

# ST MARY'S

## COLLEGE of MARYLAND

*The National Public Honors College*

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE APRIL 13, 2026

#### PROVOST AND DEAN OF FACULTY'S REPORT

##### **Charge**

The Academic Affairs committee shall: 1) receive and consider recommendations of the President for appointments, promotions, and dismissals to and from the faculty; 2) consider all major plans for and changes in the curricular policies and organization when presented by the President; and 3) recommend to the Board of Trustees the adoption, modification, or rejection of proposals emanating from the faculty, as proposed by the President.

##### **Unit Mission**

Academic Affairs works to cultivate a rigorous and equitable academic environment where the St. Mary's College community thrives.

Below, I highlight two key initiatives underway: a proposed framework for AI Governance in the the College's teaching and learning environment, and the soon-to-launch "Essential Questions" project, that will bring a shared focus to each new year of campus activities. In addition, this report contains the biannual overview of the institution's grant funding activity.

##### **Faculty Workgroup on AI Governance**

Academic Affairs has been leading discussions on the import and place of artificial intelligence (AI) in the learning enterprise since just before the pandemic. Championed by our Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning, the College has hosted a number of August workshops on emerging AI platforms and demonstrations on integrating AI into day-to-day pedagogy (the Board might recall that participants included our colleagues from the local Defense Acquisition University). The library faculty have also facilitated student discussions on the applications and ethical usage of AI in research. While SMCM faculty have been encouraged to include statements on their syllabi outlining instructor expectations on the accepted/prohibited uses of AI in course work, there had as yet been no cohesive effort to lead a broader discussion about the College's position on and plans for AI in our coursework.

In fall 2026, I convened an advisory committee, comprised of faculty volunteers (both AI advocates and cynics) across a wide range of disciplines. This process was structured across bi-weekly meetings that moved systematically through defining the technology, establishing ethical boundaries for engagement, and exploring the essential competencies our graduates will encounter. As a result of these discussions, the faculty workgroup has drafted a College framework for "AI governance" — a broad term to describe the shared policies and procedures that foster effective, safe, and responsible use of artificial intelligence in the context of teaching, learning, research, and creative works. These governance principles will be the foundation of all future discussions of AI in the academic context, and are intended to support academic freedom, fairness, mitigate risks (such as bias), protect data privacy, and ensure compliance with regulations.

One of our primary process findings is the urgent need for a “bottom-up” disciplinary integration rather than a top-down mandate; we believe that the most effective AI instruction will be embedded within the specific contexts of each major.

Looking ahead, our immediate next step is the Faculty Town Hall scheduled for April 13, where we will recommend a set of foundational principles for the faculty; these include the requirement for a clearly stated AI policy in every syllabus, mandatory transparency regarding AI-assisted grading, and the affirmation that students remain the “pilots in command,” fully responsible for the accuracy and integrity of their work. Recommendations also include specialized training that will focus on FERPA compliance and the practical redesign of assessments to ensure they remain robust in an AI-enabled environment.

The future roadmap also involves the development of a resource kit containing sample assignments and Blackboard modules to lower the barrier for faculty adoption. Long-term, the group will explore embedding AI competencies—such as evaluative judgment and iterative inquiry—within the LEAD curriculum and disciplinary Program Learning Outcomes. Ultimately, our process reflects a consensus that inaction is no longer a viable strategy; to paraphrase the workgroup’s briefing, we must move forward immediately to ensure our students graduate not as passive operators, but as critical, adept, and informed architects of the future.

### **“Essential Questions” Project**

Launching in Fall 2026, **Essential Questions** is a campus-wide initiative from the Integrated Retention Committee (Academic Affairs, Admission and Enrollment Management, Inclusion and Belonging, and Student Affairs) designed to cultivate a deeper sense of class identity and intellectual community, and to help establish a sense of belonging that spans from orientation to graduation.

This new tradition invites the entire campus into a year-long, interdisciplinary conversation. Each spring, we will announce a broad theme for the following fall centered on a common inquiry, serving as a through line beginning in New Student discussions and weaving through our annual programming. The goal is to provide a shared context each year for multifaceted, timely discussion across departments and student groups. Moving forward, we look to develop a collaborative process where faculty, students, and staff help select the annual theme.

For our inaugural 2026-2027 academic year, we are proud to explore the question, **“What makes a community?”**—a theme that aptly reflects our core campus values (as well as the research expertise of our new president). The annual Essential Question also encourages a broad array of disciplines to explore the theme through their own unique lenses, in the form of course content, guest speakers, film screenings, etc. Our first endeavor will begin with a collaborative event during Orientation Week to bring together our four scholar-leader cohorts: De Sousa-Brent, Sum Primus, Landers, and Monument Scholars. The College will offer an “Essential Question” digital badge to help promote our shared events on the SMCM campus programming calendar, and to encourage broad engagement. The initiative features an initial assessment of the project at the close of AY28-29, and metrics to gauge both participation and effects on retention.

## Six-Month Grants Activity Report from the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

These research updates and accomplishments from October 2025 to present highlight continued growth and impact across the institution. The office is onboarding a National Institutes of Health (NIH) subaward through Virginia Tech, an important milestone for a small institution that reflects growing capacity to participate in complex federal research. It has also established a subaward with University of North Carolina, Charlotte to support their contribution to a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded project, strengthening collaboration and expanding the reach of our research portfolio. Currently managing 55 open awards, the office maintains strong operational oversight while continuing to prioritize student engagement, facilitating externally funded awards that support 18 students in research experiences, guest lecturing in six classes this spring, and mentoring students through competitive opportunities such as the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) and the Green St. Mary's Revolving Fund (GSMRF), which supports sustainable campus projects.

At the close of this report, a graph provides an overview of SMCM's annual total funding, FY18 - FY26. As we close FY26, the College's grant awardings total \$1,288,688.

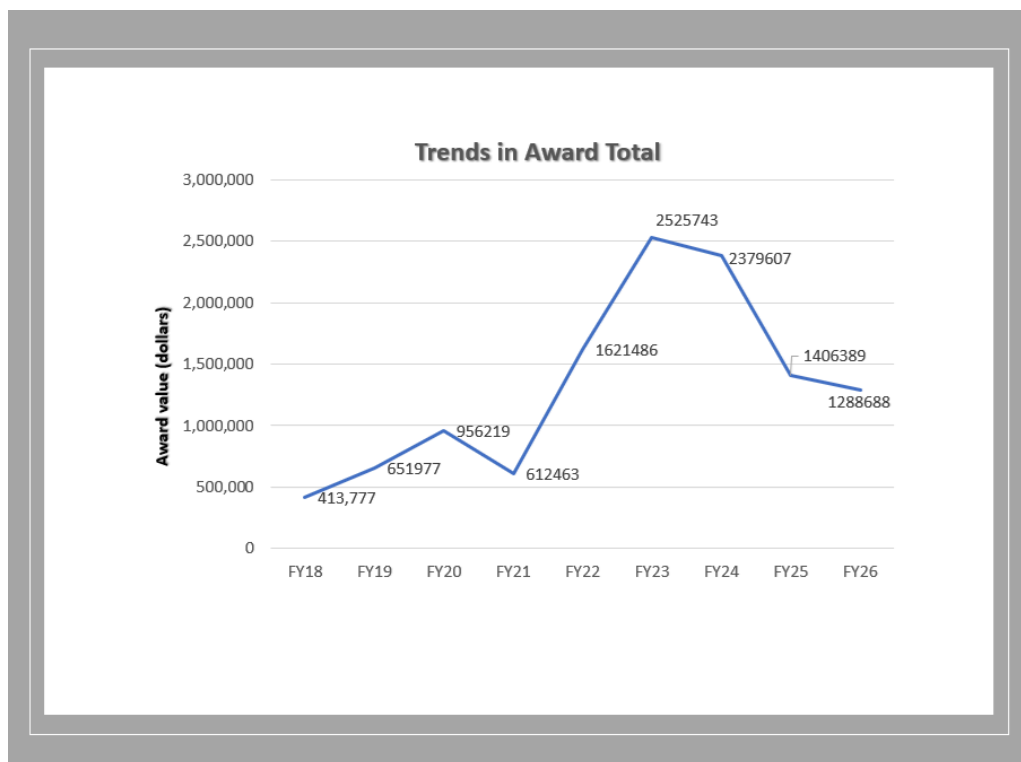
### Newly Launched Awards

- **Julie King**, Professor of Anthropology received from the Rappahannock Tribe:
  - **\$27,869** to support collaborative efforts titled *Planning for the Return to the River Programs*; and
  - **\$37,694** to assist the Rappahannock Tribe in documenting their principal 16th-century town along the Rappahannock River in eastern Virginia.
- **Julie King** also received **\$38,082** as a sub awardee to Towson University for the Summer Maryland Indigenous Archaeology Program, funded by the Maryland Department of Education. The program engages middle and high school students in hands-on archaeology while honoring the cultural heritage of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe.
- **Caitlin McPherson**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology, received **\$1,000** from the National Antivivisection Society to support the acquisition of high-quality human skeletal models to enhance laboratory instruction in Human Osteology, Anatomy and Physiology, and Human and Disease Co-Evolution.
- **Derek Young**, Dean of Students, received **\$18,000** from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to support activities associated with *Food for Thought II: Advancing Equity, Sustainability, and Community Engagement*.
- **Brittany Johnson**, Assistant Professor of Music, Voice, Choir, and Musical Theater, received **\$1,000** from the St. Mary's Arts Council to support the Tri-County High School Choral Festival Concert to be hosted at the College.
- **Liza Gijanto**, Professor of Anthropology, and **Kelsey Bush**, Community Affairs Liaison, received **\$38,000** from the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture and the Maryland Historical Trust to advance historical preservation and research efforts at the Galilee United Methodist Cemetery.

- **Jerry Gabriel**, Associate Professor of English, received **\$1,000** from the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area to support educational outreach through local workshops focused on the historical and cultural traditions of Southern Maryland.
- **Chuck Adler**, Professor of Physics, received **\$15,000** from The Patuxent Partnership, Inc. to support a research collaboration, including the construction of a gonioreflectometer to measure scattering phase functions from various rough surfaces.
- **Sarah Hlubik**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology, received **\$15,117** from the Leakey Foundation for the project *Understanding Fire Incidence in the Early Pleistocene of Koobi Fora, Northern Kenya*.

**Awards Recently Received and Currently Onboarding**

- **Jess Jolly**, Director of Counseling Services, received **\$7,000** from the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling to continue educational programming on gambling prevention and safer gambling practices.
- **Katy Arnett**, Associate Provost, received a **\$2,800** Campus Compact Mini-Grant to support faculty at St. Mary’s College of Maryland in integrating inclusive dialogue practices into their courses. This work will also contribute to a broader cohort advancing effective, campus-wide approaches to classroom discourse.



**Note:** FY22, FY23 and FY24 totals reflect significant awards: Congressional Appropriation for Marine Vessel (FY22=\$900,000), Congressional Appropriation for Schaefer Hall renovations (FY23=\$1,000,000), and Professor Kelly Neiles's NSF award (FY24=\$1,022,822).