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Signature Programs

Saint Mary's College of California

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Saint Mary's College of California 2023-2024 Academic Catalog

Signature Programs

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Saint Mary's Core Curriculum

[The Core Curriculum](#) consists of skills, knowledge, and values that provide the foundation of undergraduate student learning at Saint Mary's College. It is an intentional, developmental, and integrated program of study in four broad intellectual areas: Habits of Mind, Pathways to Knowledge, Theological Understanding, and Engaging the World.

Habits of Mind: Fundamental to a liberal arts education are the habits of mind that prepare students for a lifetime of learning and critical engagement with the world. A trajectory of developmental learning begins in the first-year writing, and continues through January Term and Collegiate Seminar courses. The Habits of Mind curriculum serves as a foundation for developing students' skills in *Critical Thinking, Shared Inquiry, Written & Oral Communication, and Critical Thinking & Research Practices*.

Pathways to Knowledge: An understanding of the diverse ways that humans encounter and explain the world is a central component of a liberal arts education. Through specially designated courses in the disciplines, the SMC Core assures that students will tread the most important pathways to knowledge: *Math, Science, Social Science, Arts and Humanities, and Second Language Proficiency*.

Theological Understanding: Theological Understanding invites students from all faiths and none to explore the perennial questions of theology and the implications that such questions have for how we should live both individually and as a community. Students meet this goal with courses designated to *Christian Foundations* and *Theological Explorations*.

Engaging the World: In fulfillment of the Catholic, Lasallian, and liberal arts mission of the College, SMC students engage with the world beyond their immediate context. Students will explore justice, global citizenship, and community engagement through *Identity, Power, and Equity in the United States, Global Issues and Perspectives* course, and *Engaged Learning*.

Collegiate Seminar

Since 1941, Collegiate Seminar has been central to the undergraduate experience at Saint Mary's College. The program, revised and renewed over time, seeks to engage Saint Mary's students in a critical and collaborative encounter with the world of ideas, as expressed in great and challenging texts of the Western tradition, considering those texts in dialogue with texts and ideas from other traditions. Attending to the dialogue among writers and traditions, students take part in the Great Conversation. The program seeks to help them develop as curious, thoughtful members of an intellectual community, able to think clearly, critically, and collaboratively, and to articulate their ideas effectively in speech and writing - powers that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

As Collegiate Seminar reflects the core identity of Saint Mary's as an intellectual community, it involves all undergraduate students and faculty throughout the schools and academic departments of the College. It promotes collaborative dialogue and respect for multiple perspectives and interpretations, inviting students and faculty to share their different ways of seeing and thinking in a thoughtful, serious, and respectful conversation.

In Collegiate Seminar classes, students read and discuss challenging texts from diverse genres, traditions, and periods, and, under the guidance of faculty from many disciplines, test their own experience and their notions of authentic humanity against them. They develop an appreciation for the diverse ways of knowing that the texts embody, and for the intellectual threads that connect the texts through history and culture. In their Seminars, they create the groundwork for a lifelong reflective pursuit of meaning and truth, and for a method of seeking truth that attends to and values the views of others.

January Term

Since 1970, January Term (JAN Term) has offered both undergraduate students and faculty the opportunity to explore courses and experiences that depart from the constraints of the regular semester. Here, students are encouraged to explore beyond their major, minor, or core requirements. Each year, faculty develop a new curriculum composed of content and approaches designed to stimulate the imagination, and experiment with both subject matter and technique.

Like Collegiate Seminar, all undergraduate students and faculty from across the College participate in January Term. Students and faculty are freed from disciplinary constraints to create innovative learning experiences. The College offers both on-campus courses and off-campus travel courses throughout the United States and many parts of the globe. Many courses emphasize experiential learning through service, community-based research, and on-site learning relevant to the region.

Each January promises new and innovative opportunities. Since students enroll in only one course, faculty members expect more and tend to increase the pace of instruction. January Term is designed to suspend the ordinary and engage the extraordinary, nurturing students as lifelong learners.
