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Saint Mary's Cuts Faculty, Staff, Programs

By Jennifer Wake

Colleges and universities across the country have been squeezed by the recent economic downturn, and are being forced to make some tough decisions. Saint Mary's College is no exception, with its president, Brother Ronald Gallagher, FSC, recently announcing cuts to faculty, staff, and a few campus programs.

In a March 20 letter he wrote to the campus community, Gallagher stated that two departments, Saint Mary's Architectural Services, and the Committee for Lectures, Arts and Music (CLAM) will be closed effective April 1. In addition, the college has halted employer contributions to its defined retirement plans, has frozen its employer contribution for health insurance, and laid off 19 of 61 adjunct faculty to date with 12 staff members slated to lose their jobs between April 1 and June 30.

"The most difficult and at times painful work of the past few weeks has been identifying the reductions in the faculty and staff salary pools (\$750,000 and \$1.5 million respectively)," Gallagher wrote. "Reducing or ending the employment of valued members of our community literally puts a human face on the economic challenges we confront."

The college also eliminated 13 currently vacant staff positions, and cut hours of 27 other staff members.

"The women in the business office have cut back their hours, but they had a choice of how to do it," said one SMC staff member who will be working two months less each year following the cuts. "One person I know of is taking Fridays off. Another is only working until 3 p.m. I needed to give up two months somewhere, if not all in summer, then somewhere else."

The cuts were just one of many budget-saving changes Saint Mary's has implemented this year after the college saw a 26.4 percent decrease in its endowment - which dropped from \$151.8 million as of June 30, 2008 to \$111.7 million as of Nov. 30, 2008 - as well as a projected decrease in enrollment for the coming years.

Over the past two months, the college has held open meetings to discuss the budget challenges it faces and it is preparing contingency plans in the event that changes in market conditions veer away from the college's "baseline planning assumptions."

"We seem to receive almost daily reminders of the dynamism of our economic environment through gyrations in markets, state budget uncertainties or announcements of new levels of financial adjustments by other esteemed institutions of higher education," Gallagher wrote.

In addition to cuts at Saint Mary's, Stanford University recently announced \$100 million in cuts from its general fund budget after its \$17.2 billion endowment shrunk as much as 30 percent since the 2008 fiscal year end. UC Berkeley last week held a town hall meeting to discuss ways to balance its budget, which has a projected deficit approaching \$70 million for the next fiscal year.

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