



BOARD OF TRUSTEES CAMPUS LIFE COMMITTEE

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

A beautiful new semester at St. Mary's College of Maryland kicked off on August 28th with Opening Convocation. The entire campus was welcomed by inspirational words from Dr. Phillips, poignant counsel from our vice presidents, encouragement from Student Body President Gillian Brewer, and a hilarious, tear-jerking speech from Dr. Diego Villada. This year's theme, "What is Community?" took center stage at orientation, as new students traveled to do volunteer work in our St. Mary's community, building relationships and giving back at the Kate Chandler Farm, Habitat for Humanity, Historic St. Mary's City, the Greenwell Foundation, and more. The campus as a whole has joyously embraced this theme with the Involvement Fair, featuring nonprofit organizations, and the SMCM Community Hour. Students are eager to see what more is to come.

The Campus Bookstore Transition

Over the summer, the announcement of Barnes and Noble as the winning bidder for the Campus Bookstore and Daily Grind operations was met with deep concern from the student body, staff, and the alumni community. Petitions circulated online

as students cried out over social media against this change. Many directly contacted the Maryland Board of Public Works to state their apprehension. Over Alumni Weekend, many alumni expressed their dismay and spoke about discontinuing their donations. As a small, tight-knit community that values authenticity, creativity, and relationships over all else, this response is not unexpected. While the administration and the Board have fought hard to preserve the most iconic and student-centered components of the Daily Grind amidst this transition and select student employees of the campus bookstore are set to participate in the RFP transition committee, the campus as a whole is feeling frustrated by the lack of information and updates they have received. The student reception of the bookstore outsourcing exposes a much bigger problem on campus. Students have expressed that they do not feel they can trust the Board and administration to communicate major campus changes in a timely and honest manner. As the RFP transition moves forward, students need regular updates and clear language to define standard business procedures, even when there are no significant developments to report.

Student Sentiment Surrounding AI

As AI becomes more prevalent in the workplace and technology in our daily lives, St. Mary's students continue their vehement opposition to AI in the classroom, their work, and their communities. Already in the first few weeks of the semester, students have become fixated on AI generated imagery on campus, resulting in a lack of trust and a loss of respect for the offices on campus that put out these graphics. Students feel strongly about the water waste and substantial negative environmental impacts resulting from the use of generative AI and they often find errors in the AI generated imagery that may attempt to depict campus. With the

addition of Canva Pro as a free resource available to all students, faculty, and staff, students are expressing frustration with the continued use of AI in the creation of flyers and other such materials.

Despite this negative perspective on AI, students continue to use it for coursework, sometimes when it is completely prohibited in a class. This dissonance could stem from many issues, including burnout, time management issues, lack of confidence in accessing resources, and reliance on AI from high school. Data from Kennedy and Company may prove useful in assessing reasons for student burnout. The new MySMCM app will make resources more accessible and remove potential barriers for student engagement. Overall, it's likely that attempts from various offices on campus to promote AI materials and AI resources will continue to be met with strong opposition, to the detriment of the relationship between the student body and administration on campus.

Library Renovations and the Third Spaces Squeeze

With the library renovation scheduled to last through the fall semester, students are already feeling an additional squeeze on the “third spaces” on campus. For now, we are seeing a delayed impact of the elimination of the first floor of the library because the warm weather allows students to utilize outdoor study spaces.

However, as the only place on campus where students can gather in large groups to work, socialize, and spend time outside of their homes, workplaces, or classrooms, the library is a major community space. Its loss has significantly impacted the students.

In anticipation of the weather changing, students are already predicting feeling trapped in their homes and seeing overcrowding in spaces such as the Daily Grind,

Brew'd Awakening, and the Learning Commons. Plans are in place to create more seating in the campus center and to extend open hours for the campus center and select academic buildings. Regular communication about these newly-designated third spaces will be essential to promoting their use, especially to new students who are unfamiliar with the more niche corners of campus. Nevertheless, the need for third spaces on North Campus is increasingly acute. Students in traditional dorms are able to utilize study rooms, the recreation room, and the lobby of their building, while in North Campus students have to trek to academic buildings (which are closed on weekends) or the Learning Commons (which does not provide food during evenings and weekends) to leave their homes. Simply put: students want more accessible comfy spaces around campus where they can talk and study socially.

Historic St. Mary's City in the Spotlight

With the imminent opening of the new visitors center at Historic St. Mary's City and the extended hours of Angelika's, students are spending more time at our resident living history museum than ever. Students are hoping that an agreement could be reached with Angelika's to allow Flex as payment to expand their dining options on campus, particularly on weekends. There are developing plans to create more community and academic connections with Historic, including jointly hosting the annual Mid-Atlantic Phi Alpha Theta National History Honors Society conference this April. The conference will accept papers from students across academic disciplines at St. Mary's and from colleges across the region. Elevating this conference on campus, with participation from the Three Cs and other local historical entities like Historic Sotterley, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, and Piscataway Park could be a major opportunity to help answer the question "What is Community?"