



# Building Connections That Will Endure

ON THE BUSY CAMPUS OF SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA, THE "POINT PERSON FOR THE ACTION PLAN" BRINGS PEOPLE AND RESOURCES TOGETHER.

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A new office at Saint Mary's College, sponsored jointly by the College and the District of San Francisco, is quickly becoming a productive center of outreach and support, connecting the College to the District and the world in new and fruitful ways.

Putting the District Action Plan of 1999 into action – a virtual whirlwind of action – is a new office at Saint Mary's College and its dynamic first occupant, Professor Carole Swain of the Saint Mary's School of Education. Swain says, "After the District Chapter in 1999, Dean Fannie Preston of the School of Education and I took some modest proposals to the College President, Brother Craig Franz, about the School of Education's

faculty doing some work with District high schools. But Brother Craig had a bigger idea in mind."

In cooperation with both District and College leadership, Brother Craig instituted the office of Special Assistant to the President for Lasallian Initiatives, a faculty position, funded jointly by the College and De La Salle Institute. In July 2000, Carole Swain became the first holder of the office, in which she will serve for a term of up to five years. "The term limit is an intentional way to ensure that this

work at the College becomes institutionalized," says Swain.

The job description says: "Reporting to the President of the College, the Special Assistant to the President for Lasallian Initiatives assists with matters relating to the De La Salle Christian Brothers' San Francisco District Action Plan, and functions as the primary administrative officer for promoting, coordinating, and implementing Lasallian initiatives among all



*The first-ever Special Assistant to the President for Lasallian Initiatives at Saint Mary's College of California is Carole Swain, Professor of Education. "In this job I want to promote throughout the College an understanding of the Lasallian heritage that will result in educational action that enhances learning and service, and makes for more fully developed, healthy human beings. And I want to build enduring connections between Saint Mary's College and the works of the District and the International Institute."*



**“I would like to be the kind of Lasallian teacher I had here at Saint Mary’s, people like Ron Isetti, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, and Myrna Santiago. To me a Lasallian teacher is not just an authority figure but someone who is there to help however it’s needed, to help students grow.”**

– Francisco Lopez

*These Saint Mary’s grads of 2001 are the first recipients of Lasallian Educator Fellowships. Having agreed to teach in District high schools, they are earning their teacher certification in Saint Mary’s School of Education tuition-free, with grants awarded by the College, and will begin teaching full-time in the fall of 2002.*

**The prospective teachers and their tentative assignments are, from left to right:**

**Sara Headd**, who will teach science and math at Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento;

**Annemarie Beretta**, who will teach history at De La Salle High School in Concord;

**Francisco Lopez**, who will teach history, government, and Spanish at La Salle High School, Yakima;

**Angela Martinez**, who will teach Spanish, history, and religion at Justin-Siena High School in Napa; and

**Adelaida Duenas**, who will teach Spanish at Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory in San Francisco.

constituents of the College and with external constituencies, especially Lasallian high schools.”

### **Cultivating Positive Relationships**

It is notable that this is not an administrative position but a faculty position. The office is thus a clear signal that the Lasallian mission is central to the College’s educational work. And it requires a professor with a wide set of skills: a doctorate in education or related field, a proven record of teaching, scholarship, and service, an ability to articulate the College’s mission, and the ability to “cultivate positive relationships among the programs,

departments, centers, schools at Saint Mary’s College, the District, and the International Institute.”

A tall order. But for Carole Swain, an inspiring challenge. She says, “I took the job because I felt that my colleagues in the College might get as much out of relationships with the Brothers’ schools as I have, both locally and internationally. We at the College have resources to share, and the mutual benefit of working together appeals to me. I felt those mutual benefits deeply myself when I first went to St. La Salle University in the Philippines in 1992. I went there to do some teacher-training work, and I saw teachers there with very few resources energized by their faith and their sense of community. I came back filled with ardent zeal about what an educational community can be.”

### **Doing the Simple Things**

That zeal propels her as she fulfills the office’s mandate. Says Swain, “I go around doing fairly simple things. I tell people in the College about all the opportunities through the College and the District to connect with other educational works. And I ask the high schools and other works in the District what they need that the College might supply. Based on the answers, I try to put together needs and resources.”

Here are two examples of needs and resources coming together in the past year, illustrative of the many levels on which connections are being made. One example involves a new experience for one person; the other is the creation of a whole new program.

**The person:** In summer 2001, for the first time, a College faculty member took part in the

District’s Summer Immersion program in India and Sri Lanka. Thomas Cooney, coordinator of the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing, calls his trip to India “one of the best experiences of my life. Before I left, I asked the whole College community to donate school supplies, which I took with me for the kids in the orphanage there. I interacted with the kids, worked on school buildings, and helped the De La Salle Brothers’ postulants with their English. I had left California exhausted, and I came back from India refreshed.” How did he find out about this link to the International Institute? “Carole Swain came to a meeting of the College’s program directors to tell them about the District’s programs.”

**The program:** Viki

Aquistapace, a biology teacher at De La Salle High School in Concord, says, “I was new at the school in fall 2000, and I asked the Principal, Brother Chris Brady, how we could reach out to science professionals to enrich our biology curriculum. He phoned the College, and Carole Swain got to work.” In January 2001, with two College science professors, Judd Case and Jacob Lester, volunteering their time and talent, the inaugural Jan Term High School Science Experience took place. Sophomores from De La Salle High did a month of work in the new teaching labs of J.C. Gatehouse Hall at Saint Mary’s. Plans call for the program to become an annual event and to expand to include chemistry and physics. In addition to getting college-level science experience, the sophomores got a bonus on their last day: SMC tee shirts handed out by Carole Swain.

## “Especially Lasallian High Schools”

As it says in the job description, the Special Assistant is to focus especially on Lasallian high schools. The principal focus has indeed been there, particularly in the training and formation of teachers. One important initiative of the past year was the first-ever Service Learning Institute. In January 2001, the College, its CILSA office, and De La Salle Institute combined to bring teachers, staff, and students from District high schools to the Saint Mary's campus to confer about service and service learning in their high school curricula. “I'm incredibly impressed and inspired to see something like this finally happen,” said one participant. Another innovative project was the inaugural Religious Studies Institute held on campus in June 2001, another joint venture of the College and the District for the benefit of teachers in District high schools. “The Religious Studies Institute is a promising step in the right direction,” says Sorin Spohn of Saint Mary's College High School in Berkeley.

“But as far as the College's outreach to the District high schools is concerned,” says Carole Swain, “the top story of our first year has to be the Lasallian Educator Fellowship Program just created in cooperation with the Saint Mary's School of Education and overseen by Joan Peterson of the School of Education. This really had its start, like so many other things, in the process of asking the District schools, ‘What do you need?’ The high schools said, ‘We need teachers.’”

Through this program, the College awards grants to graduating

seniors or to recent College graduates who agree to teach in District high schools. In exchange for their commitment to a three-year term of teaching, the Saint Mary's graduates are enabled to spend a year in full-time work toward their teaching credential in the Saint Mary's School of Education, tuition-free, with the prospect of beginning their high school teaching the following fall.

## Grants for Teachers in Training

The five graduates of 2001 currently in the program (one student, Jazareth Lopez, was accepted but has deferred her studies until next year) are excited and grateful. Says Annemarie Beretta, “I was applying to Lasallian Volunteers, but Brother Michael Avila knew that my ultimate goal was teaching, and he told me about this new fellowship program, and when I interviewed with the people from De La Salle High I felt right at home.” Francisco Lopez says, “I would like to be a teacher like the ones I had here at Saint Mary's, people like Ron Isetti, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, and Myrna Santiago. To me a Lasallian teacher is not just an authority figure but someone who is there to help however it's needed, to help students grow.” Angela Martinez says that for her the fellowship program is perfect: “First, it pays the cost of getting my credential. Second, I get to teach in a Lasallian school. Third, I do my credential studies in the Saint Mary's School of Ed. I found out about the program because my teacher handed out flyers in class and there was a meeting about it that very afternoon. For me, it just fell out of the sky.”

Of course, those flyers didn't come from the sky. They came from the office of the Special Assistant to

the President for Lasallian Initiatives. Enduring connections are indeed being made, by simple means pursued energetically: A word dropped here, a flyer posted there, a phone call answered, a program started. “I'm a kind of broker,” says Carole Swain modestly. Other applicable metaphors might be town crier, networker, bridge

**“You have inaugurated something very worthwhile with solid potential.”**

**“A well-connected combination of theory and practice.”**

*So said participants in an important new initiative in teacher formation – the Religious Studies Institute – held at Saint Mary's College in June 2001 as a joint venture of the College and De La Salle Institute. High school teachers from throughout the District came for a week of workshops and presentations on adolescent spiritual development and religious education.*



builder, resource, catalyst, and talent scout.

However you characterize what Carole Swain does, it seems to be working. Schoolkids in India toting SMC notebooks and folders, and sophomores at De La Salle High in Concord wearing SMC tee shirts are small but vivid markers of the many links being created – living connections that will, we hope, endure. ✨

