

100-Day Listening Tour Report

JANUARY 2026



ST MARY'S
COLLEGE of MARYLAND

The National Public Honors College

5th

BEST PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE NATION

in U.S. News & World Report's
"2026 Best Colleges."



#2

**in the U.S. among
public schools for
making an impact,**
Princeton Review (2025)*

69

Academic programs

St. Mary's College
students enjoy their
time in and out of the
classroom with nearly
70 student clubs
and organizations.

smcm.edu/programs



#1

Ranked #1 for
best college food in
Maryland by Niche

23

VARSITY ATHLETIC TEAMS

NCAA Division III, Inter-Collegiate
Sailing Association, Mid-Atlantic
Rowing Conference. SMCM has
17 national sailing championships
and 150+ sailing All-Americans.



Find out more at
smcm.edu/athletics

350+

Alumni mentors support
student success

10:1

student-to-faculty ratio

95%

of our faculty hold the highest attainable
degree in their respective field of study

361

acres of
waterfront campus



90%

of graduates are employed, in school,
volunteering or in the military six
months after graduating (Class of 2024).

*From The Princeton Review. Used with permission. TPR Education IP Holding, LLC. The Princeton Review is not affiliated with Princeton University.

100-Day Listening Tour Report



Dear Community Members and Friends,

What an absolute delight it has been to join you here at St. Mary's College of Maryland. The passion for this place is truly extraordinary, and it is an honor and privilege to serve as your president.

As you may know, I spent my first hundred days on a listening tour to learn more about the rich legacy of St. Mary's, the perspectives and experiences of its students, staff, faculty and trustees, and the many elected officials and community members who contribute to this very special community. I believe strongly that this process is crucial to identifying not only where we are – with all of our individual and collective strengths – but also to identify our challenges and aspirations for the coming years.

Across these conversations, I have gained even greater insight and clarity about this treasured institution, and each meeting has underscored the College's reputation for educational excellence, as well as its position as an invaluable partner and resource for so many here in Southern Maryland and beyond. I believe strongly in the value of listening and working together to achieve our goals and look forward to collaborating with each and every one of you to actualize an even brighter future for St. Mary's College of Maryland.

The following provides a summary of the information and insights that emerged during my 100-day listening tour, categorized by major topics, and including initial actions which have been taken to address pressing issues. Now we are starting the next phase of strategic planning, in alignment with the collective feedback shared these past few months. My next steps will prioritize the enhancement and building of our community's future, and I hope you will continue to join us in this visioning process.

I want to close by thanking everyone who participated in this listening tour once again. It has been an unparalleled experience to hear your thoughts on the opportunities and challenges we face, as well as the many stories which comprise The National Public Honors College.

In appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhonda Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rhonda G. Phillips, Ph.D., FAICP
President



Overarching Themes & Strengths

This tour included more than 270 meetings and events to actively listen and gather information, as well as review of hundreds of pages of information, including 200+ written comments submitted by students, staff, faculty and community members through a web portal. Several overarching themes and strengths were revealed during this process:

The Existence of a Deeply Passionate and Dedicated Network of Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Students, Trustees, Foundation Board Members and Community Members

Their affection for and commitment to our success is truly extraordinary and has made it clear to me that the College's greatest strength remains its people.

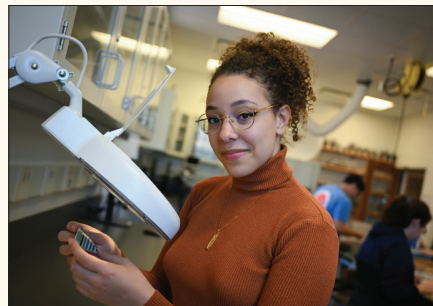
Our Unique and Envable Position in Maryland's Higher Education Landscape as the State's Designated Public Honors College

This position must be preserved and enhanced to continue providing exceptional educational opportunities and post-graduation outcomes for our high-achieving and highly motivated students.

Our Valuable, Transformative, and Differentiated Liberal Arts Experience

Defined by the Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery (LEAD) Curriculum and Honors College Promise, the St. Mary's Way, and our historic waterfront campus in Maryland's first capital city, St. Mary's College is an irreproducible academic and environmental asset.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *The Seahawks' sailing program boasts 17 national championships. Dynamic faculty make this waterfront campus a creative learning environment where motivated students engage in hands-on learning and directed research.*



100-DAY LISTENING REPORT



Challenges & Opportunities

In addition to the assets identified above, I would be remiss not to identify some challenges and opportunities as we move forward. I have been impressed by the willingness of faculty, staff and students to engage in candid evaluation, and believe strongly that each of the challenges and opportunities we face are eminently resolvable through thoughtful stakeholder engagement, purposeful and creative design, and an unwavering commitment to improvement. Some of the most salient challenges identified during this tour include:

Administrative and Technological Processes

Strong consensus exists regarding the need to modernize, streamline and strengthen the systems that support our work. These include the College's Enterprise Resource Planning system, human resources services for faculty and staff, student-facing academic and financial services, and campus communications – both internally and externally.

Academic, Residential and General Campus Infrastructure

With ongoing and generous support from the State, the campus has meaningfully reduced its deferred maintenance backlog over the past several years. While recent renovations have been transformational there is more work to be done. This is particularly the case with student residential buildings and key facilities such as the Wellness Center, Public Safety Office and academic/research laboratories.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: On-campus housing is guaranteed for four years in residence halls, townhouses and suites. The River Runner motorcoach shuttles students to shopping, cultural events and airports. Modern lab facilities are used by the state's only undergraduate marine science program. A view of the historic campus from the St. Mary's River.

Initial Actions & Next Steps

Based on my 100-day listening tour, observations around campus, and additional efforts to gather and analyze information received during this process, the following emerge as crucial next steps for the development of our next strategic plan:

Infrastructure Modernization and Operational Stabilization

My office, along with the Board of Trustees and each campus Division, are working urgently to modernize financial, human resources and student information systems as quickly as possible. A Board-level ERP Transition Team has been established, with initial work already beginning. The same is true for campus infrastructure, where a Board-level Housing and Infrastructure Committee and a Faculty & Staff Housing Task Force was established in the fall semester. At this point all options are on the table, and I look forward to sharing more updates as this work continues.

Institutional Innovation and Agility

Efforts are currently underway to strengthen shared governance, support employee morale and retention, and advance student recruitment and persistence through coordinated, campus-wide initiatives. New advisory committees and task forces – including the Leadership Council, Shared Governance Working Group, Budget Committee, Branding and Standing Advisory Group, and more – have been structured to include input from across the campus community and were established to study and identify actionable recommendations for key priorities. As conditions at the local, state and national levels continue to evolve, so too must we.

Community Engagement and Reputational Strength

The College remains deeply committed to academic excellence and ensuring that every student has an outstanding educational experience. Accordingly, continued investment in academic and co-curricular offerings, as well as strategic partnerships with alumni, community members and state/national partners will strengthen student recruitment, retention and success while simultaneously elevating the College's national standing.



100-DAY LISTENING REPORT

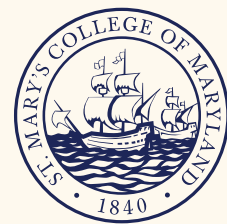


Looking Ahead

The insights shared during the first 100 days reaffirm what makes St. Mary's College of Maryland exceptional: a deeply committed community, a distinctive academic mission and a shared belief in the power of education to transform lives. The challenges identified are not barriers to our success—they are opportunities to strengthen our foundation, modernize our systems and ensure that SMCM continues to thrive for generations to come.

With clarity of purpose, collaborative leadership, and a renewed focus on innovation and excellence, SMCM is well positioned for its next chapter. Together, we will build on our strengths, address our challenges with intention, and elevate the College's impact locally, nationally and globally. Guided by our values, strengthened by collaboration and united by a shared vision for excellence, we will continue to elevate St. Mary's College of Maryland as the nation's premier public honors college—an extraordinary place to learn, to work, to discover and to serve.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *Neuroscience students in the lab. Students in Washington, D.C. for a career day at JPMorgan. Study abroad in Akita, Japan. Marine science students study a sediment tube pulled from the Patuxent River with their professor.* THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *Faculty take pride in mentoring their students and close personal interaction. With 23 varsity sports, SMCM is the home of the Seahawks. Skateboards and smiling students: no wonder The Princeton Review ranks SMCM #13 for friendliest students!*



The **NATIONAL PUBLIC HONORS** *College*



U.S. News & World Report 2026

#5 National Liberal Arts College (Public Schools)

Top 100 Liberal Arts Colleges (National)



The Princeton Review 2025-2026

#2 Top 20 Best Schools for Making an Impact (Public Schools)

#9 Green Matters: Everyone Cares About Conservation (National)

#13 Friendliest Students (National)

Top 50 Best Value Colleges (Public Schools)



Washington Monthly 2025
Best Bang for the Buck



College Raptor 2026
Hidden Gems in the Mid-East U.S.



Forbes Top College 2026



Military Friendly School '25-26
Silver



Niche 2026
Top 100 Best Liberal Arts Colleges
in America



Niche 2026
#1 Best College Food in Maryland

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www.smcm.edu/president