

**FEATURES:** Balance | Unity without uniformity: a lesson in teaching and learning | First Quarter Seminar Program | Upcoming events



# Balance

By Brendan J. O'Shea, Head of School

At a recent Saint Mary's Parent Education workshop hosted by the Parents Association, members of the academic team presented some thought-provoking insights regarding how teaching and learning have evolved over the years. Specifically, academic leaders provided information on how Baby Boomers learn differently than members of Gen X, who, in turn, learn differently than Millennials. Gone are the days of the "sage on the stage," i.e. the teacher who only lectures from the front of the classroom while students furiously scribble notes, trying to keep pace with the instructor. Buzz words and phrases related to today's education include engagement, interactive classrooms, collaboration, applied learning, flexible spaces, and flipped classrooms.

How do schools, parents, teachers, and students make sense of it all? At Saint Mary's, we focus on finding the right balance between traditional and progressive methods. Students are not able to apply knowledge they have not mastered. Skills must be acquired and assimilated. At one point in history, this is where education stopped. Content mastery was enough to satisfy students and educators. As education and our world have evolved, content mastery is

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no longer the stopping point – or the ultimate goal. Today, students expect real-world experiences in which they can apply the skills they have garnered. Real-world experiences, which involve teamwork, analytics, creativity and communication, make learning pertinent, exciting, and tangible for our students.

Striking the proper balance is a continuous process. Saint Mary's made tremendous strides in finding the appropriate balance with the introduction of the Seminar Program, now in its second year. Communication, health/wellness, innovation, and social impact are at the core of the Seminar Program, as are real-world experiences that allow Saint Mary's students to apply what they have learned in new and relevant contexts. The experiences become more complex and demanding as students progress through the program and culminate in a senior internship or capstone project. This process allows our students to be prepared for college AND life.

It just so happens, preparing young women for lives of purpose and meaning has been our mission since 1842. How Saint Mary's has prepared girls over the decades has certainly changed as the school evolved to meet the needs of its students; however, our commitment to giving girls what they need to grow, learn, and thrive has remained the same.



## How we design learning

# Unity without uniformity: a lesson in teaching and learning

By Stephanie Suski, Academic Team Leader, Instructor of Humanities & Social Sciences

Scholars of political science have developed a variety of theories to explain federalism and the complicated interplay between our national and state governments. My favorite aspect of federalism, a concept we study in our U.S. Government courses, is that it produces unity without uniformity. This allows us as a country to agree on basic beliefs, such as the value of education or assistance to the needy, and then gives each state some freedom to decide how to implement those values in a way that best fits the needs of its people. I like to think the Humanities and Social Sciences department at Saint Mary's works a bit like our federal system – we have a set of agreed-upon principles that guide us; and at the same time, we are a department of six people, each bringing our own teaching styles and areas of focus. This clarity of purpose combined with a variety of perspectives and expertise enriches both the student and teacher experience.

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For example, mastering the ability to analyze historical events in order to observe causes, effects, and trends while understanding multiple points of view, is a core value of the department. Different faculty guide students in developing these analytical skills in different ways. In 9th grade World History, taught by me and Melissa Ramel, students debate the role the U.S. should play in the Middle East or whether the U.S. should have dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. In Laura Grantmyre's U.S. History classes, students step into the world of the past by assuming the identity of a person in history, such as an abolitionist, and then write diary entries from that person's perspective or they may create an illustration comparing the myth versus the reality of the American West.

As a department, we are also unified in our use of a common rubric to assess student writing and require all students to have a copy of *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* by Mary Lynn Rampolla. There is, however, no uniformity in the writing assignments students are asked to complete. These will vary in length and complexity depending on the course and teacher. For instance, in Tambrie Aiken's Advanced Placement Comparative Government course, taken mostly by seniors, students are asked to write extensive research papers analyzing nondemocratic regimes, communist and post-communist countries, and Brexit; while in ninth grade-level courses introduce students to the mechanics of writing with the assignment of a two-page paper.

Though each assignment may be very different from one another, there is unity in that they all require students to think critically about events in history, build specific skills, and apply what they are learning in different ways. Through this process, a student is exposed to a variety of courses (and we have a lot of variety in Humanities and Social Sciences— we teach history, government, psychology, religion, and economics), gains a well-rounded perspective on the world, past and present, and deepens her understanding. Not all students learn the same way, and not all teachers teach the same way. By taking a "unity without uniformity" approach to teaching and learning in Humanities and Social Sciences, students master the same key skills and concepts, but do so through a variety of means. They enjoy a more flexible and dynamic experience that fits both teacher and learner, just like our federal system.

# First Quarter Seminar Program

This year marks year two of Saint Mary's unique Seminar Program. The program, organized by grade level, is designed to build key competencies and engage students with Raleigh-area experts and organizations while focusing on the areas of innovation, communication, health and wellness, and social impact. This year's first quarter Seminar Program offered students the following experiences:

## 9th Grade | Health & Wellness

- Students learn about the importance of taking care of themselves, and the impact that has on their overall health and well-being. Drawing on health and wellness topics covered during this seminar, students are creating public awareness campaigns as they work community partners Black Box Dance Theatre, Dr. Natalie Gwyn, and the Chrysalis Network.

## 10th Grade | Innovation

- Students are working with curriculum drawn from Venture Labs (of Venture Girls by Cristal Glangcha) to learn about the importance of creativity, observation, idea generation, market research, and design thinking in the entrepreneurial mindset. They designed apps using MIT's app inventor and then pitched the concept of their apps to a "Sharks" panel of faculty and staff. They also worked with community partner TeachingHorse, a leadership development company specializing in experiential learning that includes working with horses.

## 11th Grade | Communication

- Students learn about the importance of communicating their strengths to colleges and future employers and will complete three real-world tasks: creating a resume, establishing a LinkedIn account, and completing a mock interview.

## 12th Grade | College Applications

- Seniors work closely with the college counseling office to navigate and complete the college application process.

## Next quarter, each grade will change its focus as follows:

- 9th Grade | Social Impact
- 10th Grade | Communication
- 11th Grade | Social Impact
- 12th Grade | Continued college

# Events

See online calendar at [sms.edu](https://sms.edu) for details



## NOVEMBER

### NOVEMBER 1

All Saints Day of Giving

### NOVEMBER 2-8

Spirit Week

### NOVEMBER 6

PA Parent Education Series:

*The Right Balance*

Granddaughters Club Inductions  
and Reception

### NOVEMBER 14-15

Admission Overnight and Visitation Day  
for prospective families

Fall Student Recital | 4:30 p.m.

### NOVEMBER 15 AND 16

Orchesis Dance Theatre Fall Concert

### NOVEMBER 21

Fall Sports Assembly

Junior Ring Banquet for Class of 2021

### NOVEMBER 22

College Kickoff for juniors and their  
parents

Thanksgiving Break:

Early dismissal 12:30 p.m.

### NOVEMBER 23

Dorms close at 10 a.m.

### NOVEMBER 24-DECEMBER 2

Thanksgiving Break

Administrative offices closed Nov. 27  
and Dec. 2

## DECEMBER

### DECEMBER 2

Dorms open at 2 p.m.

### DECEMBER 3

Classes resume

### DECEMBER 10

Middle School Exploration: Dance  
Master Class

### DECEMBER 11

Residential Life Holiday Dinner

### DECEMBER 14

Residence Halls Breakfasts

### DECEMBER 15

Lessons and Carols

Lighting O' the Grove

### DECEMBER 18

Alumnae Collegiate Club Holiday  
Gathering

### DECEMBER 19

Christmas Break:

Early dismissal 12:30 p.m.

Dorms close at 5 p.m.

*Administrative offices closed December  
21-January 5*

## JANUARY

### JANUARY 5

Dorms open at 2 p.m.

### JANUARY 6

Classes resume

### JANUARY 20

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service:  
school in session

Admission Overnight and Visitation Day  
for prospective families

### JANUARY 30

Curriculum Night  
with pre-event reception

### JANUARY 31

Winter Break early dismissal 12:30 p.m.

Dorms close at 5 p.m.

## FEBRUARY

### FEBRUARY 1-3

Winter Break

### FEBRUARY 3

Dorms open 2 p.m.

### FEBRUARY 4

Classes resume

*Stay tuned for information about dates  
for Curriculum Night and the winter PA  
Parents Education Series.*

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SCHOOL**

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