

Saint Mary's College of California Launches School of Arts & Sciences, Names Inaugural Dean

Experienced academic leader Gesine Gerhard, PhD, will guide the College's newly unified academic home for the sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences.

MORAGA, CA, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Saint Mary's College of California is beginning the academic year by launching its new School of Arts & Sciences, a significant milestone in the College's ongoing efforts to strengthen interdisciplinary learning, academic innovation, and student success.

The new school is led by inaugural Dean Gesine Gerhard, PhD, an accomplished academic leader who joined Saint Mary's from Drake University earlier this summer.



Both scientific discovery and the liberal arts remain central to the Saint Mary's experience, now strengthened through a unified School of Arts & Sciences designed to foster deeper interdisciplinary collaboration and learning. /Illustration by Ashley Rose

Saint Mary's School of Arts & Sciences unifies what have previously been the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Science, creating a single academic home for the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. The new structure reflects both the College's enduring commitment to the liberal arts and its vision for preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and evolving world.

"Today's most important challenges and opportunities do not exist neatly within disciplinary boundaries," said Carol Ann Gittens, PhD, MBA, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost at Saint Mary's. "The School of Arts & Sciences creates a more integrated academic environment for students while preserving the strengths of the disciplines themselves. By bringing the sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences together, we are expanding

opportunities for collaboration, innovation, ethical inquiry, and human-centered learning.”

To lead the new school, Saint Mary’s selected Dr. Gerhard, a nationally respected academic leader, scholar, and educator who most recently served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Drake University.

Leadership That Understands the Interdisciplinary Way Students Learn

During her eight years at Drake, Dr. Gerhard oversaw more than 40 academic programs and approximately 140 faculty members across the humanities, fine arts, social sciences,

and natural sciences. She led initiatives focused on interdisciplinary academic programming, student success, faculty development, experiential learning, strategic enrollment growth, and fundraising, while guiding the institution through a period of significant change in higher education.

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“Dr. Gerhard brings an exceptional combination of academic leadership, strategic vision, collaborative spirit, and deep commitment to liberal arts education,” said Gittens. “She understands both the enduring value of the arts and sciences and the increasingly interdisciplinary ways students learn, think, and prepare for meaningful lives and careers. Her leadership will help shape this exciting next chapter for Saint Mary’s.”

“I am deeply honored and excited to join Saint Mary’s as

the inaugural dean of the School of Arts & Sciences,” said Dr. Gerhard. “At a time when higher education is being called upon to prepare students for an increasingly complex world, Saint Mary’s has taken a bold and visionary step by creating a school that brings together the strengths of the liberal arts and sciences while embracing innovation, interdisciplinarity, and professional preparation.

“I look forward to partnering with our talented faculty, staff, and students to prepare graduates who are ready to pursue meaningful careers, lead purposeful lives, and address the complex



Hands-on scientific inquiry is a hallmark of Saint Mary’s, where students engage in meaningful research while building the knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges. /Photo by Francis Tatem

challenges of our time,” she said. “Together, we will build a strong future rooted in the transformative power of an arts and sciences education.”

Among her accomplishments, Dr. Gerhard helped launch innovative interdisciplinary programs in areas such as artificial intelligence and zoo and conservation science, while continuing to champion the foundational skills that define a liberal arts education: critical thinking, effective communication, ethical reasoning, creativity, and intellectual curiosity.

Prior to her leadership at Drake, she served in several academic leadership roles at the University of the Pacific, including Associate Dean of the College of the Pacific and Director of General Education, where she helped lead university-wide curricular reform, first-year experience initiatives, and programs focused on student success and belonging.

A scholar of modern European and German history, Dr. Gerhard has published extensively on World War II, the Holocaust, food politics, and social history, and has remained actively engaged in teaching throughout her administrative career.

Meeting the Needs of Students and Society

The creation of the School of Arts & Sciences comes as Saint Mary’s continues to strengthen areas of growing student interest and societal need, including nursing, health sciences, education, business, communication, and the social sciences, while reaffirming the central role of the arts, humanities, and sciences in a comprehensive undergraduate education.

The School begins its inaugural year serving students across dozens of majors and programs spanning the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. In many ways, the new School reflects and strengthens the educational approach that has long distinguished Saint Mary’s nationally—one rooted in intellectual curiosity, close faculty mentorship, interdisciplinary learning, and whole-person development. Those qualities helped earn Saint Mary’s a place in Colleges That Change Lives, where it was the first Catholic college and the only California institution included among the guide’s featured schools.

Central to the new school’s vision is a renewed emphasis on competencies that transcend



Students perform in Saint Mary’s spring production of Pippin, one of many arts experiences that reflect creative expression, collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning. /Photo by Francis Tatem

individual disciplines, including ethical reasoning, clear communication, quantitative and data literacy, data analytics, and emerging fluency in artificial intelligence. The hallmark Collegiate Seminar program remains at the heart of the Saint Mary's experience, fostering dialogue, reflection, and interdisciplinary learning across cultures, traditions, and fields of study.

"The arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences each bring unique ways of understanding our world," said Gerhard. "Bringing these disciplines together creates exciting opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and discovery while preparing students to address complex challenges with both expertise and empathy."

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