

THINKING ABOUT MISSION: A Resource for Faculty

Inspired by members of the Mission Leadership Team
Prepared by the Office of Mission, 2016

What is this resource?

This resource document provides ways to think about the SMC Mission. It is not a set of guidelines, nor is it meant to be an assessment tool or check list. Document contents are drawn from various mission initiatives, colleagues, strategic plans, Brothers' documents, etc. Hopefully this resource will offer some creative ways to think about Mission. Perhaps it will also be a catalyst for you to identify the many ways you are already advancing the Mission.

Some language, examples, possibilities and behaviors may be helpful to faculty as they consider ways of engaging more fully in advancing the Mission.

Mission Resource Offerings: Assumptions Made

- **Many Mission Journeys**
We all have a mission journey and chart our own path as we grow as teachers and colleagues
- **Mission is a Driving Force and Institutional Commitment**
Mission is an institutional commitment and driving force that spans schools, departments, programs, offices and centers
- **Mission Values Permeate the SMC Landscape**
SMC Community members live our mission values as each of us come to understand them and practice them. As we develop as members of many college communities, each of us, individual, by individual, reform and strengthen the mission and the community
- **Many Mission Manifestations**
Mission is animated in everyday ways: how we support one other; how we come to understand and interact with our students; how we do our teaching; and often even how we pursue research

Saint Mary's College Mission--aspirational statements--adapted from a Mission enhancement initiative, 2013

The five statements that follow reflect an effort to be explicit about how our liberal arts tradition, Catholic identity, Lasallian heritage are intertwined. Inspiration for these aspirational statements was found in the rationale, design, and learning outcomes of the “new” Core Curriculum launched in 2012.

1) What is the overall purpose of a SMC education?

Education for human fulfillment and a sense of vocation both individually and communally

Some ways we fulfill our purpose:

- ❖ Fostering teaching and learning that is inspired by the pursuit of truth
- ❖ Forming intellectual habits of the mind that emphasize how to think, not what to think, using critical thinking skills to engage in the process of inquiry and pursue lines of thought to completion
- ❖ Providing a learning environment that supports respect for the moral dimensions of intellectual pursuits
- ❖ Promoting learning (knowledge, purpose and skills) that can be made relevant to the world and to a sense of vocation—meaning the achievement of a fulfilling and meaningful personal and professional life

2) How do we educate at SMC? What is the process?

We encourage the pursuit of integrative and collaborative learning infused with a personal care for our students

Examples of our process of educating/teaching and learning:

- ❖ Student-centered educational programs and experiences, with special attention to the needs of individual students—academic, economic, social and spiritual
- ❖ Active learning that enables students to create their own understanding
- ❖ “Theory to Practice” (praxis) orientation
- ❖ Integrative learning that fosters openness to wonder about the nature of reality and seeks fundamental principles, not merely facts
- ❖ Community engagement experiences aligned with learning outcomes

3) Who are we?

We foster an atmosphere where mind and spirit are nourished through dialogue of faith and reason

Some elements of culture:

- ❖ Opportunities for mutually illuminating relationship between faith and free intellectual inquiry where exploration of great questions that arise from human experience are explored
- ❖ Visible signs of our liberal arts, Catholic and Lasallian traditions in art, architecture, icons, publications and celebrations
- ❖ Opportunities for spiritual formation and religious education for students
- ❖ Opportunities for vibrant liturgical and sacramental life, and for interfaith dialogue

4) How do we interact with one another?

We actively create a hospitable and civil community whose inclusivity mirrors the communion of “All People—the People of God”

Some “Inclusive Excellence” practices:

- ❖ Being open, receptive and inviting to all persons in their uniqueness and diversity
- ❖ Having authentic reasonable and respectful dialogue
- ❖ Striving to be “Culturally Competent”
- ❖ Supporting students from all economic, cultural circumstances, especially the marginalized
- ❖ Leading by positive example with high standards of personal behavior and responsibility

5) How do we look beyond ourselves?

We share a praxis of commitment to the common good that respects the dignity of all

Some ways we demonstrate our commitment to others:

- ❖ Promoting the common good through policies that advance justice in the world, consistent with Catholic Social Thought
- ❖ Encouraging faculty, staff and students to animate their values by becoming engaged with the wider community
- ❖ Committing to “Care for Our Common Home” (*Laudato Si*, Pope Frances)
- ❖ Promoting peace and justice locally, nationally and globally

The Mission of Saint Mary’s College is lived as one single, prophetic mission to serve our students. The sources of the SMC Mission are our Catholic identity, liberal arts tradition, and Lasallian heritage.

Some examples of the SMC Mission elements follow:

Catholic Identity

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition characterizes Catholic identity in higher education. A Catholic university is a place where the Church does its thinking (Fr. Theodore Hesburgh). There is a harmony between faith and reason. Faith propels us to continue to explore the unknown and mysterious.

Catholic Intellectual Tradition

The Christian Brothers believe that the high calling of a Catholic college is nothing less than the evangelization of the intellect. All Christian life can be seen under the saving light of

revelation and when this light is cast on the pursuit of knowledge both its unity and its embrace of the totality of humanity is perceived (Brothers of Saint Mary's College, 2010).

Catholic Intellectual Tradition is often characterized by some of the following ideas:

- Content and approach to knowledge--“faith seeking understanding” (Saint Anselm of Canterbury)
- Non-elitist bent--education of all--diversity, unity and social justice
- Attention to community dimension of all human interactions/open mindedness/respect for others
- Cumulative wisdom of the past
- Integration of knowledge/interdisciplinary/life-long learning

Catholic Social Thought & Lasallian Research (IALU definition/2015)

Saint Mary's College encourages faculty and student research that advances justice in the world by exploring topics such as:

- Environment and sustainability
- Poverty and the distribution of goods
- Race and ethnicity
- Immigration
- Health and nutrition
- Innovative education in service of the economically poor
- Human rights
- War and peace

Liberal Arts Tradition

The Liberal Arts tradition at SMC is often characterized in the following ways:

- Fosters and promotes diverse ways of knowing and arts of thinking, both critical and creative
- Liberates the human person into an authentic life in response to the truth they discover
- Honors cooperative as well as individual achievement
- Promotes application of learning to progressively complex problems
- Dedicated to the value of learning as its own good
- Takes seriously our students' ultimate concerns: the need to understand who we are, where we come from, why we are here, and our connectedness to one another

Lasallian Heritage

The purpose of Lasallian Education is synonymous with Education as Social Justice— to provide quality education for students to become whole persons intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Lasallian education is motivated by the belief that God’s presence is in and among us.

The most basic goal of a Lasallian educational institution is to create a student-centered community imbued with the values—Presence of God, Quality Education, Concern for the Poor and Social Justice, Respect for all Persons and an Inclusive Community whose members support one another with mutual understanding and respect.

Some Lasallian ideas of how faculty can meet the needs of the students:

- Being fair is a hallmark of Lasallian education
- Meeting students where they are, sensitive to their needs
- Knowing students personally: our compassion and caring behavior is a prerequisite for our students’ ability to perceive the invitation we represent in their lives
- Using your confidence, enthusiasm, and motivation to inspire students to deeper, broader learning and better discipline

Some examples of Lasallian methods of instruction:

- Modeling behavior faculty want to inculcate in their students
- Striving to generate enthusiasm for learning
- Demonstrating interest in our students and recognize them as persons with dignity
- Involving students as much as possible in the process of learning through methods such as Community Engagement, Collaborative Faculty/Student Research, and Active Learning.

Associated for Mission: An Act of Hope, Brothers of the Christian Schools Circular 461, General Council – Rome, Italy (2010)

Lasallian Educational centers must be places where welcome, peace and respect are lived out in communities characterized by the acceptance of each human person. They must be places where cultural diversity is not an occasion for conflict, exclusion, or destructive tension but rather where being different is an enriching component of community life (2.3.2.).

Let it be clearly stated and unambiguously that calling oneself Lasallian is not relegated only to those of the Christian faith. Many faith-filled people professing other creeds participate daily in the Lasallian educational Mission They are a valued part of this community (3.13).

Sources:

- ◆ Goal 3 From De La Salle to Lasallian: Strategic Planning Working Group and Implementation Team planning documents, and Mission Leadership Team member input (2014-16)
- ◆ Mission Assessment Task Force (2013)
- ◆ Statements of the Brothers of Saint Mary’s College: Contributing to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and The Lasallian Educational Tradition (2010/2015)
- ◆ Hiring for Mission Participant Guidebook (2013, revised 2014)
- ◆ SOLA Dean’s Website Letter (2015)
- ◆ ACCU publications on Catholic Social Thought and Catholic Intellectual Tradition (www.accunet.org)