College v. University

When trying to explain the difference between colleges and universities we often refer to the tale of David and Goliath. It teaches us that those who are smaller can often be mightier than the big by maximizing their strengths and using them strategically. And at Saint Mary’s College we regularly go toe to toe with giant institutions and match or exceed them in academics, the arts, and athletics.

With 2800 students, Saint Mary’s stands out among the schools to which we are regularly compared. Most of them are universities two times, or even ten times larger. A lot of this is because of our distinction as a liberal arts and sciences college. But mostly it’s because of how we do it.

Where universities typically focus on research, we instead focus on teaching. Our classes are only taught by faculty, and more than 80% have 25 or fewer students (last year our largest class had 37.) This assures eye contact and face time with teachers who get to know what you can do that you never knew you could do and who will push you to do what you might be afraid to try. It encourages dialog between professors and students as well as a conversational style of learning among students that creates a collaborative rather than competitive academic environment.

Usually a university’s identity is reflected by its professional programs as well as research. But Saint Mary’s instead focuses on providing you a classic liberal arts foundation. By giving you understanding of the world’s Great Books combined with the study of science, math, humanities, fine arts, and social sciences you acquire the best possible tools to later become doctors, teachers, attorneys, engineers, and business leaders. And, a Saint Mary’s education empowers you for life with widely transferable strong research, writing, and analytical skills. We all know that because is the ultimate answer to everything in life, but a Saint Mary’s education teaches you why.

Saint Mary’s is great not because we are as good as, or better than, other institutions; we are highly respected because we are distinctive. This is from 152 years of perfecting education the Saint Mary’s way. Our approach is reflected by a distinctive 4:1:4 academic calendar that lets you to drill down more deeply into the courses you study, extensive study abroad opportunities, and signature programs like our month long Jan Term with its unique courses designed to make you love learning. It’s reflected by a rich residential experience on a breathtakingly beautiful campus where you study, eat, and live together, and cheer on fellow Gaels nationally recognized as dancers, actors, and Division I athletes. And absolutely nothing beats our ideal location in San Francisco’s East Bay region.
September 1st, 2014

By its style and size Saint Mary’s encourages the dialog and collaboration that enables life-long learning. That is why we are the only California, the only Catholic, and the only NCAA Division I school recognized as one the 40 prestigious Colleges That Change Lives. Our website is designed to make you want to learn more about us, so that we can engage you in conversation and learn more about each other. We look forward to staying in touch.

Sincerely,

Michael K. McKeon
Dean of Admissions