

# Student Affairs and Services

Annual Report | 2022-2023



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## Pjila'si Welcome

The following pages highlight the activity and achievements of Student Affairs and Services (SAAS), SMU, from May 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023.



## A message from the Associate Vice-President, Student Affairs and Services



Student Affairs and Services (SAAS) supports a dynamic institution with a vast scope of diverse student populations. We strive to create inclusive environments, based in safety, respect and uplifted voices, to support our ultimate goal of igniting the success and engagement experience of Saint Mary's students

We are located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the L'nu'k. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed in 1725 and we are grateful to work and foster student success in Mi'kma'ki. To uphold our duties and responsibilities as treaty people, guided by principles of reconciliation, SAAS is

committed to repairing relationships, amplifying Indigenous voices and developing strong institutional and community supports for Saint Mary's Indigenous students.

We acknowledge that these ancestral and unceded lands are also home to more than 50 African Nova Scotian communities that have held a prominent and unique piece of Nova Scotia's history for over 400 years. We are committed to work in reducing institutional barriers and inequities created by systemic racism through community consultation, advocating for space, providing adequate supports and reinforcing sense of belonging.

This past year has seen some notable challenges. Prominently, we have experienced a return to in-person learning with a student group that has existed almost exclusively in a virtual environment, and we are at an important juncture in how universities re-define themselves. I am excited for the opportunity to grow and evolve SAAS and the student experience, taking new chances and meeting our students on their level. Our team remains impassioned in our mission to support students through their journey with Saint Mary's, and we will continue to seek new ways to work together and engage with and serve students

This report highlights our points of pride for the 2022-2023 academic year. I am proud of all our SAAS members for their resilience, significant efforts and accomplishments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Brophy". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Tom Brophy  
Associate Vice-President | Student Affairs and Services

# Student Affairs and Services (SAAS)

Student Affairs and Services (SAAS) is comprised of teams supporting the following areas: academic supports; Career and Co-Curricular; Cultural and Community; Health and Wellbeing; Residence Life and; Student Life. We aim to ignite the success and engagement experience of Saint Mary's University students. Community, belonging, retention and completion are at the heart of all SAAS endeavours. Included under the Student Affairs and Services portfolio are the following divisions: Black Student Advising; Career and Experiential Learning; Student Communications, the Counselling Centre; The Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility; the Holy Cross Chaplaincy; Indigenous Student Advising; the International Student Centre; Residence Life; the Sexual Violence Support Centre; the Student Health Clinic; and the Student Success Centre.

## Divisions of SAAS

### Black Student Advisor

The Black Student Advisor provides support to black and African descended students at Saint Mary's. Hiring from within the community, the role is in place to provide culturally informed and culturally relevant services to students, strengthening community and fostering a stronger sense of belonging, while supporting and guiding students through their journey at Saint Mary's and beyond.



### Career & Experiential Learning

Career and Experiential Learning (CEL) provides all students and recent alumni with the ability to expand their understanding of self, academic direction, and career planning. This is achieved through professional career counselling, job search skill development, innovative programming, experiential opportunities, and community and employer connectivity. CEL services include career counsellors; resume and job search support; co-curricular record; employer engagement; service learning; and co-operative education.



### Communications

The Communications office engages students and the broader SMU community through digital and traditional communications strategies to build relationships, reinforce connectedness and promote supports, resources and initiatives from Student Affairs and Services. The Communications office also serves to uplift student voices, sharing stories, experiences and narratives of students throughout their journey with SMU to amplify the sense of community and belonging.



### Counselling Centre

The Counselling Centre offers free, confidential services to Saint Mary's students, including in-person and virtual individual counselling, psychoeducational programming, and events. The Counselling Centre offers additional mental health related opportunities through the Peer Support Program, Wellness Ambassadors, and numerous interdepartmental and cross-campus collaborations for faculty, staff and students.



# Divisions of SAAS

## Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility



The Fred Smithers Centre (FSC) provides accommodations to students with disabilities through the Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility. Various services are available to help students achieve their academic and career goals. The Centre helps students navigate through their living and learning journey with Saint Mary's and beyond, offering exam and testing accommodations, assistive technologies to support virtual and in person learning, advocating for student needs, advising on available grants and bursaries, collaborating on the Student Employment Initiative and providing career guidance.

## Holy Cross Chaplaincy



Holy Cross Chaplaincy (HCC) center is a place where everyone is welcome. Founded and lived out in the Christian tradition, Holy Cross Chaplaincy offers Adoration and Catholic Mass, and are also home to the international campus ministry organizations Catholic Christian Outreach, The Navigators and Power To Change. The HCC offers the SMU community a place to gather, engage in healthy discussions in a safe environment, pray or attend social events.

## Indigenous Student Advisor



The Indigenous Student Advisor (ISA) engages Indigenous students in their transition to Saint Mary's and throughout their academic journey by providing cultural and traditional-based supports. Collaborating with Indigenous communities and the broader Saint Mary's community, the ISA advocates for Indigenous students, works to create inclusive spaces, develops Indigenous-led programming and initiatives, and amplifies diverse student voices.

## International Student Centre



The International Student Centre (ISC) provides support, assistance, and advice to international students at Saint Mary's University and strives to ensure that they fully participate in university life and that they thrive academically and socially. Services include study permit guidance, government and university referrals, mentorship programming, information sessions and workshops, support in registering for and getting set up for local provisions and services, conflict management, and more.

# Divisions of SAAS

## Residence Life



Annually, Residence Life supports the academic success and creates a sense of belonging for more than 1000 students in an inclusive, engaged and diverse residence community. Purposeful social and educational programming initiatives grounded in student development theory are planned and facilitated year-round. Initiatives include alcohol-free alternative events (Res After Dark), wellness, inclusion and diversity programming and student committees, RA special projects, Holiday programming, leadership development, and numerous employment opportunities.

## Sexual Violence Support Centre



The Sexual Violence Support Centre (SVSC) offers support and resources to students, staff and faculty who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence. The SVSC also provides professional training and prevention education - including the student-led Sexual Violence Prevention Initiative - for the Saint Mary's and broader community.

## Student Health Clinic



The Student Health Clinic provides on-campus and virtual health services to students, including medical appointments, consultations, medical testing and referrals, general health and wellness supports, and more. Services are available to domestic, national and international students for the active duration of their studies at Saint Mary's and up to one year following graduation.

## Student Success Centre



The Student Success Centre provides resources and initiatives that support student engagement and success throughout their journey at Saint Mary's. The SSC offers a wide range of programs and services including the New to SMU program, Learning Skills and Strategies, Peer Success Coaching, Student Life and Leadership development, alcohol and drug harm reduction programming, the SMU Community Food Room and Early Assist partnerships and much more.

## Belonging & Community Introduction



The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges in connection and engagement through an unprecedented virtual university experience, which left many feeling isolated and lonely. In 2022 Saint Mary's transitioned back to a more traditional university experience, with most in-person learning resuming. However, the return to campus brought its own challenges including a sense of unease, academic uncertainty and challenges around managing safety protocols.

In Student Affairs and Services, units increased their output and spectrum of offerings, enhanced and revitalized existing outreach, strategized ways to (re)

engage students and welcomed the return of in person programming with a vast offering of events, activities and person-to-person connections.

As our dynamic campus continues to grow, we have worked to improve our understanding of various population needs and develop enhanced offerings that are centred in equity, diversity and inclusion, that are accessible for all.

## Wellness Ambassador Pilot Project

Funded by the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Counselling Centre launched a Wellness Ambassador Pilot Project for the 2022-2023 academic year. Four students were recruited as Wellness Ambassadors (WAs) representing and supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+, Black, Indigenous and International communities. Each worked to create space on campus for members of their respective communities to gather, engage, learn and share their unique experiences as they pertained to mental health. The WAs also received training through the Stay Connected Mental Health Project to provide peer support as needed.



Cumulatively, the WAs coordinated more than 20 community programs, offered ongoing peer support drop-in hours, hosted 5 community events and collaborated with several units and departments across campus. In total, the WAs interacted with more than 370 students in various group and community formats throughout the academic year.

# Belonging and Community

## Community Events

The easing of COVID-19 restrictions allowed for a return to in-person programming and events. For SAAS, that meant the return of several long-anticipated events. Every December 26, the International Student Centre (ISC) brings together staff from SAAS and the broader SMU community to serve up a holiday meal in the O'Donnell Hennessey Student Centre. The Boxing Day Dinner is a special tradition that originated as a way to maintain connection with those who are unable to travel home during the university's holiday closure. This year's dinner saw roughly 150 students and their families come together for the feast.

In February, the ISC, alongside the Students Acting for Global Awareness (SAGA), brought back an annual favourite; the International Night. In March, the ISC collaborated with the Muslim Students Society to host the inaugural Ramadan in Unity event. The ISC also provided resources and funding to student societies like the African Student Society to bring back the annual African Night event.



“ —

It is so important that Saint Mary's continues to support events like these. It helps students feel connected and at home here while sharing and celebrating where they come from.

Ysaac Rodriguez, Manager, International Student Centre

”



## Community Events continued



In Residence Life (RL) the Holiday Programming Team facilitated 15 special programs, providing students with opportunities to connect and stay engaged during the winter holiday closure. RL also supported initiatives, events, committees, training and more throughout the entire academic year. In the Holy Cross Chaplaincy (HCC), a Student Leadership Team was established to help lead the chaplaincy community and further engage students. The HCC also facilitated several formation programs and retreats for students.



For the first time since 2019, The Student Success Centre's Transition Team coordinated an in-person New to SMU program for fall 2022. Divisions of SAAS, alongside departments and individuals across campus executed 47 different events and activities designed to welcome new students to Saint Mary's. Programming supported introductions to various living and learning aspects of SMU, provided opportunities to connect with peers and ease into a new stage of life. Nearly 1,100 students participated in the various programming, building connections and helping to set themselves up for success in their SMU journey.

## Student testimonial

Kaeandra Clarke transferred to SMU after her first year of university and decided to take part in the fall 2022 Welcome Weeks activities. "I met my best friend and pretty well my entire SMU friend group through Welcome Weeks," says Clarke. "You sometimes hear people complaining that it's hard to make friends here, but it's not true. The Welcome Weeks events were so fun," Clarke elaborates. "I especially loved P.U.M.P.; it's like a ridiculously fun kind of speed dating but to make friends. Everyone's out on the Huskies field running around together and you just start to click with people."



# Belonging and Community

## Community Events continued



In 1993, Wikewiku's (October) was declared Mi'kmaq History Month by the Santé Mawi'omi Grand Council and the Government of Nova Scotia. In 2018, Saint Mary's established an annual tradition of hosting a Mawi'omi (gathering) at the beginning of Wikewiku's to celebrate Treaty Day and the kick off of Mi'kmaq History Month. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the event was held virtually in recent years. In 2022, in collaboration with community Elders, Indigenous community members and the Native Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre, the Indigenous Student Advisor (ISA) and Indigenous Student Initiatives Coordinator welcomed the in person sacred gathering and celebration back to SMU.

The Mawi'omi welcomed members of the Indigenous community as well as the broader SMU community to the half-day event. Tables were set up en route to the gathering, which featured information booths and Indigenous makers. The event itself boasted a sacred ceremony, storytelling, dance, drumming and gathering with the community. Participants were encouraged to wear an orange shirt for residential school survivors, victims, and their descendants, and were invited to join in the celebrations on the dance arena later in the event. More than 200 people attended the Mawi'omi with representation from Saint Mary's students, faculty, staff and members of the community.

## African Heritage Month Literary Display

In collaboration with the Patrick Power Library, the Black Student Advisor (BSA) compiled a selection of scholarly texts that celebrate Black joy and liberation for a month-long display in the library as part of the university's African Heritage Month initiatives. The BSA drew from their experience and education in social work, community engagement and activism to inform the selections, which provided perspectives, education and information for a range of audiences.



## Enhancing SAAS Content

SAAS initiated and supported a number of communications strategies to enhance the way in which SMU expresses content, represents voices and facilitates access to information. The Communications Office shifted its social media efforts to portray more authentic student moments, developing stronger relationships with the SMU societies and groups and sharing stories from the unique narratives of diverse students and their experiences at Saint Mary's. A SAAS Communications Group was formed to create a space for information and knowledge sharing, strategizing best practices and enhancing a wholistic representation of SAAS to students.

Knowledge sharing included ways in which equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA) could be better incorporated into social, digital and traditional media. Units took a self-guided approach to content audits, making updates across all media expressions to better support EDIA-centred practices and better reflect the dynamic student population. Divisions of SAAS, including the Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility, the Counselling Centre and the Sexual Violence Support Centre hosted information and training sessions within Student Affairs, with SMUSA and various student societies and groups, and all across Saint Mary's departments to inform and better equip staff and students with resources and tools to support diverse student needs.

## In the **News**: SVSC Enhanced

Saint Mary's University is proud to launch a new website for the Sexual Violence Support Centre under Student Affairs and Services (SAAS). The Sexual Violence Advisor, in conjunction with members of SAAS and the Saint Mary's web team, have been working over the past year to develop a new website that enhances the user experience, aligns with more intuitive web navigation and better showcases the supports, education and initiatives within the centre.

**"With the full overhaul of the SVSC website, the content structure is more intuitive making it easy to quickly navigate to supports or resources,"**

says Dee Dooley, Sexual Violence Advisor. "This helps ensure the SMU community has access to comprehensive, accessible and survivor-centric information and supports."

The refreshed website derived from a need to present written and visual content that was trauma-informed and survivor-centric.

Vector graphics replaced stock photography to reduce potential visual triggers for survivors, content was modernized to reflect evolved understandings of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment, and pages were audited to ensure accessibility and ease of use.

## **New Website Highlights**

1. Enhanced user experience: removing stock photography in favour of vector graphics means reducing the risk of potential content triggers for a survivor.
2. Updated navigation: the SVSC landing page creates an intuitive interaction opportunity with audience sub-page architecture.
3. New Ways to Explore: users can now explore supports, resources, forms, policies, initiatives, programs and education through the vector card landing page and the simplified mega menu navigation bar.

# Health & Wellness

## Health & Wellness Introduction

As with previous years in the effects and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022-2023 academic year saw heightened demand for health supports with a strong emphasis on mental wellbeing. Student Affairs and Services endeavours to support the wellbeing and health of students, equipping them with tools and strengthening resilience to manage stressors and ensure they have sufficient access to resources.

All divisions of Student Affairs incorporated health and wellness initiatives into their student engagement strategies. From medical and clinical appointments to literacy and information sessions, from collaborative awareness initiatives to wellness programming, staff all across SAAS worked to provide impactful wellness supports and resources for students.

## Highlights

### **The Student Health Clinic**

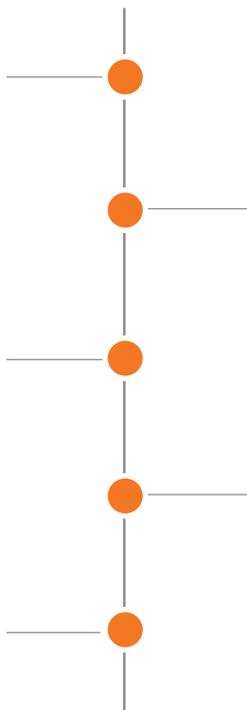
saw a 39.8% increase in patient bookings, totaling 8,257 appointments for students during their education and up to one year following graduation, as well as their immediate family.

### **The Counselling Centre**

completed 1832 counselling appointments (an 10% increase over 2021-2022) and 380 intake appointments.

### **The Holy Cross Chaplaincy**

saw 1% (roughly 60-70 students) use the SMU chaplaincy space at least once a week.



### **The Sexual Violence Support Centre**

provided 205 supportive counselling sessions, offered 461 check-in sessions and provided 47 accommodations for SMU community members who experienced sexual or gender-based violence.

### **The Community Food Room**

experience a 44% increase in usage totaling in 3036 visits from SMU community who experienced food insecurity.

## Quick Facts

- ▶▶▶ The Student Health Clinic hosted a two-day influenza vaccine in November 2022, providing more than 100 patients with vaccine doses above and beyond regularly scheduled influenza vaccine appointments.
- ▶▶▶ 12 events hosted by the Res Consent Project in Residence Life, focusing on education around sexual consent, sexual health and sexualized violence.
- ▶▶▶ 11 events hosted by the Res Wellness Team in Residence Life, which focused on mental health, wellness and harm reduction.
- ▶▶▶ The Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility hosted 6 visits from a certified therapy dog during peak stress periods throughout the year. They also hosted 3 Music for Mental Health jam sessions bringing together students, staff, faculty and alumni.
- ▶▶▶ The Student Success Centre and Strategies partnered with the Sexual Violence Support Centre to launch a Learning Through Healing series.
- ▶▶▶ The Keep It Social team recruited a team of 7 student volunteers and supported six major activations including events relating to first and last class, Hallowe'en, Saint Patrick's Day and Homecoming.
- ▶▶▶ The Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility collaborated with The Counselling Centre to provide tailored mental health training for 12 Graduate Student Invigilators, teaching abilities to support vulnerable students during times of high anxiety, such as when testing.
- ▶▶▶ Residence Life created a new training module on the university health services to educate student leaders and support appropriate referral avenues.
- ▶▶▶ The 45 Residence Assistants (RAs) received more than 60 hours of in-person training to prepare them to support and refer students. The RAs also received self-care training through the Counselling Centre to support and maintain their own wellness.
- ▶▶▶ The Counselling Centre's Peer Supporters offered roughly 230 hours in weekly drop-in peer support sessions hosted across campus and within residence to increase student access to wellness resources and supports.
- ▶▶▶ The Health Clinic was forced to move exclusively to virtual operations during an unexpected building closure. Despite the closure, the health team remained actively engaged with patients, completing 856 appointments during the 6-week period.

# Engaged Living & Learning

## Engaged Living & Learning Introduction

Saint Mary's view of student success is one that helps learners find their own best path, to grow and to find new experiences outside the classroom. Student Affairs and Services strives to shepherd this student discovery and to foster student growth and success. We have worked to develop programs and services that support students through the continuum of the student experience inclusive of their transition in, through, and out of the university.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, divisions of SAAS executed new and existing programming, training, learning and information workshops, and social events. The results of these initiatives allowed us to connect with students on their level, increase our reach and engagement across campus, support and enhance student development, make person to person connections and gain insights into the narratives, perspectives and lived experiences of SMU students.



## Enhanced Supports Improve Learning for Students with Disabilities

The Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility (FSC) undertook several initiatives to bolster learning supports for student who experience disabilities at Saint Mary's. The centre recruited Peer Notetakers who undertook bespoke training on the notetaking process along with disability awareness training.

The FSC purchased a campus-wide license for Google Read & Write for student use. The software offers a slew of tools including text to speech and speech to text, text and picture dictionaries, web text simplification and summarization, and more. These tools have proven benefits for students with learning related challenges and disabilities. The FSC also piloted a lecture and notetaking software, Glean, in 49 classrooms during the winter term. The assistive technology supports students with disabilities in taking charge of their own note-taking skills giving them the confidence and ability to improve their own learning potential.



## Guided Integration for International Students

The International Student Centre hosted 16 information sessions during the Welcome Weeks, offering sessions pertaining to student services, cultural shock, immigration, banking, budgeting, financial aid, the Saint Mary's health plan, on and off-campus employment, and more. In addition to information sessions, the ISC also hosted 9 Welcome Weeks events including a Welcome to Nova Scotia night, NS SIN and ID excursions, paint nights, shopping trips and tourism-style outings. Throughout the year, the Students Acting for Global Awareness (SAGA) group, under the direction of the ISC, hosted various social activities that promoted student engagement, cross-cultural exchange and social interaction. During the 2022-2023 year, events included kayaking at the Saint Mary's Boat Club, a Halloween movie night, an apple picking trip, trivia night, a badminton tournament, paint nights and regular games nights.

## Engagement Quick stats

**86**

engagements by faculty and staff with the Counselling Centre's in person and Brightspace Mental Health learning by staff and faculty.

**100**

students engaged during six monthly Well Wednesday events hosted by the Counselling Centre totalling 600 students

**194**

students trained in the Waves of Change Bystander Intervention program through the SVPI.

**33**

Service-Learning program courses offered across 2022-2023 academic term with 360 students enrolled, totaling in 6,177 hours.

**86**

students participated in pilot SVPI programming on consent and healthy relationships.

**16**

FSC students awarded bursaries - 12 accessibility travel bursaries and 4 SEI service learning bursaries.

**384**

students, faculty and staff participated in outreach events such as Moosehide Campaign Day, Homecoming, Wellness Week, the National day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, International Women's Day and Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

**142**

residence-wide programs were executed, welcoming in-resident and non-resident students alike, resulting in 2756 engagements throughout the 2022-2023 academic term for a 58% overall engagement increase.

**417**

students engaged in 14 various Student Success Week events over the course of the 5 day event.

# Engaged Living & Learning

## SMU Spark Pilot Project Supports First Year Experience

The Student Success Centre, in collaboration with the Writing Centre, the Studio for Teaching and Learning, Career and Experiential Learning, the Counselling Centre, Financial Services, students and faculty members across Saint Mary's, launched the SMU Spark Project. SMU Spark is a digital learning resource that faculty can customize and integrate into first year courses. It provides a digital hub of resources including interactive content, videos, self-assessment questionnaires, quizzes, padlets to engage with classmates, and more. In its inaugural year, nearly 600 students in introductory Science and Commerce courses used the digital resource. Members of the SMU Spark Committee have been developing additional modules to disseminate across courses, and have been working with additional faculty departments to implement the resource over the coming academic terms.

“

SMU Spark modules helped me understand how to plan my courses, organize my studies and how to have certain strategies for different type of exams. It's been so great that I scored good in my exams, and I've developed new skills that I can employ in other areas of my life as well.

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1st-year student, HR Certificate Program



## INC Introduces International Students to Canadian Employment

International Student Career & Employability Certificate (INC) Program provides senior-level international students with skills, knowledge, and experience to help them become successful employees in the Canadian workplace after graduation. In the 2022-2023 year, INC accepted 17 international students into the program, offering engaging out-of-class sessions from facilitators, career coach presenters, employers and fellow participants. This year's participants contributed 622+ volunteer hours within the local community.

“INC taught me how to integrate in a team with people from different backgrounds, which is a huge part of many Canadian workplaces. It provided me with insight of empathy and understanding different points of view and how to manage that in a work environment. The program was almost like a simulation for me to see how it would be for me to work in a Canadian workplace.”

- 2022/2023 INC participant

## Mi'kmaq Cultural Materials Display

An ongoing partnership with the Nova Scotia Museum, the Indigenous Student advising office, the Indigenous Students' Association and the Patrick Power Library saw a refresh of the Library's Mi'kmaq Cultural Materials display, which is a host location of the Nova Scotia Museum. This display is an acknowledgement that Saint Mary's is in Mi'kma'ki and emphasizes Indigenous cultural education.



## SEI Employs Record Number of Students

The Student Employment Initiative (SEI) Program is organized with Saint Mary's University Career & Experiential Learning and The Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility. The program assists students with disabilities in securing employment contracts with employers, gain volunteer experience, and develop their professional skills and competencies. The SEI program, offered year-round for part-time and full-time work placements, collaborations with employers to create job postings that are inclusive and welcoming. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the SEI program generated 75 work terms - the largest in the program's history - and invested \$3,600 in work term accommodations. The SEI program lead adopts an integrated team approach, referring SEI students to various career support services including job search assistance, resume development support and career counselling.

# Fostering Future Readiness

## Fostering Future Readiness Introduction

In SAAS, we strive to guide students in their self-discovery and exploration by supporting opportunities for developmental experiences. Throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, divisions of SAAS have supported fostering future readiness through countless training, workshops, employment and volunteerism opportunities. By equipping students with future-ready skills like critical thinking, collaboration, communication, adaptability and more, we help students set and achieve goals, plan for their next steps and feel empowered as they move through stages of their lives.

## Employment, Volunteerism and Training Opportunities

Throughout the academic year, Student Affairs and Services has employed students in innumerable paid and volunteer opportunities within all divisions, providing students with learning and skill-building opportunities that will not only bolster their resumes and professional networks, but often-times will improve their own journey within SMU and beyond but expanding their engagement with and knowledge of the institutional framework, resources and supports available to them.

From Pack Leaders and Peer Success Coaches to Wellness Ambassadors and Residence Assistants, from cultural Initiatives Coordinators to leadership and literacy roles, SAAS has dedicated a large amount of resources to creating paid and volunteer positions that provide hands on development opportunities for students. Given the broad scope of opportunities and the student-facing nature of our services, students employed through SAAS are exposed to a vast array of

experiences that will equip them with the skills and abilities to help position them for success in any of their future endeavours.

Within the framework of the student roles, hundreds of hours of training has been developed and implemented to equip and support the success of the students. Prominently, training supports learning and literacy in broad skills such as leadership, mental health, diversity and inclusion, self-care and working with and supporting vulnerable populations. In many cases, extensive tailored training is also offered including subjects around drug and alcohol harm reduction, gender-based violence prevention, Waves of Change Bystander Intervention, peer coaching and mentorship, peer notetaking, cultural wellness support, and so much more.



## SAAS Student Employee Testimonial

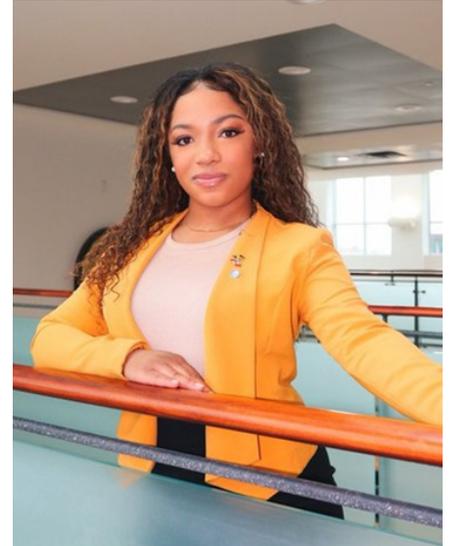
“

The RA student leadership position has impacted me so positively. I'm forever grateful for the three years of wonderful experience that I've garnered as a Residence Assistant - from New Residence Assistant, to Returning Residence Assistant, to Senior Residence Assistant.

[The Res Life team] has built an amazing community, which I was delighted and honoured to have been part of. This community building has been passed along to RA's in modules, trainings and workshops designed for our holistic development as Residence Assistants, as Students, and as individuals being prepared to enter the professional world.

Being an RA has helped me with Time management and Public speaking, and I'm proud to say that I have graduated on the Dean's list, and I was the Valedictorian for the Faculty of Science at the 2023 Convocation. This wonderful developmental role played an important part on my journey, and I can't thank you and Saint Mary's University enough!

- Natania Blair, RA 2020-2023, 2023 Valedictorian



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## Student Development Opportunities

During the 2022-2023 academic year, Student Affairs and Services has engaged in over 400 developmental roles, involving various training requirements, reporting structures, project ownership, feedback and evaluations, direct networking, peer collaboration and more. Career and Experiential Learning supports students gaining developmental opportunities throughout Saint Mary's by facilitating the Student Engagement Initiative and the SMUworks program. CEL also supports students in gaining opportunities beyond the campus walls by connecting students with external employers through the Career 360 portal. During the academic year there were 7943 active students, 358 newly active alumni and 346 new staff, faculty and employers.

# Fostering Future Readiness

## Recognition in Co-Curricular Learning

In 2022, Career and Experiential Learning implemented a Service Learning Bridging Program allowing Service Learning students to receive Co-Curricular Record (CCR) recognition for their volunteer work with community partners. While Service Learning links community-based experience with course content, the CCR is an opportunity for students to record and verify out-of-class experiences, such as involvement in student societies, community volunteering and developmental workshops, and capture skills on an official university verified document.



### CCR Quick Facts

- ▶▶▶ **513** activities added to student CCRs
- ▶▶▶ **47** CCR related appointments were held
- ▶▶▶ **713** active students were engaged with the CCR
- ▶▶▶ **19,438** hours were recorded by students through the CCR
- ▶▶▶ Connected with **24** new orgs both locally and nationally
- ▶▶▶ On campus volunteer fair connected **372** student participants with 26 unique organizations
- ▶▶▶ **11** CCR students were recipients of the Student Leadership Recognition Awards hosted in the winter 2023 term

## Future-Ready Skills and Information Workshops

The Sexual Violence Support Centre facilitated Gender-Based Violence Prevention – Facilitator’s Training for 16 student leaders from NS Post-Secondary Institutions.

Residence Life coordinated 14 unique Adulting 101 sessions in collaboration with the Student Success Centre and Career and Experiential Learning.

Career and Experiential Learning hosted a wide range of workshops including resume and cover letter writing, job searching, NS Labour Standards and Employment Rights, Time Management, Summer Job Searching, and tailored presentations for classes in the Sobey School of Business and the Faculty of Science.

## Facilitating a Network for Opportunities



For students looking for a job or preparing to enter the workforce upon graduation, networking skills are essential. Networking helps students build professional relationships, learn about their field of interest and even find out about job opportunities. Making those first connections can often feel daunting and it can be difficult to know how to start.

The Saint Mary's Co-Op program, facilitated through the Career and Experiential Learning unit in SAAS, allows students to explore their interests and get hands on experience in their field of study, while also providing participants with valuable opportunities to build their networks.

In the past year, CEL has worked hard to bolster the student experience within the Co-Op program including hosting an updated virtual orientation event for new students, creating a Co-Op Student Guidebook and developing an International Travel Waiver to safeguard

### Co-op Quick Facts

- ▶▶ **424** students enrolled in Co-Op in the 2022-2023 year, which is an increase of +3.4% over the previous year.
- ▶▶ **258** co-op participants secured work terms in Co-Op, which is an increase of 25.2% over the previous year.
- ▶▶ **49** participants completed third work terms, which is an increase of 13.9% over the previous year.
- ▶▶ In total, **2816** jobs were posted, which is an increase of 6.7% over the previous year.
- ▶▶ **5** Co-Op students went on to become Valedictorians in their respective faculties at the spring 2023 Saint Mary's convocation.

# Fostering Future Readiness

## In the **News**: Student Leadership Conference

In its first real return since before the global pandemic, the annual Student Leadership Conference (SLC) boasted a jam-packed day featuring inspiring speakers, motivational break-out sessions and a student leader panel.

The theme, “Stepping up to Leadership” put an emphasis on new perspectives and understandings of what being a leader means, focusing on how the global pandemic evolved the construct of student leadership. More than 85 students attended the 2023 Leadership Conference, with a broad range of new and long-time SMU community student leaders.

The conference aims to develop and hone important leadership skills and strategies including self-care and wellness, communication skills, career sessions, time management, organization and social responsibility.

The day was topped with an inspiring keynote speech from powerhouse alumna, Keisha Turner BA'12.



## Student Communications and Support

### Introduction

Effective communications and support for students means simplifying the navigating process in accessing information, engaging with services and engaging with resources that yield desired results, whether it be in building connections, managing course loads, making health a priority, achieving academic goals or building on skills. SAAS has worked to develop and maintain relationships across Saint Mary's for consultation, collaboration and referral. This means we have been able to cut down on the degrees of separation from students to services resulting in better connecting students with the right resource at the right time for the right reason.

We are ever adapting our approach to engaging students, relying on formal and informal student feedback, data and analytics to inform new strategies and improve existing ones. We are also increasing opportunities for one-to-one connections with students through peer-led initiatives that have allowed us to build trust and reinforce connections. The efforts that have been developed and built on by the units throughout SAAS have on over the past year continue to see positive results from proactive and reactive support both academically and personally for students.

## Tailored Communications Newsletters

- ▶▶ The Communications Office collaborates on both the student and Faculty/Staff bi-weekly Bulletin Newsletter
- ▶▶ The International Student Centre produces the FusionNewsletter weekly for International Students
- ▶▶ The Counselling Centre produces a Healthy Mindsnewsletter with health and wellness related content
- ▶▶ Career and Experiential Learning produces a newsletter to stay connected with community partners and employers
- ▶▶ Residence Life produced a Top 5 e-newsletter distributed twice a week providing a roundup of upcoming events and important information

## Career and Employment Coaching Guides Students in Next Steps

Career & employment coaches work directly with students in enhancing their communication skills to market themselves to employers articulating experiences and skills gained through work, volunteer, and academic experiences via writing of cover letters and resumes and LinkedIn profiles as well as verbally during interviews. In addition to workshops, career & employment coaches meet with students on a one-to-one basis, where they held 1901 individual appointments to support students job search and career research efforts.



# Student Communications and Support

## Peer Success Coaches Expand Reach and Impact

In the 2022 academic term, the Peer Success Coaching program was finally able to move to in person coaching and events for the first time. Where previously the program was run exclusively in a virtual environment, the coaches and mentees are now able to engage in new and less formal ways allowing for more ways to build and maintain relationships. The move to include in person engagement also created opportunities to develop new programming. Coffee with Coaches was introduced as a way for coaches and mentees to check in and connect during key times throughout the year when students may need extra support, encouragement or referrals to various campus supports.

In the past year, 27 Peer Success Coaching events were held with a cumulative 1267 participants. Through these direct connections with coaches, 287 referrals were made to provide specific or tailored supports to students. Referral channels included direction to Academic Advising, Learning Skills and Strategies, the International Student Centre, Career and Experiential Learning, Student Awards and Financial Aid.



## Early Assist Sees Increased Retention in Engaged Students

Early Assist is a coordinated support program that supports students who may face difficulties that have the potential to put their academic success at risk. Through Early Assist we connect students to services and advice as early as possible in the term in hopes of mitigating the risk of major academic implications. Early Assist relies on a campus-wide care team which consists of Academic Advisors, the Learning Strategist, Student Success Specialists, extended supports in the Fred Smithers Centre for Student Accessibility, and Financial Aid and Awards.



# Student Communications and Support



“  
*I appreciate that the Learning Skills and Strategies Coach, really seemed to get [my daughter] and their approach in asking her what she can manage versus telling her what she should be doing has really made a difference for her!! She feels like someone is finally actually listening to her!*  
”

-Parent of 2nd-year Arts student

## Learning Skills and Strategies Quick Stats

**94** | LSS workshops offered.

**17** | Study Hall sessions conducted.

**468** | Cumulative number of students attending workshops and study hall sessions.

**215** | Learning Skills Coaching appointments.

**78%** | Increase in coaching appointments from Winter 2022 to Winter 2023.



# Student Communications and Support

## Sexual Violence Advisor Role Supports Disclosures and Reports

In response to the introduction of a dedicated Sexual Violence Advisor in the Fall of 2021, both Disclosures and Reports of sexual violence have increased. The trend of increased Disclosures and Reports is in line with other Post-Secondary Institutions across Nova Scotia and Canada that have added specific sexual violence prevention and response supports to their campus communities. The capacity building, increased awareness, and clear and safe pathways for sharing and receiving support are key reasons why these increases have been observed. Feedback from students, staff, and faculty has highlighted the benefits of this support service to the campus community.

Measure 	2020-2021	2020-2021	2020-2021			
Disclosure 	12	42	64			
Reports 	Code of Student Conduct 1	Code of Student Conduct 3	Code of Student Conduct 4	HR Resolution 1	SVH Policy Informal Resolution 1	SVH Policy Informal Resolution 1
Total	13	45	71			

# Assessment, Research and Improvement

## Assessment, Research and Improvement

Student Affairs and Services commits to transparency, self-evaluation and ongoing evolution of practices. It is important to reflect on our strengths and successes while looking for areas to improve and enhance. We recognize that the institutional landscape and the needs of our learners are ever changing and the most dangerous approach we can take is the, “it’s always been done this way” model. SAAS seeks to take chances, modernize our understanding, meet our students on their level and push past the bar of standard practice.

Units across SAAS are employing strategies such as research, data and analytic assessment, informal and formal feedback collection through forms, surveys, etc., and community consultation to reinforce efforts, provide empirical understandings, and inform improvements and new developments. We are also working closely with faculty members in conducting research and analysis related to student success and graduation rates.

## The Future of SAAS

As we look towards the future, we look forward to exploring new ways of simplifying the navigation process for students, finding more fun and engaging ways to connect with students and seeing the fruits of our labour continuing to yield positive results and impacts through the achievements and success of SMU students. We have many exciting projects already in development for the 2023-2024 year with promise of significant impacts in various aspects of the student experience. The passion of our SAAS team, paired with all our unique backgrounds, understandings, training, education and skill sets enable us to approach student support from a broad scope of diverse perspectives and understandings. As we continue to learn, develop trust and build our relationships with students and SMU stakeholders, our propensity for impact will reach more swiftly moving into the post-COVID era of institutionalized learning and living.





**Saint Mary's  
University**