



One University. One World. Yours.

# **ENGAGING THE VISION:**

## **ACADEMIC PLAN, 2008 – 2011**

**December 2007**

## **VISION**

Saint Mary's, building on its strong tradition of accessibility and community engagement, will be the *University of Choice* for aspiring citizens of the world.

## **MISSION**

The mission of Saint Mary's University is to offer undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programmes; to engage in research and disseminate its results; and to serve the community from the local to the international level.

## **CORE VALUES**

Saint Mary's University addresses its vision and mission in the context of all of its values:

- In achieving its mission, the Saint Mary's community is guided by core values of academic integrity, the pursuit of knowledge, responsiveness to community needs, openness to change, concerns for a just and civil society, and fiscal responsibility.
- The University is committed to accessibility, diversity and the provision of a positive and supportive learning environment through the effective integration of teaching and research.
- Through promoting the importance of critical enquiry, leadership, teamwork and global awareness, we aim to prepare students for responsible and rewarding lives and to remain engaged with our alumni worldwide.
- We recognize the importance of the contribution and growth of each individual in the University's success.
- Saint Mary's welcomes mutually beneficial partnerships and strategic alliances with all levels of government, with other educational institutions, non-government institutions and the private sector.

## **Engaging the Vision**

### ***.... Aspiring citizens***

The ultimate objective of a Saint Mary's education is to nurture and support productive, critical and responsible citizens. Each academic discipline contributes to the development of specialized knowledge and skills. Such knowledge lays the foundation for successful and rewarding lives in a demanding and complex society. The true value of a University education is realized when it also instills in students a strong sense of personal worth and a commitment to social responsibility.

Citizenship begins with a sense of belonging. The community of learners that comprises Saint Mary's must engender this sense and enable it to serve as a springboard for broader engagement.

By fostering the spirit of critical inquiry and cultivating effective powers of communication, education empowers us to embrace the rights and duties of citizenship. By promoting and supporting openness and tolerance, it also affirms that citizenship is inclusive. All members of our society must have access to the full benefits of citizenship, not least of all access to education.

The entire Saint Mary's community has a role to play in realizing the vision. Faculty and staff must exercise leadership by modeling engaged citizenship. The University itself must set a standard of good institutional citizenship. As "aspiring citizens," students must come to recognize that they have the capacity and the responsibility to make a difference.

### ***... Of the world***

In today's global society, citizenship is no longer limited to the local or national community. The rights and obligations of citizenship transcend boundaries and relate ultimately to our membership in the human race.

Fully developed citizenship, therefore, requires a cosmopolitan outlook. Saint Mary's well-established commitment to cultural diversity encourages and supports the development of such a global perspective. "Aspiring citizens" must also become "citizens of the world."

The international character of our campus and programmes offers opportunities for personal enrichment through contact with diverse cultures and paves the way to achievement and prosperity as students learn to succeed in complex, cross-cultural settings.

True "citizens of the world," however, must also engage the global challenges now facing humanity at home as well as abroad. Global citizenship is a call to action on issues of universal significance, such as the degradation of the environment, world health, and the growing divide between the world's rich and poor. Global awareness entails linking global to local understanding of such issues. For our vision to be fully realized, it must be focused on the creation of a just and humane society.

## **Priorities Refreshed and Refocused**

Consultations across the campus during 2006-07 indicated that the priority areas of endeavour identified in the 2002-2007 Academic Plan continue to enjoy strong support within the Saint Mary's community. This new Academic Plan, therefore, does not attempt to replace those priorities, but to refresh and refocus them in light of the progress that has been made over the last five years. Momentum must be sustained in areas where major advances have occurred, though the pace of growth need not be so rapid. Increased attention must be paid to improvements in areas where progress has been slow. We must also articulate our Vision more fully and develop further strategies for realizing it.

## **The Changing Environment**

Changes in the environment must also be taken into account and strategies formulated that anticipate developments on the near horizon. The future will unfold differently from the recent past. This new environment is in some respects highly unpredictable, and uncertainty itself is a key feature of the context in which we must work. For example, the level and nature of future government support for the post-secondary sector remains unclear.

Other aspects of the future are more predictable, such as the changing demographics of Atlantic Canada from which the vast majority of our students are drawn. The number of high school graduates in this region will decline sharply over the next five years, and competition among universities to recruit these graduates will continue to intensify. At the same time, a growing proportion of both the general population and of our faculty will reach retirement age. Demand among non-traditional students for educational opportunities may rise significantly, while we will be challenged to find a sufficient number of new faculty members to replace those who retire.

Saint Mary's enjoys an advantage in that we have already experienced a large measure of faculty renewal. Nearly 40% of our full-time faculty have been appointed in the last seven years. While this does not obviate the demographic challenges that we will face in the future, 89 new faculty members have joined us in that period, bringing fresh ideas and energy while discovering synergies with senior, experienced colleagues. The effective incorporation of new appointees into the faculty ranks has required time and effort, a major and promising investment in the future of Saint Mary's.

Changes are also occurring among the new and rising generation of students. Like their predecessors, they see higher education as a major investment in their future and trust that the credentials they earn will lead to successful and rewarding careers. Today's students, however, also show signs of a growing social awareness. The Saint Mary's educational experience must respond to their desire to engage the urgent issues that confront our local and global communities.

## **Ensuring the Conditions for Success**

*For the Academic Plan to succeed, key conditions for success must be in place. These conditions encompass people, programmes, policies, facilities and communication strategies. The following steps to ensuring the conditions for success are mutually reinforcing. They are not listed in an order of priority.*

**Recruitment and retention of faculty and students** – Demographic challenges arising from both the projected decline in high school graduates in the Atlantic region and the aging professoriate make it imperative that we have effective strategies for recruiting and retaining both students and faculty. The richness of our programmes, and the financial viability of the University, depends on having substantial clusters of scholars in our areas of specialization and a critical mass of engaged students.

**Staff engagement** -- Staff of the University have played, and must continue to play, a crucial role in the academic enterprise, either by providing direct services to faculty and students or by maintaining the institutional and physical infrastructure that enables teaching, learning, and research. Engaging staff in identifying and supporting our academic priorities will be crucial to the success of the Academic Plan.

**Departmental planning** – In order for the broad objectives of the Academic Plan to be fully achieved, they must be realized at the programme level. Faculties, departments, and interdisciplinary programme councils must develop plans of their own that reflect their existing and potential strengths in a manner consistent with the approved institutional framework.

**Scholarly resources and facilities** – To realize our full academic potential, we must have classrooms, study spaces, library resources, and research facilities that meet today's standards and support contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. The effective incorporation of educational technology and the provision of research and teaching facilities that enable collaboration and accommodate a variety of teaching and learning styles are crucial in this respect.

**Inclusiveness** – Saint Mary's University is well known for its tradition of accessibility, and for its cosmopolitan student body. Accessibility in the broadest sense depends upon a commitment to inclusiveness, and this commitment demands that we reach out to under-represented communities.

**Communication** – Coordination of effort within the University and progress toward common goals depends on a spirit of collaboration and on the timely sharing of meaningful information. Our values and achievements must also be communicated to the wider community in a manner that reflects the realities of today's Saint Mary's.

***Priority #1: Building on a tradition of community involvement, foster a culture of civic engagement and ensure that social responsibility is recognized as a hallmark of Saint Mary's University.***

A priority for the coming years will be to establish civic engagement as a key feature of our institutional identity. To achieve this objective, the development of our academic programmes and research activities must be responsive to community needs and emerging social priorities. Institutional policies and campus renewal projects also have a crucial role to play and many opportunities exist to link our academic expertise to administrative initiatives in the pursuit of common goals. A clear and pervasive commitment to social responsibility will enrich the educational experience of current students, inspire prospective students to make Saint Mary's their university of choice, and contribute significantly to their development as active citizens.

In realizing this priority, Saint Mary's can draw on a long tradition of service to communities at home and abroad. This service has been provided both by members of the Saint Mary's community acting on their own initiative, and by the University acting formally on an institutional level. Community service has occurred in a variety of spheres, ranging from the heritage sector to environmental initiatives, business and professional development, arts and culture, social service projects, recreational programming, and the provision of facilities as a venue for community events.

Civic engagement as an institutional priority grows naturally out of and supports community involvement, but it entails a more active encounter with the major social issues of the day.

## OBJECTIVES

- In both our academic programmes and extra-curricular activities, ensure that students experience a high level of engagement with societal issues and ample opportunities to engage with community groups.
- Continue to support interdisciplinary programmes as a strength of Saint Mary's since they often focus directly on urgent social questions.
- Engage students, faculty and staff in promoting environmental responsibility on campus and beyond through collaborative initiatives such as the Sustainability Task Force.
- Promote, support and recognize scholarship and creative work that address major community concerns. Encourage the dissemination of results in accessible formats and engage the public in an open discussion of ideas.

***PRIORITY #2: Increase student success by enhancing programs and services that support that goal.***

A majority of students who complete Saint Mary's degrees indicate that Saint Mary's was the right choice for them. Numerous examples also point to the success of individual graduates as they progress to the workplace, professional schools or post-graduate programmes. Yet for a variety of reasons – personal and financial as well as academic – a significant number of students do not complete their academic programmes. Under the Academic Plan of 2002-07, steps were taken to address this situation by responding to suggestions from students on ways to improve their experience at Saint Mary's. These steps included increased financial aid, enhanced academic advising, pilot mentoring programs, and revisions to academic regulations governing probation and re-admission. A Career Development Centre was opened in 2007, and programs have been developed that offer extra support to selected students re-admitted on special terms of probation after their first year. Individual successes have been achieved and valuable lessons learned through these initiatives.

In January 2007, A Task Force on Student Success presented a major report to Senate outlining measures to enhance successful transitions in three key stages of student life: transition to university, transition through university, and transition to the workplace or further study. The underlying theme of the report is the need to increase student engagement in all aspects of campus life, a factor widely recognized as a key to persistence and success. The implementation of many of the recommendations of this report will be a focus for the next three years. There remains room for improving the rates of persistence and completion of students who begin degree programmes at Saint Mary's. Formal and informal surveys of students continue to indicate that they are seeking further improvement in academic advising and career development services. New resources are required to achieve these improvements.

## OBJECTIVES

- Implement the key recommendations of the Task Force on Student Success, making a comprehensive first-year strategy the top priority.
- Work incrementally towards the establishment of a single-destination Student Success Centre, a central location where key student support services are co-ordinated and delivered.
- Invest in further improvements to academic advising and career development services to help students succeed in their current programmes and prepare for further study or transition to the workplace.
- Carry on an active program of institutional research into key dimensions of the student experience and follow-up on results with appropriate action.
- Increase the number and variety of opportunities for student involvement in all aspects of campus life.

***PRIORITY #3: Building on existing areas of strength, broaden and enrich Saint Mary's programme offerings relating to current and emerging societal priorities, and the needs and interests of new constituencies of students.***

Over the past five years, Saint Mary's has experienced significant programme renewal. New courses have been developed, changes have been made to existing programmes, and new certificates and degrees have been introduced. Change has been an iterative process, influenced by the strengths and commitments of our faculty, by the needs and interests of students, and by changes in society.

The changes that have occurred so far lay the groundwork for further improvements. New opportunities are emerging on a number of fronts. Evolving societal priorities, growing demand for highly qualified specialists, the aspirations of non-traditional students, alternative models of programme delivery and the particular strengths of newly appointed faculty all point to exciting possibilities for programme development. For such development to succeed, it must be realized in a coordinated and measured fashion, consistent with our institutional priorities and in keeping with sound financial planning.

#### OBJECTIVES

- Explore innovative approaches to curriculum, including where appropriate new ways to define existing programmes and the possibility of new certificate and degree programmes.
- In developing such approaches, include programmes that appeal to both traditional and non-traditional students and/or are delivered in innovative formats.
- Retain and strengthen our commitment to lifelong learning through Continuing Education programming as a key means of responding to current educational needs.
- Develop guidelines for the development and resourcing of new programmes.
- Develop a strategy, supported by a clear business plan, for the selective use of web-based courses as an element in our delivery of extension programming. Integrate this strategy with a plan for web-enhanced course delivery on campus.
- Pursue additional institutional partnerships as one way of developing high quality, innovative programmes and of broadening the opportunities open to our students.



***PRIORITY #4: Through a process of continuous improvement, maintain quality teaching and learning as a hallmark of Saint Mary's University.***

Saint Mary's continues to enjoy a well-deserved reputation for providing quality education in a friendly and supportive environment. Students enjoy frequent direct contact with faculty, and have increased opportunities for experiential learning and involvement in faculty research. Individual faculty have been recognized internally and externally for excellence in teaching at all levels. Institutional support for instructional development has been strengthened, and programs have been put in place to allow faculty champions to develop and disseminate innovative pedagogical approaches.

There is a need for continuous renewal to maintain and improve teaching and learning at the University. New courses have been developed and changes have been made to existing programmes that lay the groundwork for further innovations in curricula and potential new programme development. The campus-wide literacy strategy, approved by Senate in 2002, has been partly implemented, but needs further development. We have been successful in maintaining an environment where faculty and students are closely engaged with one another in the process of learning, both inside and outside the classroom. We need to ensure that we continue this engagement, and be open to new opportunities to enhance faculty-student interaction. Teaching and research are complementary, and Saint Mary's takes pride in its ability to integrate the two; the University community must continue to develop innovative approaches to this on-going challenge.

#### OBJECTIVES

- Highlight and develop the ways in which our curriculum supports our vision to be “the University of choice for aspiring citizens of the world.”
- Support initiatives that enhance student/faculty interaction and foster student engagement and a culture of inquiry.
- Ensure that processes and resources are in place that support effective teaching and its continuous improvement.
- Continue to strive for an appropriate balance between teaching and research and for ways of integrating the two.
- Re-assess the campus wide literacy strategy, amend it as necessary, and take steps to implement all of its provisions.
- Investigate the potential of recent innovations in communications technology to enhance learning and to facilitate the creation of communities of learners.

***PRIORITY #5: Build on the international character of Saint Mary's as a distinctive strength of the University.***

Saint Mary's is among the most international of Canada's smaller universities. The strong international character of the University is rooted deeply in its history and currently consists of the high proportion of full-time students who come from outside Canada, the extensive involvement of Saint Mary's in international projects and partnerships, and the offering of niche programmes with a specific international focus. Saint Mary's Centre for Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) brings hundreds of additional international students on campus each year and serves as a stepping-stone for many into our degree programmes. The number of students taking advantage of international field trips and study abroad opportunities has increased sharply.

Changing circumstances at home and abroad call for creative adaptation if this international strength is to be maintained and developed. The number of international students coming from traditional source countries may decline as those countries expand their own capacity in higher education. Competition among Atlantic Canadian universities for international students is increasing, partly in an attempt to compensate for declining domestic enrolments. Shifting priorities and reduced support from the federal government makes it more challenging to obtain funding for international projects and placements. International programmes in our curriculum must compete with the urgent needs of other programmes, and are in some cases under-resourced. Attempts to "internationalize" the curriculum beyond programmes with a specific international focus are a work in progress.

## OBJECTIVES

- Continue to internationalize the curriculum as a way of engaging global issues and of linking global issues to local, social, and economic realities.
- Explore new markets and new strategies to recruit international students, including attractive programming for both visiting and full-time international students, greater integration between TESL and credit programmes, and more seamless articulation agreements with international institutions.
- While keeping the percentage of international students at or above current levels, work to achieve greater balance and diversity in the international student body.
- In keeping with the student success agenda, consider the special needs of international students. Seek additional ways to assist and support second-language students as they progress through degree programmes.
- Develop strategies for adjusting to changes in federal priorities for international assistance programs, and pursue alternative sources of support for international projects.
- Building on our experience of cultural diversity, engage newcomers in our community through research, academic programmes, and services.

***PRIORITY #6: Capitalize on the momentum in research, scholarship and graduate studies at Saint Mary's to further develop our University as a dynamic research institution, and to gain full recognition as such.***

The creation and dissemination of new knowledge is an essential function of a University, and Saint Mary's has a long tradition of fulfilling this mission by means of original research and scholarship. Through a combination of circumstances and individual effort, our level of scholarly activity has reached new heights in recent years. Institutional support for research has been greatly strengthened and significantly more external funding has become available. Saint Mary's has invested in strategic areas where it has distinguished itself regionally and nationally, entered into fruitful partnerships with other universities, and increased support for individual scholars. Growth in graduate studies has been a crucial factor in supporting research activity. The number of scholarly publications by Saint Mary's faculty and their students has increased exponentially, and external research funding obtained through grant competitions has more than quadrupled in five years. Saint Mary's commitment to the research enterprise has been a significant factor in attracting high caliber new faculty to our ranks.

Success brings with it new challenges. In keeping with our commitment to community engagement, many of our research initiatives focus on issues and opportunities faced by the wider community. However, transferring the results of academic research effectively to non-academic audiences poses many challenges for both researchers and members of the community. On a practical level, our campus must contend with the problem of properly accommodating classrooms and research facilities with limited space and resources. Finally, while the reputation of Saint Mary's as a research-active university has grown in academic circles and in some parts of the wider community, public perception of our University still lags well behind our accomplishments.

## OBJECTIVES

- Define a plan for the further development of graduate programmes as a key ingredient in our promotion of research.
- Work to develop more effective methods of knowledge transfer so that the full social and economic benefits of our research can be realized.
- Seek improved strategies for integrating research with teaching and learning, drawing on best practices inside and outside Saint Mary's.
- Within the framework of the Campus Master Plan, devise a space allocation scheme that reconciles the need for research facilities and dedicated graduate student space with other space requirements.
- Devise a consistent communications plan to gain public recognition of Saint Mary's contributions to research and scholarship.
- Ensure that growth in access to scholarly resources keeps pace with our accomplishments in research.

## **Assessing Progress**

The shaping and realization of the Academic Plan is an iterative and dynamic process that requires on-going assessment of our progress, examination of our environment, and reflection on our priorities and objectives.

Major indicators of the successful realization of this Academic Plan will be:

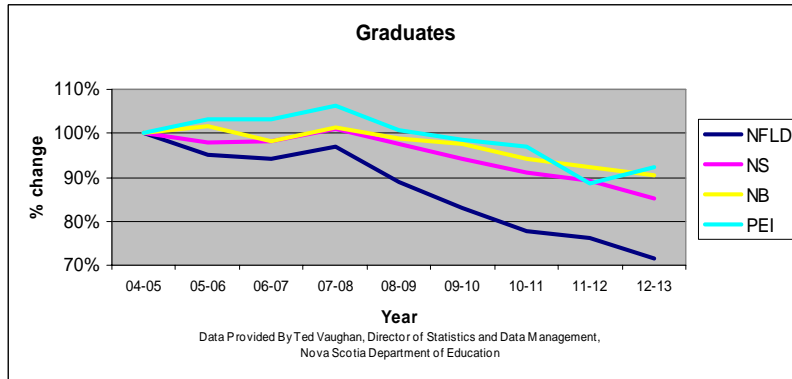
- Saint Mary's promotes among members of the university community a spirit of civic engagement and global awareness.
- Saint Mary's is widely recognized for its commitment to social responsibility.
- Saint Mary's students and graduates express satisfaction with their learning experience.
- A higher percentage of Saint Mary's students successfully complete their programmes.
- Innovations take place in curriculum, including new programming and new methods of delivery.
- Accessibility is increased, including accessibility to non-traditional students.
- Saint Mary's continues to develop effective community partnerships, and is seen by the community as open and responsive to its needs.
- The percentage of international students at Saint Mary's remains at its current level or higher, and diversity among the international student body is increased.
- Research activity and research funding continue to grow, not only in absolute terms but also relative to other comparable universities.
- The number of graduate students and the number and variety of graduate programmes grow in a measured fashion.
- Public perception of Saint Mary's reflects more accurately the full range of its achievements and activities.

To assist in this process, annual status reports will be circulated to the campus community and opportunities will be provided for comments and dialogue. These opportunities will include, but will not be limited to, an annual town hall meeting devoted to discussion of the Academic Plan.

# Appendices

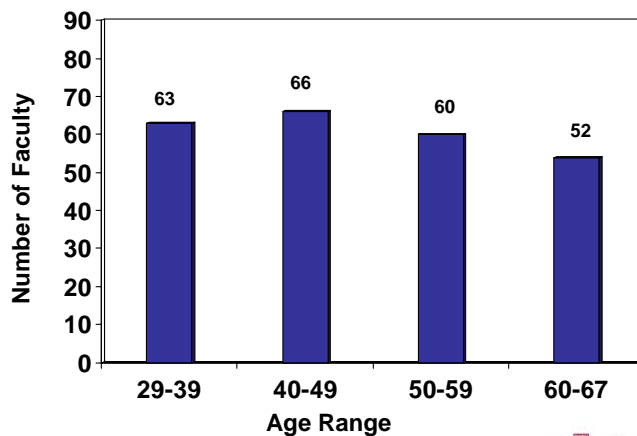
## Saint Mary's University Academic Plan: 2008-2011

### Projected High School Graduates in Atlantic Canada



## Saint Mary's University Academic Plan: 2008 - 2011

### Age Distribution by Full-time Faculty Members



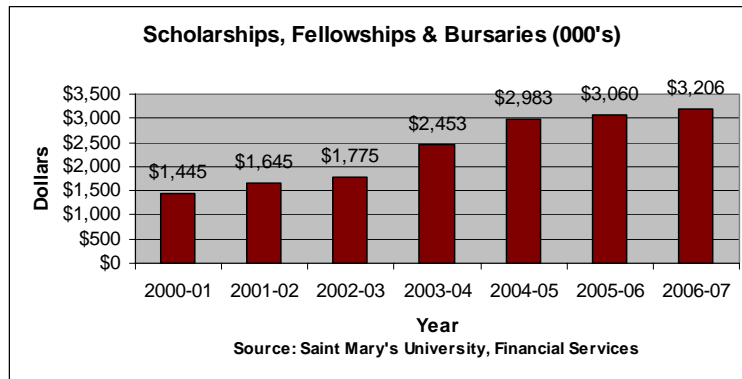
Source: Saint Mary's University



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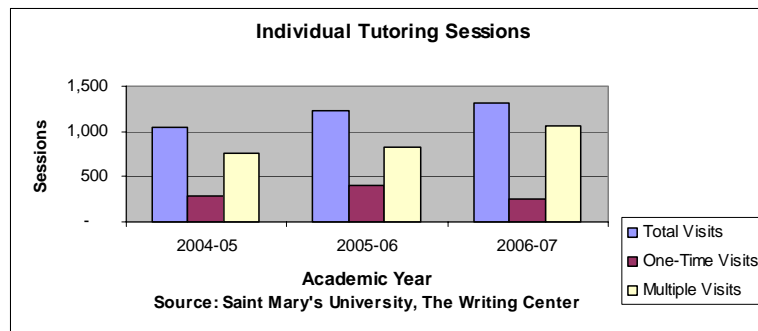
## Appendices

### Saint Mary's University Academic Plan: 2008-2011



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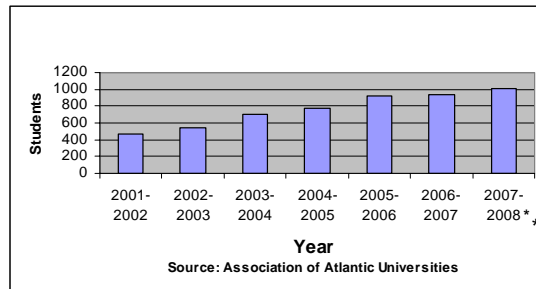
#### Usage of Saint Mary's Writing Center



# Appendices

## Saint Mary's University Academic Plan: 2008-2011

### Growth in International Student Enrollment

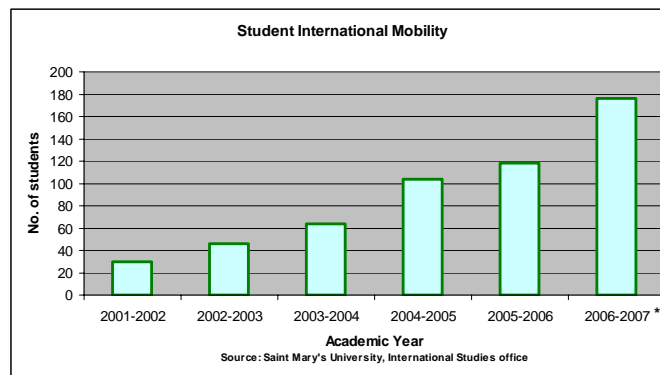


\*AAU Preliminary Survey of Enrollment 1/10/07



## Saint Mary's University Academic Plan: 2008-2011

### Growth in Study Abroad Participation



\* Partly due to increased number of field schools



# Appendices

## Saint Mary's University Academic Plan, 2008 - 2011

