

NEWS RELEASE

Jan. 2, 2007

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University of Saint Mary Winner Of 2007 CHEA Award For Institutional Progress In Student Learning Outcomes

(Leavenworth, Kan.)—When the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth founded the University of Saint Mary, they made education one of the university’s founding missions. Throughout its 83 year history, the Education Department has made a significant contribution to K-12 education through its programs for teachers. In late December, USM’s Master of Arts programs in Education (MAE) and in Teaching (MAT) received national recognition for their emphasis on student learning outcomes.

The University of Saint Mary was awarded the 2007 Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes in December. CHEA is a Washington-based non-profit organization that evaluates accredited organizations for quality and also serves as an advocate on accreditation issues to government. Saint Mary is one of only five schools nationwide to receive the honor.

CHEA uses four criteria for evaluation that focus on student-learning outcomes. The four CHEA criteria categories include articulation and evidence of outcomes, success with regard to outcomes, information to the public about outcomes and using outcomes for improvement. For the past several years, Sister Frances Juiliano, chair of the education department, and Dr. Gretchen Wilbur, education professor and dean for assessment, have worked diligently to establish proper evaluation methods for MAE and MAT students.

According to Dr. Sandra VanHoose, vice president and academic dean, the Education Department’s reputation for success remains strong today thanks to diligence of professors like Juiliano and Wilbur.

“We are absolutely thrilled with this recognition,” VanHoose said. “Dr. Wilbur, our dean for assessment, S. Frances Juiliano, chair of the education department, and all of the education department faculty members deserve this honor for the years of work and good thinking they’ve put into the question ‘how do we know students learn what we say we teach them, and how do we continually improve what we and they do?’ That question speaks to the whole of our university as well, as we take these questions about learning seriously. For USM, it’s also about a teacher-student relationship that is at the heart of what we do well.”

Wilbur presented the noteworthy assessment system in the CHEA Award Application with assistance from education faculty members and Marketing Director Laura Davis. In describing the key features of the programs, Wilbur highlighted how student learning outcomes are central to teaching, learning, student-research, and ongoing improvement, and how student achievement results are made public. Wilbur has been selected to represent the University of Saint Mary while accepting the award at the 2007 CHEA Annual Conference, January 29 – 31 in Washington.

CHEA President Judith Eaton said the reputation of USM’s education program is well deserved. “Given the current debate regarding the role of student learning outcomes in accreditation, the University of Saint Mary serves as a solid example of the enormous progress that institutions are making through the implementation of comprehensive, thoughtful and effective initiatives. We are delighted to recognize this distinguished institution with this award,” she said.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is an organization of nearly 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and is the only higher education institutional membership association to be created by a referendum of college and university presidents. CHEA scrutinizes accrediting organizations for quality (“recognition” of

accrediting organizations), based on self-created standards, and also serves as an advocate on accreditation issues to government. For more information, visit CHEA's Internet site at www.chea.org.

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