

Updates and Announcements



HSI Training

Saint Mary's College recently took a significant step toward strengthening its service to Latinx students by participating in the ESCALA Moving Towards Servingness (MTS) retreat, a three-day intensive program focused on improving campus-wide efforts for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). A team of 15 faculty, staff, and students, with the support of the Office of Academic Affairs, engaged in this retreat to deepen their understanding of how to better serve Latinx students and drive institutional change.

The ESCALA retreat is designed to equip HSI practitioners with the tools to disrupt institutional barriers, particularly the White Institutional Presence that undergirds the culture throughout higher education, and develop policies and practices that center the experiences and needs of Latinx students. Participants explored Latinx-centered communication models, the social-historical context of HSIs, and strategies for analyzing data through a Latinx-centered lens. The program ended with concrete proposals for transformation and actions at each of the institutions that participated. Our participation in the retreat was part of the broader commitment of the recently formed HSI Advisory Council to train staff and faculty in matters related to HSI as we all strive to create an inclusive environment where all students can thrive.

For years, a small group of dedicated Latinx faculty, staff and students, and allies have tried to weave the HSI designation into the College's institutional identity and strategic planning. This transformation is shaped not only by unwavering faculty, staff, and administrative leadership but also by impactful student activism which goes back decades. Tangible faculty-led initiatives that speak to these efforts include the founding of ALLIPAS, the Institute for Latino and Latin American Studies (ILaLS), and the Brother Camillus Chávez ILaLS Student Award; all which have enhanced support for Latinx students.

At this point in time, Saint Mary's is well positioned to serve as a model HSI within the Lasallian network; the ESCALA retreat represents another milestone in its efforts to diversify and equitize its HSI initiatives at Saint Mary's.

The team is now working on clear, actionable goals, which they will present to the ESCALA network and other schools in November. Team co-leads Amaury Avalos and María Luisa Ruiz want to thank all team members:

Terri Jett	Gabriela Bermudez	Pamela Stanley	Kimiya Shokri
Myrna Santiago	Corey Cook	Vanessa Marquez	Laura Lyndon
Elizabeth Gallagher	Monica Márquez		Karen Ruff

Special recognition goes to students **Nuvia Alvarez** and **Victor Flores**, for their contributions and dedication to this important work.

By engaging in programs like ESCALA, Saint Mary's College is not only addressing the immediate needs of its Latinx student body but also advancing its mission to be a leader in fostering spaces of belonging and support for all students. I look forward to sharing more about the impactful, intentional work being led by the advisory council and other HSI practitioners in the near future.

Updates and Announcements



Religious Accommodation Development

The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Mission and Ministry Center have been developing religious accommodations for students, faculty, and staff at Saint Mary's. It includes a statement for syllabi, protocols on accommodating religious holidays/celebrations /ceremonies, and a list of common events connected to religions people may follow in the Saint Mary's community. We hope to release the living document as a supplement to the Student Handbook.

SMC Land Acknowledgement

The Native American and Indigenous Student Association (NAISA) and ODEI are collaborating with the Brothers (the current owners of the land) to create a Saint Mary's Land Acknowledgement that includes additional focus on stewardship. The final version is nearly ready and is going through the final revisions before it will be adopted by Saint Mary's and announced by ODEI.

Real Talk

This is a new section for people to freely express their thoughts in a manner that encourages informal community conversations. Be ready when you receive an invite to engage in some “real talk!”

Recently I have been thinking a lot about storytelling, generous listening, and the value of slowing down and making space for authentic connection. As part of the SMC team attending the ESCALA retreat a couple of weeks ago, we were asked to write and share a “cultural introduction” in which we had four minutes to share anything we chose about our background, family history, identity, values, and things that are important to us. The only requirement was that our introduction include nothing about our title or position. I am still moved by the ways in which each member of the team leaned into vulnerability and showed up as their whole, authentic, complex selves in that moment. It also made me reflect on how often that is not possible for folx to do, and about all that I might be missing when our daily interactions are only focused on the work at hand and take place in contexts in which power dynamics and hierarchies - often racialized and gendered - are both unacknowledged and reinforced. I am called to consider how often each of us can make assumptions, create narratives, or take up space in ways that prevent us from truly knowing and learning from the people around us. I invite us to consider how we create space for one another to show up as our whole selves.

- How are we creating space (in a meeting, in the classroom, in our offices) for folx to show up as they are?
- Are we expecting people to show up for “business as usual” without recognizing how their lived experience or identity might be impacting their ability to be fully present and how does our identity and positionality impact the dynamics in the room?
- How can we all be creative about cultivating brave and safe spaces for connection?

Thank you for joining me in considering these questions, and in the spirit of connection, I invite anyone (who read this far!) to reach out to me at lk13@stmarys-ca.edu, I'd love to share a coffee, a tea, or a walk, so we can learn one another's stories.

-Laura Lyndon