

Stuart L. Nachbar

College Counselor

Member: HECA, NACAC, NJACAC, PACAC

322 Windsor Court

Ewing, NJ 08638

(609)406-0062

stuart@educatedquest.com

www.educatedquest.com

Saint Mary's College of California

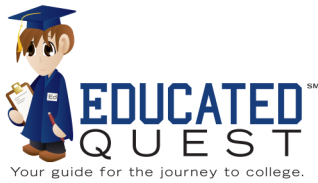
A small college with 2,800 undergraduates and 1,100 graduate students,, Saint Mary's College of California has received several accolades, most prominently its selection as one of the Colleges That Change Lives in 2013. Located in a picturesque valley in California's East Bay, the Saint Mary's campus is only ten miles from Oakland and about 20 miles from San Francisco. This is also the only member of the Colleges That Change Lives that participates in NCAA Division 1 scholarship athletics.

Colleges are chosen to be Colleges That Change Lives in part because they offer a rigorous liberal arts curriculum that is often found at more selective colleges, but do not always have extremely selective admissions. Saint Mary's primarily attracts a B/B+ student, more likely from California. The middle 50 percent of the entering class scored between 1060 and 1240 on the SAT or between 22 and 27 on the ACT Composite. SATs and ACTs are super-scored.

Saint Mary's offered admission to over 3,800 of the nearly 4,700 students—82 percent—who applied to join the 650 member freshman class that entered last fall. The college waitlisted another 214, and the majority (129) accepted a place on the wait list. Thirty-four were later offered admission. Interestingly, nearly half of those who applied to enter as transfer students—they can enter with as few as 23 credits—deposited. Saint Mary's may be an attractive opportunity for Californians who want to transfer, whether they are decided or undecided on a major. The state's public universities require more credits or transfer students, and also have more restricted access to their more popular majors.

Saint Mary's retained 86 percent of the students who arrived in 2016, quite good for a private liberal arts college. Retention rates have been as high as 89 percent (2013), according to Common Data Sets posted online by the college. Saint Mary's graduated 65 percent of the students who entered in 2011 within four years, up from 63 percent for the class that entered two years before. This too, is quite good.

While Saint Mary's retention and graduation rates are lower than they are for the Jesuit universities in California (Loyola Marymount University, Santa Clara University, the University of San Francisco) those schools also admit statistically stronger freshman classes and offer more pre-professional majors. But the student who considered Saint Mary's versus the University of California-Santa Cruz, when both schools offered the same or similar majors or when a student enter college undecided, was more likely to graduate on time from Saint Mary's.



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Costs

Saint Mary's estimates a [Total Cost of Attendance of \\$67,200](#) for the current academic year including direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board) and indirect expenses such as books, clothing and transportation.

During the 2017-18 academic year, the college awarded need-based scholarships to *every student* it deemed to have demonstrated financial need and granted merit-based scholarships to just over a quarter of the freshman class. These awards could have been stackable for the neediest qualified freshmen, but the college met, on average, only 73 percent of demonstrated need. The average student loan debt for the class that graduated in 2017 was approximately \$31,400. The Federal Direct Student Loan program allows undergraduates to borrow a maximum of \$27,000 over four years.

The merit-based Presidential Scholars Scholarship and the Honors at Entrance Scholarship are stackable merit awards that total \$25,000 and help to make the college more price competitive versus a public university. [But the Presidential award requires a separate application.](#) Those who are seriously interested in Saint Mary's who qualify for these awards based on GPA (3.8 minimum) and have standardized test scores above the upper quarter of a class (1250+ SAT/27+ ACT Composite) should complete this application as early as possible to receive consideration. Another incentive: students need to maintain only a 2.0 or better to have their award renewed. Saint Mary's students may also earn departmental merit awards as they progress through their education. These may be stackable with the merit awards that the students may have already earned.

Curriculum

Students who choose Saint Mary's can take on as much rigor as they would at many colleges that would not have offered them admission from high school.

Saint Mary's core requirements (Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Humanities, Foreign Language) are similar to other liberal arts colleges. [One of only seven Lasallian Brothers colleges in the United States](#), Saint Mary's also requires a general (non-religious) course in the Bible as well as a second credit-bearing religion course, much like other religiously affiliated schools. But the college also requires all students to take Collegiate Seminar, a course in the Great Books, each year as well as one course outside of the major every January. This course may be on campus or in study abroad or away within the US. Three-quarters of the students who choose a course that requires travel for the January term receive a travel scholarship to help reduce costs.

Saint Mary's offers 35 majors within three schools: the School of Liberal Arts, the School of Economics and Business Administration and the School of Science. The college also



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offers options to [earn teaching credentials on campus through the Kamanovitz School of Education.](#) Saint Mary's also offers more programs in the performing arts than most liberal arts schools including a [Liberal Education for Arts Professionals \(LEAP\)](#) and a major in [Technical Theatre and Design](#). Anthropology majors may opt for a concentration in Archeology. Unique business programs include a concentration in [Digital Media](#) as well as an Economics major with a concentration in Sustainability Studies. Forty percent of the business students concentrate Marketing or Digital Media. The college also offers the option of pursuing a cross-disciplinary curriculum called the [Integral Program](#) that is based more extensively on the Great Books.

The unique requirements separate Saint Mary's from other schools that applicants are most likely to consider such as Loyola Marymount University, Santa Clara University, the University of San Francisco as well as the larger public colleges in the Golden State. But Saint Mary's may be a better option for a student who is undecided between a major in the liberal arts versus one in a business or education program. The college does not admit to a major, nor does it require students to declare one until the second semester of their sophomore year.

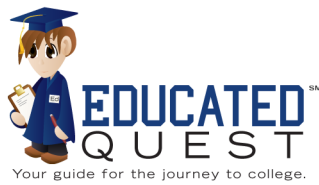
You won't find large classes at Saint Mary's. No course, not even the introductory classes in subjects such as Biology, Economics or Psychology, has more than 40 students. Saint Mary's students gave their faculty a rating of 3.81 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#). They held their faculty in higher regard than students at Loyola Marymount University (3.73), Santa Clara University (3.62), the University of San Francisco (3.74) and the University of California-Santa Cruz (3.72).

Community

Over 85 percent of Saint Mary's undergraduate student body hails from California, and when transfer students are considered, most of these students come from the northern part of the state. The undergraduate students are quite diverse for a private school—over a quarter are Hispanic—and the majority are collectively non-white.

Saint Mary's campus is dominated by Spanish Mission style architecture. The academic center of the campus is quite easy to navigate on foot with many spaces for students to relax on nice days. The college is currently renovating its student center, with plans to add a campus pub. The college has recently completed renovations to its recreation center as well as the McKeon Pavilion where its basketball teams, the Gaels, play to capacity crowds during successful seasons. But the dining hall, while having character with Hogwarts-like long tables at the center, is in need of an interior update.

The college takes night time security seriously, closing the only main campus gate to students and approved guests after 11:00 PM. Saint Mary's most recently [Clery Report](#)



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shows few incidents of crime on campus, even the numbers of alcohol-related incidents are small for a school that has just over 1,600 students living on campus.

One of the smallest colleges that competes in NCAA Division I varsity scholarship sports, Saint Mary's puts one of the most successful mid-major Men's and Women's basketball programs in the nation on the McKeon Pavilion floor every season. The teams compete in the West Coast Conference against other Catholic colleges and universities in California, Oregon and Washington. The Men's Basketball program has made six appearances in the NCAA Tournament since 2005, reaching the Sweet 16 in 2010. Within the conference, The Saint Mary's Gaels success on the court is second only to Gonzaga. The Women's Basketball team has made six appearances in the Women's National Invitation Tournament (WNIT), also since 2005. Saint Mary's also fields highly competitive and successful Men's Club Rugby and Soccer teams.

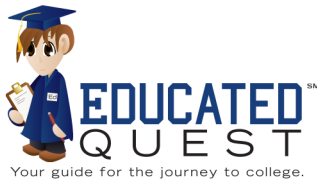
Saint Mary's location in Moraga is less than 30 miles from San Francisco and less than 15 miles from Oakland. But you will need either a ride to the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station in Lafayette, less than five miles away, or access to a car to get to either city. [Bus services to these communities are free and the BART through the County Connection. The college plans to expand their supplemental shuttle service to this station and match it better to the light rail train schedules.](#) Moraga, along with nearby Lafayette, offers shopping and dining opportunities within a well-to-do community, but most are more oriented to adults and families. Walnut Creek, less than ten miles, from campus, offers more of the national chains shopping and entertainment.

Comforts

Saint Mary's houses 1,600 of its 2,800 undergraduates on campus. About 1,300 beds are occupied mainly by freshmen and sophomores, the remaining 300 are in apartments for juniors and seniors. First-year students are assigned to double rooms, unless they request to triple up, which reduces costs. The college operates 22 residence halls. There are Living-Learning Communities within the halls: Science in Honors, Sustainability, International Houses, as well as two that are faith based.

All first-year students live on campus unless they are adults or have family or medical responsibilities that require them to commute from home. Sophomores are guaranteed housing. Juniors and seniors may live in the residence halls or apply to share six-person townhouse apartments through a lottery, although there was most recently a wait list for 200 beds. The college is considering options to either construct an additional townhouse complex for 300 students, or to enter into a partnership with a private developer to construct apartment-style housing off campus.

Two apartment complexes in Moraga, Donald and Ascot, are popular choices for juniors and seniors who opt to live off campus, along with houses that are shared by several



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students. Rentals can range between \$900 and \$1200 per student per month. Students may pay less if they live further from campus in Walnut Creek. However, they must also have access to a car to juggle commuting with work and class schedules.

One problem with the current housing situation is that it is difficult to bond a campus community at a small college when around half of the students live off campus. The college tries to help by scheduling Community Time—and no classes—in the main courtyard from 12:30 to 2:00 to encourage students to talk with peers in clubs and organizations, among others in the college community.

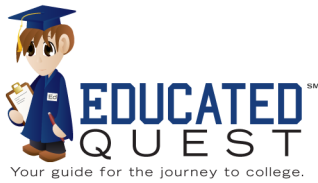
Connections

Saint Mary's boasts of having more than 30,000 living alumni, with over 18,000 still living in the Bay Area, a very large community within one of America's most desired job markets for recent graduates. The college attracted representatives from over 175 employers to on-campus career events, impressive considering that the school that graduates only 400 seniors and does not offer degrees in fields such as Engineering or Nursing. However, the base gets thin outside of the Bay Area. While there are nearly 2,000 alumni based in and around Los Angeles and Orange County registered in [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), the only metro areas outside of California that had more than 400 alumni were Seattle, New York and Portland.

Saint Mary's [alumni](#) include Mahershala Ali, Academy Award winner (2017) for Best Supporting Actor (Moonlight) and Critics' Choice Awards winner (2016) for Best Supporting Actor (Moonlight); Joseph Alioto, former mayor of San Francisco and Mario Alioto, senior vice president of the San Francisco Giants, among many others.

The college's career services, with five full-time staff are quite good for a school of this size, and it has been proposed that career development become an additional signature program for the school alongside the Collegiate Seminar and the January term. In addition to offering [one-to-one services \(resume and cover letter reviews, assessments, among others\) as well as panel presentations and career fairs](#), students receive instruction in how to negotiate on job offers. California employment laws require that entry-level job candidates be informed of the salary range for the jobs that they are being considered. Students are also offered the option to take a workshop on what they may expect during their first 90 days on the job.

While the college has not posted employment data for the most recent graduates as of this date, it appears, from student reviews of the college on Web sites and my campus visit, that motivated students will find internships related to their majors, as long as they can work out the commute.



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Conclusions

Saint Mary's may be a very good school for a B/B+ student who is undecided between liberal arts majors or undecided between the liberal arts and either business or education. It offers considerable rigor to prepare students for further education and has a very strong alumni base in the San Francisco area. The college deserves kudos for attempting to resolve its weaknesses in residence life, dining and mobility, though families should ask questions about them when they visit campus. But the education can also be quite expensive for those who are neither the academic stars nor the most recruited athletes in the revenue sports.

Report Card: Saint Mary's College of California

- Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: B+/B+
- Freshman Retention: B+
- Costs: B
- Curriculum: A
- Community: B
- Comforts: B
- Connections: A (San Francisco Bay area)/C (elsewhere)