

NEWS RELEASE

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University of Saint Mary Named to President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll

(Leavenworth, Kan.)—When the University of Saint Mary opened its Service Learning Center, the aim was to help students gain a civic responsibility to help those less fortunate. Two years after its creation, the center is being recognized nationally for its achievements.

In October, Saint Mary became one of only 141 colleges and universities (out of a possible 510) named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. The honor roll was created in 2006 by President Bush's Council on Service and Civic Participation in collaboration with the Corporation for National Community Service and Campus Compact. The President's Honor Roll will be awarded annually to schools of all enrollment sizes based on student-led service projects from the previous year.

"We are very proud that the University of Saint Mary has received the distinction of making the first-ever President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll," USM Academic Vice President Sandra VanHoose said. "Service is stressed from the moment our students arrive all the way through graduation. We are proud to be a leader in Kansas Campus Compact, a coalition of Kansas colleges established to encourage and support campus engagement in the community."

USM Service Learning VISTA Sara Denny received the news at the National Community Awards Ceremony Oct. 17. "We feel that we have one of the strongest programs in Kansas," she said. "And this helps to show that."

For the inaugural awarding, the council focused on Hurricane Katrina aid and relief projects. USM sponsored a host of Hurricane Katrina service projects including "Operation: Living the Mission," which provided free tuition for college students displaced by the storm. USM also paired with the American Red Cross and Catholic Community Services to publicize aid for victims, and held campus-wide fundraisers and clothing drives. However, the most eye-opening relief project came nearly one year after Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. In May 2006, Denny led 21 USM students to New Orleans, who discovered that much of the area remained in disarray. The group worked for one week deconstructing houses to prep them for reconstruction.

"The experience was emotionally and physically exhausting," Denny said after the trip. "The hurricane and the devastation it caused will be in the history books, but hopefully what's part of history is the response. The response of individuals like us."

About the Service Learning Center

The University of Saint Mary Service Learning Center is sponsored by the Kansas Campus Compact, which comprises a coalition of 15 colleges and universities established to encourage and support campus engagement in the community. USM's Service Learning Center sponsors all service learning activities, including five annual alternative break service trips to Appalachia, Kentucky, Guatemala, Denver, urban St. Louis, and New Orleans.

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