic leaders from a larger list provided by Saint Mary's:

- Jonathan Brown, President, Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities
- Mary E. Lyons, President, University of San Diego
- Caryn McTighe Musil, Senior Vice President, Association of American Colleges and Universities
- Paul J. Zingg, Office of the President, CSU Chico

Many of the leaders we spoke with expressed great affection for Saint Mary's – and great hopes for the college's future. They commended Saint Mary's current leaders for what they've achieved so far, and for taking on the soul-searching challenge of addressing “brand.” Their feedback on Saint Mary's distinctions, challenges, and opportunities resonates strongly with what we heard from other Saint Mary's constituents. Here we offer the highlights of these conversations.

Reputation Criteria

What criteria do academic leaders use to assess the reputation of a college or university? Although all said they consider traditional measures of excellence – including academic reputation and accessibility and commitment of faculty – these leaders told us they also look beyond standard criteria at:

- How the institution defines academic excellence, and whether it is achieving excellence according to its own standards.
- Whether the institution strives to cultivate values as well as skills.
- Whether the institution “lives” its mission, and whether that mission is reflected in the experience of everyone the institution touches.
- How the institution makes a difference in what it defines as its “community” – whether that community is local, regional, national, or global.
- Whether constituents can tell a clear, consistent, compelling story about the institution.

Intellectual and mission-based integrity need to be a part of the brand, so when you think about them, you understand who they are. – Academic opinion leader

I ask: Is it preparing students to be responsible citizens? How does it define academic excellence? These days it isn't enough to define academic excellence according to old, traditional standards. You have to challenge students in new ways that prepare them to be effective in a changing world. I look for an inventive curriculum with a sense of freshness.
– Academic opinion leader

I look at the extent to which its mission is clear and there is an intentional demonstration of commitment to the mission. This could be evident in many ways. For example, if service is part of the mission, is the college visible in civic engagement? – Academic opinion leader

Based on the criteria they use to assess colleges and universities, using a scale of 1 to 5 (in which 5 is highest), academic opinion leaders gave Saint Mary's an average rating of 3.1; 4 was the highest rating Saint Mary's received, 2 the lowest. Colleges and universities this audience would rank similarly included:

- Cal Lutheran
- Claremont Colleges
- Drew University
- Oberlin
- Seattle University
- Pacific University
- University of Portland
- University of Redlands
- Whittier

Saint Mary's Distinctions

What sets Saint Mary's apart from other academic institutions? Academic opinion leaders highlighted:

- Saint Mary's basic orientation: Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts
- Christian Brothers reputation for outstanding education, including their international network
- Private status/west coast-California location
- Beautiful, human-scale learning environment
- Emphasis on deeper engagement – not just “service learning” but a commitment to engaging students in the search for solutions, and an embrace of social justice
- Career and mentoring program – a place where faculty remember your name

In preparation for this interview, I talked to [my husband, who visited Saint Mary's] and he said it was a storybook, Stanford-like campus on a human scale – a hidden story, an amazing place. ... He took a picture of the statue of La Salle at the center of campus and he got it from such an angle that you can see, on the steps behind the statue, a student being mentored by a professor. His photo captures what it's like to learn there. – Academic opinion leader

Saint Mary's distinction is engagement. ... Students don't just serve people in a soup kitchen. It's about seeking to understand the social forces behind homelessness and hunger and trying to solve the problem. That's truly social justice, and it's a Saint Mary's distinction. ... There's increasing emphasis on solving problems, taking deeper responsibility, engaging students. – Academic opinion leader

Strong opinions arose around the relevance of Saint Mary's value traditions: Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts. These values, we heard, make Saint Mary's a place uniquely equipped to address challenging questions, both intellectual and spiritual.

The fact that Saint Mary's is Catholic and Lasallian makes it a place with a conscience, that is identified with values and with teaching – a place that can talk about these things in way other places can't. The public is hungry for a purposeful discussion of values. We see this in students, too. See Alexander and Lena Astin's (UCLA) report on spirituality. They found that students are longing to explore the meaning of life, spirituality, purposeful living, but there are few places to explore these things, and faculty are the least comfortable with it. Saint Mary's can stand out in this way. – Academic opinion leader

Today, people have a more shortsighted view of the world. They need to have enduring values and sensibilities, beyond technical skills. It's about having a philosophical knowledge structure rather than narrow technical skills. – Academic opinion leader

Personal and social responsibility tend to be the orphan outcomes [among academic institutions]. Everyone wants them but no one gives them a home. – Academic opinion leader

Truly bringing these values to life so that they resonate for everyone in the community – from students, to faculty, to alumni – would set Saint Mary's apart and address a growing need for educational institutions that allow students to pursue questions that go deeper than academics. However, as commentary on Saint Mary's challenges will reveal, the college is perceived by some as falling short of its great potential in this area.

Saint Mary's has so much potential. It's a first-class private liberal arts institution on the West Coast. That alone sets it apart. But a truly distinctive institution is focused on bringing its identity elements to life. For example, do alumni leave affected in a positive way by the Lasallian ideal of service to the disadvantaged? Is that truly a hallmark of a Saint Mary's education? I don't think so. But it could be, and I would argue that it should be.

— Academic opinion leader

Saint Mary's Challenges

Academic opinion leaders echoed other constituencies in their assessment of Saint Mary's challenges, including:

- Lacks visibility beyond its immediate "orbit"
- Location could be considered an asset (small college in idyllic setting) or a liability (isolated from the main stream)
- Perceived as high-cost for valued delivered

The greatest consensus regarding challenges — and the most passionate voices — emerged around the idea of bringing Saint Mary's value traditions to life. More than one academic leader noted a lack of clarity around what it means to be a Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts institution in the modern world. How does Saint Mary's define these terms? The answer to that question, academic leaders told us, is as critical to establishing a strong brand as it is to making a difference in the world.

The way an institution talks about itself, the way people experience it, and the way it acts need to reflect institutional values. And I'm not just talking about labels like "Catholic," "Lasallian," or "Liberal Arts." That's all very nice, but what does it mean — to people at the college, to alumni, and to people touched by the college?

My sense of Saint Mary's is that there's no deep-down awareness of these values across the community, or of the distinctions that make the college good and vital. Sure, alumni have a lot of affection for the college. But mostly they remember good times and the pretty campus. And what does that add up to? — Academic opinion leader

People want to be able to touch [the distinctions that set Saint Mary's apart] and understand them. [For example,] you won't get out of Saint Mary's without becoming an educated person with responsibility. [They need to] define what the difference is. — Academic opinion leader

As a Catholic institution, how do you have deep roots in the modern world of religious diversity as well as other types of diversity? You have to be a place that's open, confident in its values, a place where you can explore value and faith traditions. — Academic opinion leader

I am not sure what Saint Mary's wants to be, or be known for or as. There are risks in that no matter how you look at it. Do they want to have broad appeal with a variety of different types of students with different backgrounds ... or do they want to be in a niche market? The faculty, administration, and Board have a big job to define it. — Academic opinion leader

... my impression is that there's no strong sense of consensus about what the values — Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts — mean. Saint Mary's has a mission. I'm sure it has a plan. But to what extent do the folks there feel committed to the values? And to what extent is the institution committed to its own rhetoric?

Here's a good question: Are people at Saint Mary's because they feel it's an institution that speaks to their individual values and hopes, or are they there for another reason? — Academic opinion leader

Another challenge is getting parents to understand the value-add. It is harder to sell than it once was. Parents think, even if my kids need binoculars to see a full professor, and even if it takes them 5 or 6 years to finish, [a public institution] will save me \$40-50K per year. This is an increasingly high hurdle. — Academic opinion leader

Advice for Saint Mary's

We asked academic opinion leaders what Saint Mary's could do to strengthen its identity and raise its profile among institutions of higher learning. Reflecting our conversations about Saint Mary's challenges, we heard:

- Establish and communicate how Saint Mary's defines excellence and the kind of community it wants to cultivate. Set your own standards and measure yourself by them.
- Stress academic excellence *and* values.
- Take advantage of opportunities to demonstrate something beyond local scope (AACU association, Christian Brothers international network).
- Showcase the Saint Mary's "product" — students, faculty, and alumni whose lives reflect the impact of a Saint Mary's education.
- Keep the curriculum fresh, vital, exciting, and relevant to both mission and world.
- Identify and communicate about core commitments. (Everyone in the community should be able to articulate Saint Mary's values.)
- Have the "difficult conversations" — among leadership and across the community — that are key to breaking identity deadlock, reaching consensus, and sharing a strong, consistent, compelling message about what Saint Mary's is all about.
- Move forward not from panic, or pressure, or fear — but inspired by the college's enormous potential.

... from my point of view, academic reputation is our bread and butter – it is what we live and die for. Maybe they feel like they are doing everything they can, but they could focus here. ... Given the size and scope, they could be seen as highly selective, like Amherst, Williams, Mount Holyoke, Smith. These schools sit in remote areas, and they don't lack applicants.
– Academic opinion leader

Demonstrate the ability to integrate Saint Mary's academics with Saint Mary's values. [Show that] it's not a veneer but a way of life. There's wholeness to it. We carry it into our work lives and communities. – Academic opinion leader

I would recommend paying close attention to the accrediting associations in a way that improves the institution. There's tension between Saint Mary's and accreditors. All the accreditors are saying is that you have to prove you are what you say you are. Prove you're effective. Doing that requires more specificity than saying "We want everybody to be liberally educated and tolerant." What the hell does that mean?

The college has been pressured not to reinvent itself but to be accountable for itself and win greater confidence that it delivers what it says it's all about. ... There just needs to be a sense that the students come first. They have the perfect template for that in the Catholic and Lasallian heritage. They don't have to reinvent their identity. They just need to articulate it, embrace it, make it intentional and visible. – Academic opinion leader

Lift up the curriculum and its innovations in new and fresh ways that are exciting, dramatic. This is particularly important for first-generation students whose parents have no idea what it means to go to college or what their children experience. Tell that story. – Academic opinion leader

I understand the issues around not being perceived as selective enough. But Saint Mary's has the advantage of being a private college; as a private college, it can be subjective in admissions. Saint Mary's can say, "We're looking for something other than the traditional measures of academic achievement. We're looking for students who've done community service, or who've shown leadership, or whatever." As a private school, you can define the character you want to build into your community; you don't have the same restrictions as a public school. But you must have the culture and climate in place to support the type of individuals you're admitting.
– Academic opinion leader

Identify and communicate about core commitments ... the three or four things that a Saint Mary's education gives. ... get the message out simply and quickly. Students need to see it every day. – Academic opinion leader

They need to have some real “come to Jesus” conversations. They don’t need to do it from panic or pressure. But they need to have these conversations. If they don’t, they will never achieve their potential, and will become mediocre. ...

I have great affection for the place, and I hope they can find the strength for the future. Because education needs a place like what Saint Mary’s could be. It doesn’t need a mediocre Saint Mary’s. It needs Saint Mary’s to be a beacon. — Academic opinion leader

In summary, we asked academic opinion leaders to share their perspectives on “brand” — what does the concept mean to today’s colleges and universities? Their suggestions resonate with their advice for Saint Mary’s — that brand must be authentic, must reflect the life of the college, and must be lived by everyone in the community.

A brand is a consistent message and presentation that is an authentic reflection of the mission and values of the institution. It is synthetic but an accurate encapsulation of the institution’s heart and soul. It captures something that is meaningful and memorable. — Academic opinion leader

Steve Sample, president of USC, has done a remarkable job rebranding that institution as a dynamic powerhouse. USC is life-long and worldwide. You are not just on the physical campus. It goes beyond, and you will be with it forever. — Academic opinion leader

Labels are so cheap. Everybody has a slogan these days. ... But they don’t answer the question “What’s the real world of this university like?” You have to convey the distinctive character of what the place is all about. It’s not about pictures of priests saying Mass. ... That’s nice, but you have to weave the values behind it in more subliminally. I’m not sure Saint Mary’s has moved beyond the staged shots and the labels so that there’s a real, shared Lasallian experience there. — Academic opinion leader

Conventionally, brand means you don’t question the quality. You just buy Heinz. In its new meaning, brand has to communicate in a nanosecond what it stands for. For colleges, this is very useful in a competitive market. It says, “This is what we bring that’s distinctively ours.” — Academic opinion leader

Analysis of Benchmark Institutions

Our research included an analysis of seven colleges or universities that Saint Mary's identified as a cohort/competitor school, an "aspirational" school (with a strong brand image that could provide inspiration for Saint Mary's), or both.

Saint Mary's identified the following four schools as cohorts/competitors:

- Santa Clara University
- Sonoma State University
- UC Davis
- University of San Francisco

(The 2007 Admitted Student Questionnaire also listed these as the top four schools which students admitted to Saint Mary's most frequently accepted.)





Saint Mary's identified the following as aspirational schools:

- Cal Poly
- Davidson
- Holy Cross
- Santa Clara University

I. Assessing the Competitive Landscape: Cohorts/Competitors

To understand the competitive landscape, we looked at how Saint Mary’s identified cohorts/competitors communicate about and distinguish, or position, themselves in the marketplace. The chart below summarizes basic information for these schools and the distinctions they put forward.

Cohort/Competitor School Positioning Snapshot

Schools and Taglines	Basics	Positioning
 “The Jesuit University in Silicon Valley”	Location: Santa Clara, CA Students: 5,300 Under / 3,400 Grad Undergraduate: 44 Majors Graduate: 10 Degrees Campus Size: 106 acres Type: Private, Catholic Jesuit	▶ Academic excellence ▶ Ideal location ▶ Engaged community ▶ Jesuit focus
	Location: Rohnert Park, CA Students: 7,000 Under / 1500 Grad Undergraduate: 41 Majors, 46 Minors Graduate: 14 Degrees Campus Size: 269 acres Type: Public – joined COPLAC , aka “the Public Ivies”	▶ Popular state university with good educational value ▶ Focus on technology ▶ Commitment to students ▶ Friendly, exciting student body ▶ Outstanding facilities in a naturally beautiful setting ▶ “A small campus with big ideas”
	Location: Davis, CA Students: 23,500 Under / 7,200 Grad Undergraduate: 104 Majors Graduate: 87 Degrees + 5 Prof Schools Campus Size: 5300 acres Type: Public UC System	▶ Golden UC brand ▶ Forward-thinking research ▶ Community connections ▶ Interdisciplinary excellence, with an emphasis on the sciences, engineering and agriculture ▶ Developing well-rounded graduates
 “Jesuit Education”	Location: San Francisco, CA Students: 5,400 Under / 3,300 Grad Undergraduate: 40 Majors Graduate: 25 Degrees Campus Size: 55 acres (urban) Type: Private, Jesuit Catholic	▶ Diverse student body and academic offering ▶ Excellence in service and scholarship ▶ Jesuit tradition

In an effort to deconstruct these positions and better understand where these players stand in relation to each other on dimensions important to key constituents, we developed a series of perceptual maps. These maps offer a visual display of where each of these schools and Saint Mary’s falls on the following key continuums:

- Large to small
- Religious to secular
- Academic excellence to service orientation
- Traditional to contemporary
- Student-centric to community-centric
- Value-priced to high-priced

From this perceptual map, we note that:

- The two public schools are secular. The three private institutions have religious affiliations.
- UC Davis is the only large school. USF, Santa Clara, and SSU are mid-sized (~8k total students). Saint Mary's is the smallest
- USF and Santa Clara are clustered closely with Saint Mary's in the small, religiously affiliated quadrant, so should be considered Tier 1 competitors. These are also the two schools that students admitted to Saint Mary's most frequently accepted.

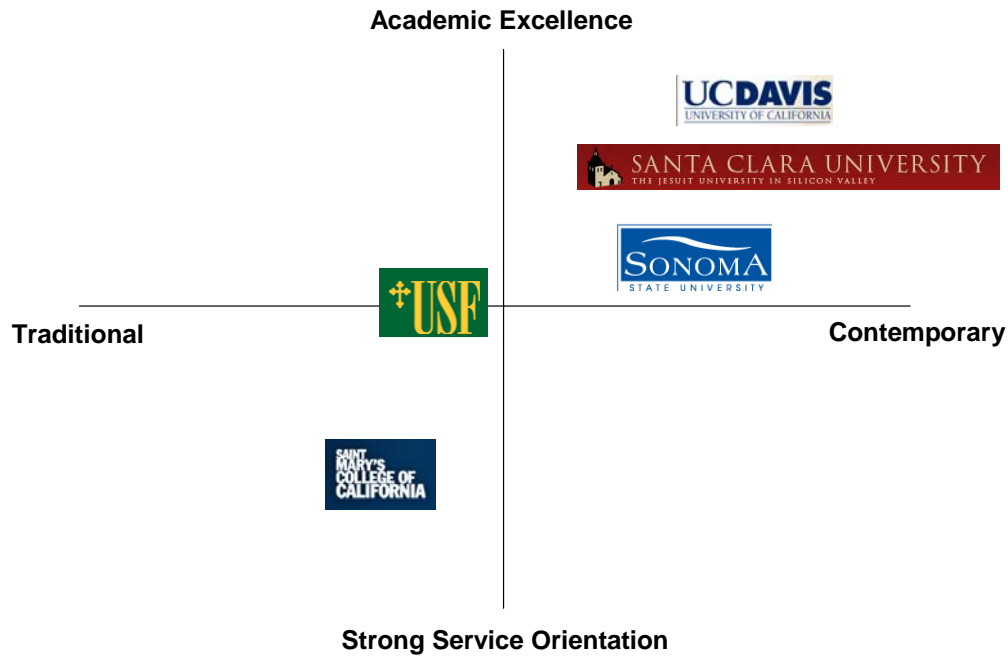
With these observations, the following opportunities arise:

- Saint Mary's private status helps set it apart from UC Davis and SSU.
- Because they cluster closely on core school characteristics, Saint Mary's should focus most intensely on differentiating itself from the Tier 1 competitors.
- Saint Mary's can capitalize on being the smallest
- Although they are all Catholic institutions, Saint Mary's is not Jesuit, and could differentiate itself in this regard. From the preceding positioning snapshot, we see that Santa Clara and USF are Jesuit schools and include "Jesuit" in their identity lines. Although it is implied by the term "Jesuit," these schools do not use the word "Catholic" as the focus of their brand communication.

The second perceptual map, on the following page, shows the competitive set along the continuums academic excellence to service orientation and traditional to contemporary.

Current Cohort/Competitor Perceptual Map

Academic-Service vs. Traditional-Contemporary



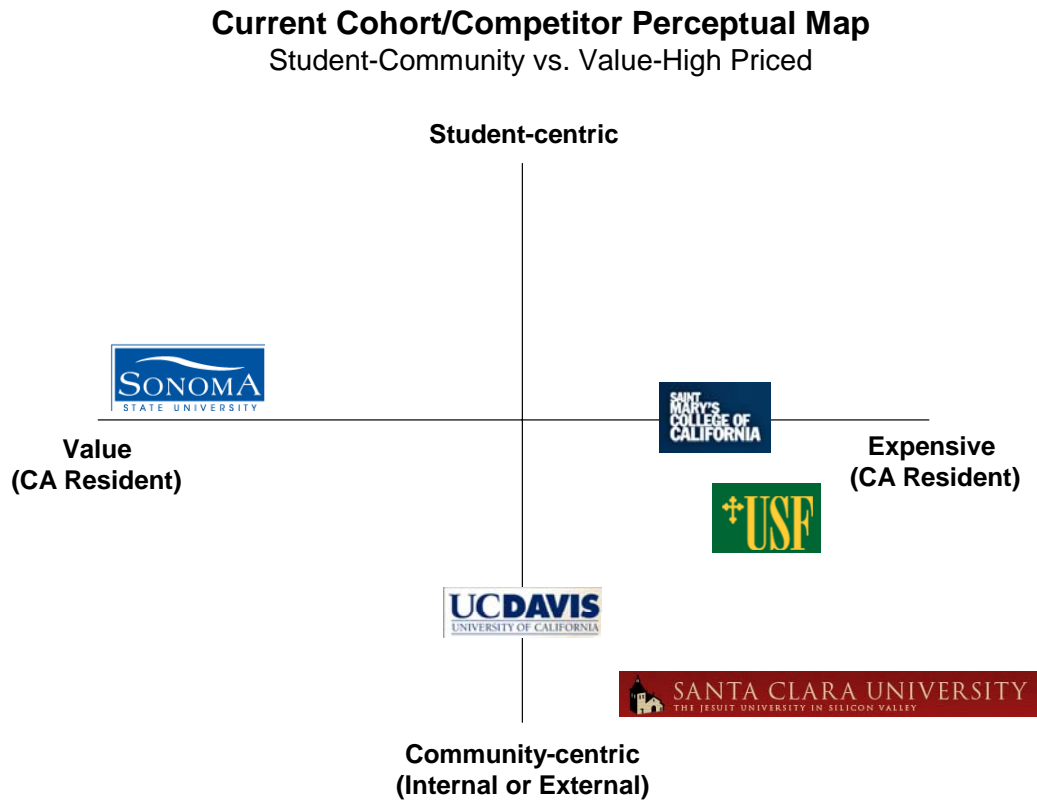
From this perceptual map, we note that:

- Santa Clara, SSU, and UC Davis, because of their positioning around Silicon Valley, technology, and cutting-edge research respectively, have a more contemporary (vs. traditional) emphasis.
- UC Davis, SSU, and Santa Clara emphasize academic excellence over service. USF communicates a balance between service and scholarship, whereas Saint Mary's communicates an emphasis on service.
- Again, Saint Mary's finds itself positioned more closely to USF.

With these observations, the following opportunities arise:

- From the ASQ, we know students admitted to Saint Mary's seek schools with a strong academic reputation, so a scholarly reputation should be considered a "cost of entry" with this competitive set. Saint Mary's does not rate as highly in this category, so should put more emphasis on its academic rigor and strengths. Graduate programs could also help bolster academic strengths.
- Conveying a more contemporary positioning by emphasizing things like technology, global, and/or "green" would help to overcome some of the isolation concerns we heard in interviews, and refresh Saint Mary's image. It would also move Saint Mary's into the cluster of competitors, closer to Santa Clara, and away from USF.

The final perceptual map below shows the competitive set along the continuums student-centric to community-centric and value-priced to high-priced.



From this perceptual map, we note that:

- None of the schools emphasize a focus on students over a focus on community, with community defined as either within the school itself, or in connection to the outside community.
- Saint Mary's cost is comparable to, even slightly lower, than that of its Tier 1 competitors.

With these observations, the following opportunities arise for Saint Mary's:

- Offer extra value in relation to price point to stand out from Tier 1 competitors.
- Take advantage of the "white space opportunity" by portraying itself as more student-centric. Student-focus is a core concept in Lasallian education, and Saint Mary's already has credibility in the high ASQ ratings in personal attention.





Based on these observations, we identify four points where Saint Mary's could raise its competitive standing to improve its brand:

- Find meaningful ways to distinguish Saint Mary's, visually and editorially, from USF and Santa Clara in particular.
- Emphasize the benefits of Saint Mary's small size, private status, student-centric focus on a campus with a strong sense of community, and additional value for the price.
- Emphasize academic excellence, and embody more contemporary characteristics.
- Reinforce/promote strengths in areas desired by students (commitment to undergraduate teaching; quality of faculty; personal attention) and improve in other areas that matter most to students (availability of majors and academic reputation).

II. Assessing the Horizon: Aspirational Schools

To understand the playing field on which Saint Mary’s aspirational schools operate and learn by their example, we looked at how these schools communicate about and distinguish themselves. We note their basic information and the distinctions they put forward:

Aspirational Schools Positioning Snapshot

Schools and Taglines	Basics	Positioning
 “Learn by Doing”	Location: San Luis Obispo, CA Students: 18,800 Under / 800 Grad Undergraduate: 66 Majors Graduate: 27 Degrees Campus Size: 1,321 acres Type: Public, California State University System, Polytechnic University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High achieving students ▶ Prestige among peers, seen as “institution of choice” far beyond its place in the Cal State system (perceived as UC)
	Location: Davidson, North Carolina Students: 1,700 Undergrads Only Undergraduates: 20 Majors, 12 Minors Campus Size: 450 acres Type: Private, Presbyterian Christian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Community and opportunity ▶ Affordability ▶ Students of integrity and faith ▶ Globally engaged
	Location: Worcester, MA Students: 2,700 Undergrad Only Undergraduate: Limitless Majors – choose from list or create own Campus Size: 174 acres Type: Private, Jesuit Catholic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ “An Education of Discovery” ▶ Helping students find themselves / student-centered educational journey ▶ Facilities to enhance learning ▶ Community involvement ▶ An individual among colleges
 “The Jesuit University in Silicon Valley”	Location: Santa Clara, CA Students: 5,300 Under / 3,400 Grad Undergraduate: 44 Majors Graduate: 10 Degrees Campus Size: 106 acres Type: Private, Catholic Jesuit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Academic excellence ▶ Ideal location ▶ Engaged community ▶ Jesuit focus

According to our analysis, these schools tend to have more applicants, admitting 30-45 percent of the students that apply compared to 60-80 percent among the competitive set. They also enroll 30-40 percent of students admitted, whereas the competitive schools enroll 20-25 percent. (For purposes of this analysis, Santa Clara was included as a competitor only.)

Looking at these aspirational schools, we identify the following “best practices”:

Lay it on ‘em in terms of benefits: Santa Clara uses simple non-institutional terms to clearly articulate who they are and the benefits of the religious affiliation.

- Presents four core values on the home page of the Web site, telling the world who they are and what their priorities are in simple, concise, non-institutional terms.
- Defines the benefit of a Jesuit, Catholic university as “educating leaders...who will help fashion a more just, humane, and sustainable world.”
- Presents the “Jesuit Advantage,” not just Jesuit Traditions.

Speak up, live up: Davidson touts its focused, selective undergraduate program and acts boldly to live up to its promises.

- Focus above all else is on educating students of “good character and high academic ability.”
- Highly selective admissions process.
- Positions on affordability (despite tuition of \$33.5K) because the college boldly eliminated students loans from financial aid packages and covers 100 percent of demonstrated student need.

Keep it simple, be genuine, set your own standards: Holy Cross takes a simple approach, generating a few genuine, high-quality achievements that are easily communicated to prospective students. The college is less concerned with rankings than with meeting its own high standards, and this frees it from comparison.

- Emphasizes Liberal Arts and Jesuit Education.
- Defines itself as delivering “an experience of discovery.”
- Positions Liberal Arts as a platform for all aspects of life.
- Touts Jesuit tradition of open inquiry, sense of purpose, service to others, challenging mind and freeing spirit.

Validate claims with results: Cal Poly is unapologetically self-promoting, supporting claims of high-achieving students and prestige among peers with compelling, credible external validations. “Simply the best” is highly visible on the school’s home page, helping to show — rather than just telling — who Cal Poly is.

- Demonstrates selectivity with compelling stats. Students boast high SAT scores and GPAs. In Fall 2007, 34,000 applicants applied for 4,700 spots. High rankings among peers.
- Shows examples of high-achieving students, including a “Human Powered Vehicle” that travels over 46 mph, top national rankings for the water polo team, and an award-winning student-run print operation.

These best practices boil down into four key opportunities for Saint Mary’s as the college looks to strengthen its brand:

- Prioritize. Emphasize what is most important.
- Clarify and simplify your message. Use non-institutional, personal terms. Communicate benefits clearly to key constituents.
- Deliver on promises.
- Find things to brag about — and proactively promote these assets. Set your own terms for success and/or validate with credible external sources. Don’t just tell — show.

Visual Audit Overview

To understand how Saint Mary's expresses itself visually — and to assess the impact of that expression on perceptions of brand — we conducted a visual audit of select Saint Mary's communication materials. We looked at various logos and wordmarks and their uses, did a survey of communications materials, and assessed Saint Mary's visual brand in relation to those of its cohort/competitor and aspirational schools.

I. General Findings

The core visual identity for Saint Mary's consists of a traditional icon of the chapel framed within an arch and a contemporary stacked word mark with capitalized words in ascending size: SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA, with the emphasis on California.

The wordmark appears to be a more recent addition to the identity system, while the chapel icon seems as though it has been used for a longer timeframe. We interpret the juxtaposition of traditional icon and more modern wordmark as an attempt to show a traditional college that has a more contemporary agenda. The chapel icon, while nicely drawn, is a common metaphor for small, and particularly Catholic, institutions. For example, Santa Clara University, identified as a cohort/competitor of Saint Mary's as well as an aspirational school, also shows the chapel in their identity.

In reviewing a wide range of Saint Mary's materials, we note that identity elements are used inconsistently across the school. This points to a system that has grown somewhat organically over time without a clear sense of direction.

Ideally, the identity should be at the center of the communication system, a consistent focal point from which the rest of the system can radiate, with a clear sense of visual hierarchy for the brand elements of identity, nomenclature, typography, and color palette. For a small school, this system should be simple, consistent, and flexible, providing a clear framework and hierarchy that are easy to implement across the institution.

However, our audit of Saint Mary's revealed:

- Inconsistent use of identity elements: chapel, icon, wordmarks and name
- Lack of a clear nomenclature system for schools and programs
- No clear typographic system
- No consistent primary or secondary color palette

- Inconsistent use of identity lockups and signoffs
- Potential overuse of chapel icon outside of the identity
- No rules on how the identity works with secondary information (e.g., school names, Web site)
- No guidelines or rules – resulting in an ad hoc feeling

On the communications side (publications) our audit revealed:

- No clear hierarchy or system to the materials
- Inconsistent format for publication grids/architecture/tone of voice/use of type, etc.
- No sense of shared strategy or identity; pieces feel designed for individual needs rather than as part of a whole.

Overall, as is typical of many institutions, it feels as though parts of the Saint Mary's system have been adopted for the individual needs of particular programs or schools. Within a subset – for example, the business program – pieces may be generally consistent; but when viewed as a whole – across college and graduate schools and programs – they seem discordant and don't feel like they radiate from a central core.

II. Detailed Findings

Here, we take a look at how these general findings play out across specific representations of the Saint Mary's brand. (For a look at the logos and other materials we assessed, please see Appendix B.)

Logo uses

- Saint Mary's currently uses two lock-ups of its logo: one with fine serif type and the other one with bold sans serif type. Having two distinctly different type systems in use, we find, dilutes the visual impact of the brand.
- In the bold-type version of the logo, "California" is the largest type in the school name. Although we understand the motives for stressing California (i.e., differentiating from other Saint Mary's Colleges elsewhere), this emphasis seems misplaced, both graphically and in terms of the college's identity. (There is much more to Saint Mary's than its California location.)
- Background colors used in the logo are not consistent across usages. Also, some examples use graphic elements, such as rules, interacting with the logo. These are all confusing elements that detract from the main message of the logo.
- The chapel in the current logo could be improved through simplification. It includes fine lines and details that do not show well in small scale, and that diminish the visual impact of the mark. And when you compare the Saint Mary's mark with Santa Clara University's, which also includes a chapel, it is easy to see that the Saint Mary's chapel is busier.
- The athletics logo and the seal are strong representations and generally work well. However, backgrounds for both are often too busy. And both would work even better if refined.

Lock-up for graduate schools

- We note much room for improvement in the way graduate school logos lock-up with the Saint Mary's logo. In each school logo, Saint Mary's is expressed differently. The School of Education is an extreme example; the type treatment is different from any other school on campus. To communicate a stronger brand, Saint Mary's needs to have a consistent look in all lock-ups. Secondly, each school name should relate to the Saint Mary's logo in the same way so the audience can see a clear hierarchy and consistent visual voice. Having a consistent lock-up between school logos and the new Saint Mary's logo will create a stronger shared identity between the college and its schools and make that connection clear at a glance.

Print materials for college

- We note that there is no systematic structure across Saint Mary's publications. Although it's not necessary to have such a structure, there are benefits to categorizing publications by group (e.g. newsletters from different schools, brochures to explain each department) and developing a system for each group.
- Many different typographic styles are currently in use.

Print materials for graduate schools

- Graduate school materials look more cohesive than college-level, but still can use greater consistency – for each school, and across all schools. For example, the School of Economics & Business seems to have the most consistency across its publications. But if you open an information package that carries the bold-type version of the school logo, you see that the business card inside has a different logo.
- Across schools, the Masters in Leadership program and School of Economics & Business use a similar color palette, but the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing uses a completely different palette.

Other communications tools

- We note that Saint Mary's uses several styles of business card – and the variety dilutes the brand.
- Athletic schedules could be improved using more simple but dynamic backgrounds.

Cohort/competitor and aspirational school logos

- Among cohort/competitor schools, the Saint Mary's logo is the busiest – and, in general, the busier the graphic, the less visual impact it has. We note, too, that both Saint Mary's and Santa Clara use similar chapels as the key image in their logos. The Santa Clara chapel does not have all the details of the Saint Mary's chapel, but it holds visual integrity as a historic church.
- In the UC Davis, Sonoma State University, USF, Cal Poly, and Davidson logos, a short word is emphasized to make the logo more memorable. Since Saint Mary's has a long name, it's important to make a strategic decision about what in the name is emphasized. Particularly when viewed in the context of cohort/competitor and aspirational schools, the "California" in Saint Mary's name seems overemphasized.
- Most of Saint Mary's cohort/competitor and aspirational schools use a seal. Consistent usage of the Saint Mary's seal under a new identity system would strengthen brand.

Cohort/competitor and aspirational school Web sites

- Although cohort/competitor and aspirational school Web site banners are similar in style, Santa Clara's banner stands out for its more sophisticated design.

III. Next Steps for Visual Identity

What image of Saint Mary's do these findings reveal? Our belief is that Saint Mary's current graphics-based communication system paints a picture of a small school with an array of programs that are unconnected, and without a central visual voice for the institution — an image out of step with a college that helps students find an internal compass, welcomes new ideas and values inquiry, nurtures both individuality and community, and is globally aware and connected to the world. To shed light on this vulnerability, we return to this quote, which also appears on page 9 of this report:

When we spoke to Saint Mary's president, Brother Ronald Gallagher, he noted that he doesn't see himself at the top of the hierarchy of the organization, rather at the center. He isn't passing his leadership downward, rather radiating outward. — BigBad, Inc. Web site Redesign Strategy Brief

Much as the college must take its lead from a strong center — from which shared principles and values radiate to shape the mission and spirit of the institution as a whole — Saint Mary's visual brand needs to take its lead from a strong center that guides the many manifestations of visual brand, from the view book to the Web site to athletic schedules to business cards to lockup between college and graduate school logos.

How the Saint Mary's brand *looks* should be a clear expression of what the brand *is* — underscoring the need for Saint Mary's to answer key questions about its identity before changing its logo or imposing a graphic design system across its communications devices. As one participant in our research put it:

Getting the strategy in place is the most important. Changing the logo won't do much without making the systemic changes. — Alumnus

Questions that will have an impact on visual brand include:

- How contemporary a college does Saint Mary's want to be?
- How local or global a college does Saint Mary's want to be?
- What unique values does Saint Mary's want its brand image to convey?
- How closely tied should college and graduate school identities be?

Finally, we offer the following quote from our conversations with college constituents. We think it sums up what the right visual brand could say about Saint Mary's:

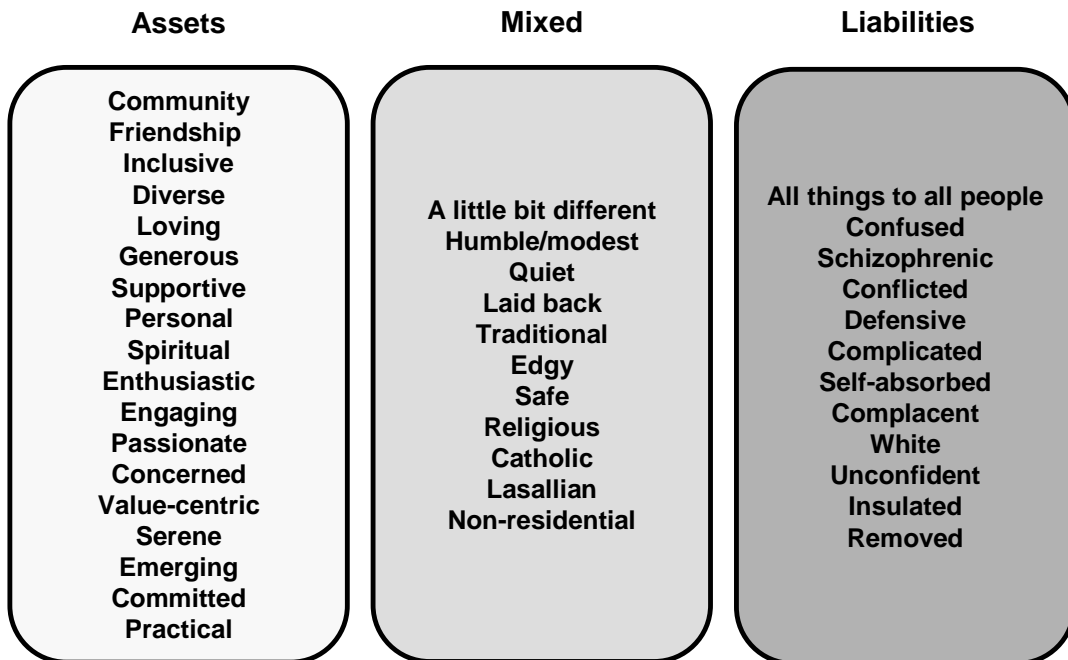
In the Romanesque cathedrals of Europe, inside next to the doors, it's common to find lions gnawing on something. It's meant to make you stop and pause. There are things to be taken seriously here What's inside is great beauty, it can make you grow intellectually, spiritually, humanly. When you exit, pay attention. Take this with you ... be transformed. — Faculty/staff leader

Brand Assessment

So, where does Saint Mary's stand today? What vulnerabilities can the college address, and what opportunities emerge for Saint Mary's to present an authentic identity, distinguish itself from competitors, and learn from other strong-branded colleges and universities?

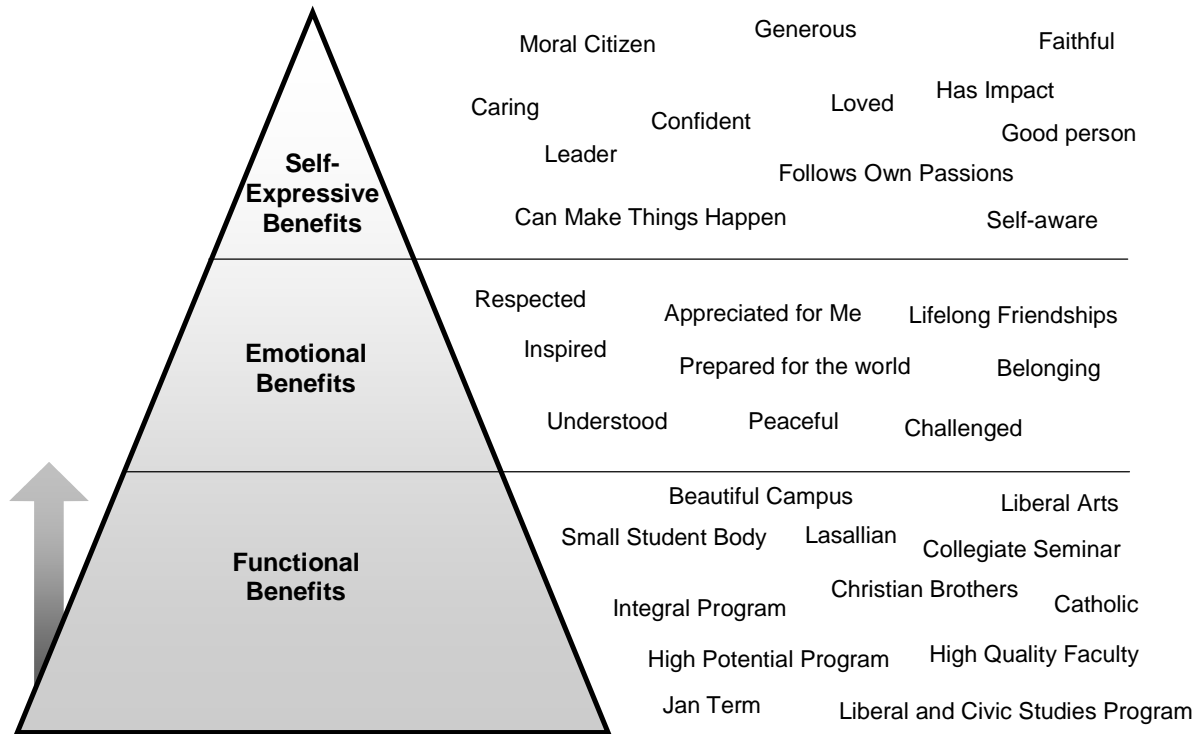
Taking a moment to summarize our findings, we offer the following snapshot of perceived qualities that are assets, liabilities, or somewhere in between:

Brand Image Assessment



Looking more closely at the distinctions of a Saint Mary’s education, we see that the college offers benefits that have emotional impact, influence how students express themselves, and shape their lives in tangible ways:

Benefit Hierarchy



In the pages that follow, we integrate the results of our research to explore what we see as the most significant vulnerabilities of the current Saint Mary’s brand – and key opportunities for the college to strengthen its image.

I. Vulnerabilities

Many of the brand challenges Saint Mary's faces were raised by constituents in our conversations and are reinforced by previously commissioned research. Some are also reflected in our competitive assessment and visual audit. Drawing on everything we've learned, we've identified six areas of vulnerability – issues and questions that currently stand between Saint Mary's and a clear, distinct, consistent, and competitive brand image.

Questions about the “three traditions” – Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts. Are they distinctions? liabilities? or just labels? And what role do they play in brand identity?

Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts – these are the terms most frequently used in current communications materials to describe Saint Mary's. However, we note a lack of follow-through when it comes to interpreting these traditions – clearly, consistently, passionately – for a contemporary audience. As we learned in our interviews and conversation groups, many in the community do not understand these traditions and would like Saint Mary's to define and express them more clearly. And among those who understand these terms, we heard questions about whether Saint Mary's truly “walks the talk.”

Our observation is that, no matter how deeply woven these traditions may be into the mission of the college, today they serve primarily as labels, open to (mis)interpretation. And using them as labels for the Saint Mary's experience may make it harder – not easier – for people to understand what Saint Mary's is all about. For example:

- Students and faculty understand that Saint Mary's is a college where issues of faith are front-and-center, offering an education that embraces spirit as well as intellect. But they wonder: What does “Catholic” really mean? How is it different from “Christian”? And does the term reflect the inclusive, inquisitive nature of Saint Mary's and the contemporary, relevant, occasionally “edgy” nature of some of the academic and cultural experiences available on campus?
- For students, the Christian Brothers' emphasis on education – a gateway to self-realization and service, accessible to all – is palpable in the teaching style on campus. Most understand the concepts of “shared inquiry,” social justice, and service and their importance to Saint Mary's. But does labeling Saint Mary's “Lasallian” add value to the experience? And does the term “Lasallian” have meaning to students who might be attracted to “Lasallian values” by any other name?

- Students understand that there is a comprehensive, critical-thinking, experiential, and cross-disciplinary approach to education at Saint Mary's; they experience it every day. But does the term "Liberal Arts" adequately express the distinctive personalized, experiential, silo-breaking nature of a Saint Mary's education? And what impact does calling Saint Mary's a "liberal arts college" – a term usually used for undergraduate institutions – have on perceptions of the college's graduate programs?

As Saint Mary's considers these labels – Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts – it's worth remembering: Saint Mary's cannot control what they mean to people who are not familiar with the college. But Saint Mary's can take the initiative to define its terms: What does it mean, at Saint Mary's, to be a Catholic college? What does it mean to be Lasallian? And how does Saint Mary's define (or redefine) Liberal Arts? These questions can be the beginning of a very enlightening conversation.

[RE liberal arts/Catholic/Lasallian] I think they miss the boat as ways of marketing Saint Mary's. ... The liberal arts part makes sense to me, but it doesn't reach or talk to people in Silicon Valley. And I don't think the Catholic and Lasallian elements connect with the real public. All three of these things speak only to a segment of the population.

– Alumnus

Can we move away from naming our complete tradition – Catholic, liberal arts, Lasallian? That's what makes the whole institution hum, but you can't articulate those things to a large audience. Some of those labels are too loaded. Let's talk about academic excellence.

– Faculty/staff leader

Many prospective students struggle to understand [the relevance of Saint Mary's three traditions] and end up comparing Saint Mary's on common and reductive terms. – from Saint Mary's Positioning Recommendations

Unclear on Catholicism

As comments from constituents illustrate, the question "How Catholic is Saint Mary's?" is impossible to answer without disappointing or even alienating some parties. The challenge, we observe, lies in the tension between traditional interpretations of the term "Catholic college" and how that relates to a tradition others consider just as sacred: academic freedom, which virtually all faculty we spoke with told us is alive and well at Saint Mary's.

Alumni who share a traditional definition of "Catholic college" may feel Saint Mary's is departing from its core values if it doesn't display the Catholic label front and center. But emphasizing that Saint Mary's is a Catholic college – and

allowing those who hear this label to assume a traditional interpretation – may give an inaccurate impression that Saint Mary's is not modern, adventurous academically, or even inclusive of different faiths and intellectual perspectives. Students (and faculty) who may be a good fit with the college may choose not to apply.

In exploring this issue, it may be helpful to consider that "looking" or "sounding" less traditionally Catholic does not preclude the college from living out the values of Catholic education, nor does it keep Saint Mary's from being and positioning itself as "more than Catholic" (or "Catholic, and more").

Need to take a stand on selectivity

Constituents we spoke with share the opinion expressed in previously commissioned research and strategy documents that Saint Mary's needs to become (and be perceived as) more selective in admissions. And although the college clearly wants to attract more high-achieving students, it should be noted that Saint Mary's is actually somewhat selective according to its own definition of the word: Guided by Lasallian ideals, Saint Mary's is looking for potential in many forms, and seeks to provide a personalized education that brings out the best in each student – whether he or she has top marks and test scores or struggled in high school. High-potential students other colleges may pass up will continue to play an important role in the Saint Mary's community. And as the college moves toward greater perceived selectivity, these choices should be expressed as enriching the community and the conversation on campus – not rendering Saint Mary's less competitive.

Our students are coming in without remediation and yet we still succeed to a great extent. That's an incredible achievement that's not told enough. – Faculty/staff leader

I wasn't a traditional college student. I didn't come in with the best study habits, and I came from schools that didn't have high rates of sending students on to college. But I had professors who understood, took the time to help, and had faith in me. Any place else I probably would have slipped through the cracks. – Alumnus

[Who does well at Saint Mary's?] The fighter, the rebellious student who needs to see the rhyme or reason, or the student who has been knocked down a few times but has resiliency – the student with moral courage, who can be challenged and will respond with a fighting spirit. Sometimes we get students who are lost and they find themselves here. – Faculty/staff leader

Perceived as isolated, not globally connected

Our conversations with constituents confirm that Saint Mary's is seen as an isolated oasis, disconnected from the larger world. They also reveal that constituents share leadership's desire to see Saint Mary's earn a presence on an increasingly global scale that reflects initiatives already under way on campus: Study abroad is an important opportunity Saint Mary's seeks to offer every student. And Jan Term often sends students into new geographies, where they gain international perspective and acquire the skills of global citizenship. In addition, the relationship with Christian Brothers institutions outside the United States adds an important opportunity and dimension. The challenge is in communicating that a small, isolated college does engage with the world.

Lack of focus/proactive communication

The confusion surrounding of the college's three traditions (including Catholicism) and the lack of consistency in logo uses and other visual representations of brand contribute to perceptions of Saint Mary's as a college that lacks a crisp, consistent, distinctive, memorable identity and voice. Some constituents also noted a lack of communication and outreach at Saint Mary's, particularly on challenging issues. People with an investment in the college (i.e., alumni, faculty, staff) would like to see Saint Mary's clarify its identity and take greater communications initiative, particularly regarding controversy.

Perceived as expensive for the value it provides

Although many of Saint Mary's cohort/competitor and aspirational schools are also private and, therefore, come with a significant price tag, the highest quality institutions in the mix are perceived as providing good value for the cost. Reputation enables premium pricing.

II. Opportunities

Every brand vulnerability is really an opportunity in disguise — a chance to clarify and strengthen identity by proactively answering brand questions, spotlighting authentic distinctions, defining terms that may be unclear, and expressing and illustrating what may be muted or dormant. The suggestions that follow reflect opportunities to reposition Saint Mary's in relation to its competitors and to learn from the best practices of aspirational schools.

Are there risks associated with embracing these opportunities? Of course. In redefining core values or moving away from the traditional labels of Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts, it may feel as though you're stripping away the safe and easy definitions many people use to understand and assess a college. But Saint Mary's has already taken its first risky step away from traditional standards by removing itself from U.S. News & World Report; on campus, there's a shift toward redefining the competitive playing field on Saint Mary's terms. And the Saint Mary's culture — with active, progressive societies (including LGBTQ) and events like a production of *The Vagina Monologues* on campus — already includes elements that could be considered beyond the scope of a traditional Catholic school. Sometimes taking a calculated risk is necessary to drive change. The question to ask is: Is it the right risk, and for the right reason?

It is critical to emphasize that we are not suggesting the college move away from its Catholic, Lasallian roots and identity. We are simply recommending that the labels are not enough to capture and communicate what that identity means.

As one Saint Mary's constituent so elegantly put it, "*When you're trying to be inspirational or aspirational, you look to the highest point.*" These opportunities, we think, invite Saint Mary's to look to its "highest self" when redefining brand, reflecting the college's unique and authentic mission and inviting others to reach higher, themselves. Opportunities for Saint Mary's to achieve this goal fall in two categories:

Embrace authentic identity elements that make Saint Mary's stand out from the crowd. For example—

- Sharpen the Saint Mary's image from traditional to ***contemporary-with-traditions*** — standing out from both competitors/cohorts and aspirational schools, and revealing Saint Mary's as a forward-looking institution, open to progressive approaches in education, diverse perspectives, dialogue, and new ideas. We are not suggesting Saint Mary's position itself as trendy or higher-ed "flavor of the month," but as fresh and relevant in a complex world.

- Focus on student-centered, personalized, *transformative education* – an authentic Saint Mary’s distinction, and something competitor schools don’t/can’t claim.
- Emphasize *egalitarian learning*. “We are all learners here” is not something many other higher education institutions – Catholic, Jesuit, or otherwise – claim. This is an authentic Saint Mary’s distinction.
- Leverage the richness of the Saint Mary’s *community* – welcoming, loving, challenging and enabling people to find a personal path and strive for a personal greatness, a home to diversity of all kinds, from intellectual to cultural to ethnic to spiritual. Let diversity attract diversity.
- Heighten representation of Saint Mary’s as a rigorous place that values *intellectual challenge and scholarship* as well as spiritual inquiry, and succeeds in delivering on all counts. Showcase faculty distinctions and creative productivity.
- Spotlight Saint Mary’s legitimate claim to being *global* through its connection to Lasallian institutions around the world. Position and promote this as a distinction.

Express identity in compelling ways. For example –

- *Go beyond “loaded labels”* – Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts – in defining Saint Mary’s. Turn these terms inside out to reveal what’s at their heart. Define Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts in ways that reflect the true Saint Mary’s – and show the unique perspective Saint Mary’s brings to these concepts.
- *Continue bringing life to Saint Mary’s traditions* (Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts) by illustrating how they come to life through *Saint Mary’s people*. The Web site and the view book have begun this process – showcasing students and faculty who exemplify these traditions and illustrate the transformative possibilities unleashed by a Saint Mary’s education. Showcasing people can also be a way to spotlight supporters who are “visionary” in their fields and in their philanthropy.
- *Emphasize the advantages of Saint Mary’s unique definition of “selective.”* Choosing high potential in all forms makes for a diverse and dynamic community where exciting conversations are going on. These conversations challenge students wherever they are in their learning, and wherever they are going in their lives.

- *Demonstrate the value of a Saint Mary's education by showing real outcomes.* Showcase Saint Mary's "products" – alumni whose lives are forever shaped by what they've learned in college and who are making a difference by carrying Saint Mary's values into the world.
- Use public perception of Saint Mary's as "lacking focus" as an opportunity to make a profound impression by crystallizing the college's mission and breaking through with *a new, fresh message about Saint Mary's.* Embrace and even promote this brand effort as an opportunity to dispel preconceptions and debunk myths, revealing the real Saint Mary's. (To borrow from Oldsmobile – "We're not your grandfather's Catholic school – even if your grandfather is an alum.")

Brand Recommendations

I. Assumptions

Because there are several issues on which Saint Mary's must make decisions that will have an impact on brand, in order to make brand recommendations, we had to make a few assumptions about the evolving Saint Mary's identity. We assume Saint Mary's:

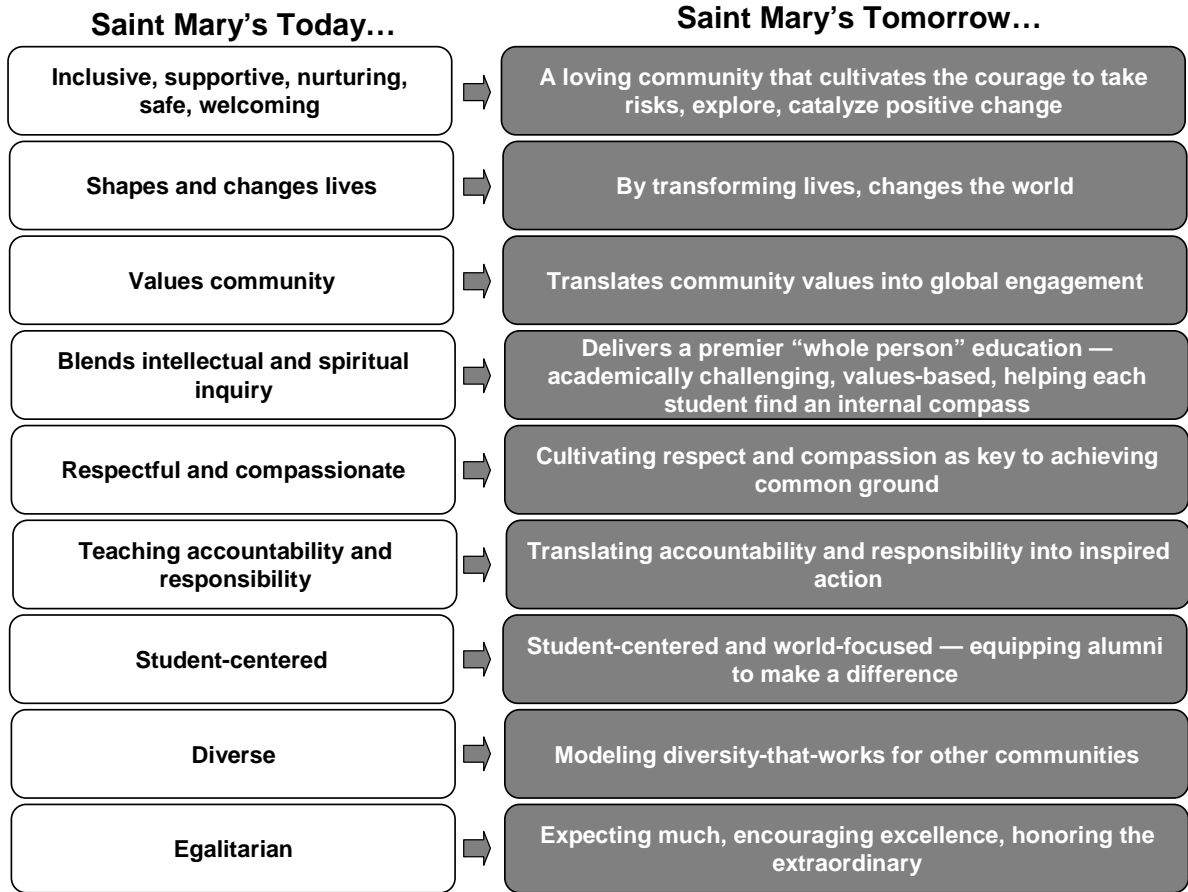
- Will continue to embrace Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts traditions as distinctions – whether or not these terms are explicitly used in initial identity statements about the college.
- Will remain a college in name rather than a university.
- Wishes graduate schools to express the same mission and values as the college overall.
- Will aim to attract high-achievers to the Saint Mary's student community while continuing to pursue Lasallian educational ideals, often accepting challenged or less-prepared students with the potential to be transformed. The result will be a uniquely diverse student body with learners of all tastes and talents.
- Will strive for greater recognition in the global sphere – portraying itself as more than a local, state, or regional resource.
- Is committed to strengthening perceived value per investment by refining and enhancing its brand.

II. Branding Tools

The following tools reflect the opportunities we see for Saint Mary's to strengthen its brand:

- The *Brand Pathway* illustrates how the Saint Mary's brand could evolve to express the college's "highest self."
- *Brand Elements* describe the aspirational "value proposition" of the college – the unique benefits Saint Mary's could position itself as offering.
- The *Skills-and-Values Set* describes the impact this value proposition has on the lives of individual members of the Saint Mary's community.
- *Brand Personality* and *Brand Voice* describe the character of the college and the tone its communications should adopt in reaching out.
- The *Brand Platform* draws on these tools to tell a brief, compelling story that answers the question "What is Saint Mary's College of California all about?"

Brand Pathway



Brand Elements

Courageous, Loving Community

- Diversity-that-works: academically, ethnically, culturally, spiritually
- Creating bonds through meaningful and enjoyable shared experiences
- Generous, inclusive, compassionate
- Willing to take risks and explore
- Harmonious, civil, respectful
- Responsible and accountable
- Building confident individuality

Transformative Impact

- Personalized/student-centric focus
- Seeking and developing potential in many forms
- Illuminating each student's personal path/encouraging personal greatness
- Delivering life-changing experiences
- Equipping individuals to confront issues without fear, find common ground
- Instilling the skills to learn, contribute, and lead for life
- Making a difference for students, faculty, community, and world

Value-based, Academically Excellent Education

- Academic and spiritual inquiry combined
- Challenging and rigorous
- Encouraging excellence
- Exceptional faculty
- Egalitarian learning – “We are all learners here”
- Broad-based education and critical thinking emphasis
- Shaping values, encouraging reflection, inspiring service

Global Engagement

- Contemporary-with-traditions
- World-focused curriculum and programs
- Globally aware and competitive
- Catalyzing global change
- Enabling the American dream
- Citizens of the world

Skills-and-Values Set

From the 19-year-old sophomore to the Christian Brother to the MBA executive alumnus, the people of Saint Mary's College carry the following skills and values into the world:

- Confident individuality; "developed" personhood
- Curiosity and openness
- Compassion
- Skills of inquiry that support lifelong learning
- Skills of community – the ability to form strong personal bonds, contribute, collaborate, lead, bridge differences
- Preparation for a balanced life of both engagement and reflection
- A "personal compass" – intellectual, emotional, moral – that helps Saint Mary's people find and follow a personal path
- A sense of purpose, "mission" – defined by the individual. This mission may be articulated in different ways across a lifetime.
- Global awareness
- A commitment to making a positive difference – and an optimistic belief that one *can* make a difference

Brand Personality

Evolve from:

- Traditional to Contemporary-with-traditions
- Humble to Confident
- Sheltered to Worldly

Continue to be:

- Loving
- Generous
- Compassionate
- Supportive
- Challenging
- Inquisitive
- Open
- Practical
- Sometimes edgy
- Responsible
- Engaged

Brand Voice

- Plain speaking/non-institutional
- Warm
- Contemporary
- Enthusiastic but practical
- Personal rather than institutional
- Straightforward, unafraid to confront issues
- Inviting/inclusive

Brand Platform

Saint Mary's College opens personal pathways for students through a rigorous education that awakens and engages intellect, spirit, and responsibility to community and world.

We thrive on inquiry and collaboration in the quest for truths. We value diversity in its many forms: academic, ethnic, cultural, spiritual. We take inspiration from our Catholic roots – shaping values, encouraging reflection. We live out the principles of Lasallian education – approaching students as individuals and equals, using knowledge to transform lives and catalyze global change, cultivating compassion. And we bring the benefits of a broad liberal arts education into the 21st century, equipping our students – undergraduate and graduate alike – to learn for life, contribute, and lead.

We are all learners here – together, working to understand and shape the world.

Next Steps

- Answer questions critical to developing visual identity (Saint Mary's, Pentagram).
- Incorporate findings, recommendations and feedback in identity development (Saint Mary's, Pentagram).
- Present 1st round visual identity (Pentagram).
- Consider engaging external (alumni and supporters in particular) audiences further (Saint Mary's).
- Consider sharing highlights (with thanks) with participants and some point in the process (Saint Mary's).

Appendix A - Sample Comments

To me, Saint Mary's is about the people. It's a very personal college. There's a sense of belonging. — Alumnus

[My biggest takeaway from Saint Mary's?] Lifetime friendships. — Alumnus

[Lasallian means] concentration on the dignity of the student. It doesn't mean you don't challenge or push. — Faculty member

Students are attracted to the expansion of the Lasallian idea. ... It has a new infusion of meaning from young people. ... You build a community here first that becomes a model for what's possible in the world and then you take that with you. — Faculty leader

Saint Mary's strengths are its basic orientation: Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts. These are powerful forces, and they don't need to be reinvented. ... The issue is, what do these terms mean? Who's defining them? Is there consensus around them? And are they being transformed into meaningful, visible action? — Academic opinion leader

I was impressed with Saint Mary's and was delighted to see it claim to deliver on the social justice aspect of Lasallian education. Lasallians were dedicated and revolutionary in their approach to meeting the needs of the poor, enabling all people to live full and rich lives. — Academic opinion leader

[Students] leave here into all walks of life. They leave with an inner sense of finding something. Students are taking [the values] on for themselves ... — Faculty/staff leader

It seems like Saint Mary's has a commitment to racial diversity. If Saint Mary's can indeed cultivate racial diversity, that will be a drawing point. It could be a distinction. — Academic opinion leader

[Only at Saint Mary's College do you find] all faculty teaching all different areas through collegiate seminar. — Faculty member

[Only at Saint Mary's College do you find] a reinvigorated and growing sense of Lasallian tradition; a sense of lived purpose, teaching the underserved, social justice, student-centered; a purpose bigger than what I'm doing. — Faculty member

Lasallian is not as good as Jesuit. More people know Jesuit over Lasallian. — Faculty member

[Lasallian means] teaching students now, not teaching the ideal student. If they are in one place, go there with them. Students are the reason we are here ... — Faculty member

You will be, from the first moment, a person, whose aspirations become our most important business for the few years of your time with us. — Faculty member

[At Saint Mary's] your voice will be cultivated and heard. — Faculty member

We allow students to develop their own academic and intellectual potential; expose them to the Catholic faith and traditions; and introduce them to a lively and life-giving community. — Faculty member

I don't know — being a Catholic school might exclude some students and faculty. [You have to find ways to] say your values without calling them "Catholic" or "Lasallian." You have to embrace them without saying they're ecumenical values. They're human values, transcendent values. — Academic opinion leader

People assume "Catholic" equals "restrictive," but it's something much deeper, something to explore. We live in a gray world and it's a gift when an institution can bring clarity. — Academic opinion leader

Many colleges say they commit to students. Saint Mary's lives it. ... Saint Mary's should be the college of choice for students with a conscience — not narrowly defining social justice, but a place for students who care about the big questions of our day, who want to make the world a better place ... — Faculty/staff leader

[The faculty culture] is already changing for the better. Teaching comes first. They come here for the mission: the belief in the capacity of education to transform. — Faculty/staff leader

The Christian Brothers have a big network of high schools ... and a quite profound international network all over the world. Saint Mary's could move toward a more international experience, and build into it reciprocity with other institutions. Build on and legitimize an advantage for a more global network of schools ... — Academic opinion leader

It's called a safety school [but we give that term new meaning]. We give you the security of an environment that frees your mind. You have a sense of home and community that lets you take risks in your community and in your life. — Faculty/staff leader

Joyce's Ulysses captures the spirit of Saint Mary's. It's about reshaping a classic piece of work into a day-in-the-life in the modern world, using wisdom and passed-on themes. It's the great modernist novel, and it's deeply Catholic. You can turn to it again and again, and come back to it at different times in your life. — Faculty/staff leader

Our approach is salvation-through-education. Even if you come in as a non-believing person, there's something to inspire you here. — Faculty/staff leader

For us in student life, it's about community and leadership, and the leadership piece of it is closely connected to values that are Catholic and Lasallian. They're universal values, but that is the piece I want our students to be proud of ... — Faculty/staff leader

I tell my students the classroom is a sanctuary. There are so many competing demands – life, health, technology. The time we're together is a sanctuary. Leave everything else outside and understand that you leave in a different way. — Faculty/staff leader

[Only at Saint Mary's do you find] the warmth and love of friends and the Christian Brothers. For me it wasn't so much about the Lasallian mission of the school. It was about the feeling on campus. It's a place that just sparkles. — Alumnus

Community service and social justice could be distinctions on which a reputation is built. But Saint Mary's isn't bringing these concepts to life or engaged in the big conversations about these things outside the college. ... It's like a little island, a beautiful, insular island in a gorgeous setting, floating out there on its own, with little visible engagement with the world. — Academic opinion leader

Research shows that savvy businesses care about the kind of education Saint Mary's provides. ... Whereas a couple decades ago businesses said they would take an accounting major over a history major, today they say the opposite because the history major is better prepared to evolve with the needs of the business. We can no longer educate students for existing jobs. We have to prepare them for jobs that don't even exist yet. — Academic opinion leader

A few years ago, Saint Mary's took a real hit in reputation with the financial problems and with the president leaving. Brother Ron is doing a fantastic job. I have lots of respect for him. Saint Mary's is uniquely positioned and has a lot going for it. — Academic opinion leader

When they recruit faculty, are they recruiting people who resonate with the mission, or are they just recruiting because they need someone who teaches Shakespeare? There's a lack of intent and alignment with the mission in these decisions, so the mission just seems like words. This is not a unique challenge for a college, but it's sad for Saint Mary's. It could truly be wonderful, a leader on the landscape of American higher education. — Academic opinion leader

I just get the feeling people don't care what I think. And as a business, you need your "customers," your alumni, to think you care. You have got to do something about it yesterday, and this process can take 2-3 years. — Alumnus

If you take a look at a college's strategic plan, its master facilities plan, its enrollment plan, its recruitment plan, its retention plan, its advancement plan, its budget, etc., – do they connect? What are the unifying elements across these plans? The mission and values of the place should be reflected in every one of these things ... – Academic opinion leader

[The three values/traditions] It plays out in how to use both education and faith together the rest of your life. They are always part of you. – Alumnus

Appendix B - Visual Audit Report