Mount Mary University’s (MMU’s) educational vision and values derive from the legacy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). Unity in diversity is at the heart of the SSND mission and the university. Diversity and inclusion carry forward the principles on which the university was originally founded. Our faculty commit to fostering an environment that witnesses to unity in a divided world during their commissioning ceremony. As faculty develop teaching and learning within their disciplines, the core values of Mount Mary are central to education at the university: compassion, competence, community and commitment. Individually and collectively, Mount Mary’s values based education promotes a holistic education that welcomes students from diverse backgrounds and emphasizes the development of the whole person.

Sponsored by the SSND, MMU is an urban Catholic university for women that strives to be recognized as a diverse learning community that works in partnership with local, national and global organizations to educate women to transform the world. Over its history, the university has been committed to building an inclusive, diverse learning community. Consistent with this vision, MMU serves an increasingly diverse population of undergraduate women students. Our campus brings together women with different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, cultures, and religious and political beliefs.

In 2014, MMU ranked as the 5th highest Midwest regional institution for diversity and we embrace the opportunity to foster cross-racial interactions and decrease the racial divide in Milwaukee. Today, nearly half of full-time undergraduate students at the university are minority (fall of 2015). Mount Mary University students are also socioeconomically diverse. Again, nearly half of all undergraduate students receive Pell grants in the 2013-14 academic year. Students are also diverse in terms of their age, religious beliefs, national affiliation, and abilities. Students are predominantly from the greater Milwaukee area and remain in the area after graduating. While students come from the surrounding community, the campus provides a diverse environment that many may not have experienced before. 2010 US Census data shows that Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties top the black-white segregation index of America’s top 100 metro areas (Frey, 2010).

**The diversity of our campus is a direct result of the social justice actions of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.**

**HISTORY IN BRIEF**

The Directional Statement of the School Sisters of Notre Dame states: “In fidelity to our charism of unity in diversity, we commit…to direct our resources and ministries toward education that transforms and calls all to eliminate the root causes of injustice.”

Towards that end, MMU has intentionally moved from exclusion to inclusion. For the last several decades, the diversity of the university’s student body increased from 12% minority in 1980 and 1990 to
Express efforts to promote diversity and student success began in the 1970s and expanded in the 1980s to the present day. As Deans of Students, Sister Isaac Jogues Rousseau and later Sister Shannon Scallon pioneered student services. They helped students establish the Coretta Scott King Association, a student group for minority women that played an important role in the college. While the student group for women of color changed in name and composition over time to the many that exist today, over the years it was an active group on campus sponsoring speakers, workshops, and programs of various kinds. The first Director of Special Services, Glenda Holley, was hired in 1979, and served as Advisor to this group. The students also set up an alumnae group so they could continue to meet and provide programs. The annual Black Alumnae Tea was a very elegant affair and attracted prominent speakers from the Black community like Marlene Cummings, a Governor’s Advisor of Women’s Initiatives.

During these decades, multicultural issues were more explicitly addressed in teaching and learning. Many departments joined the Sociology Department and Social Work Programs in offering course work addressing minority issues (i.e. the Black American Family, Racial and Cultural Minorities). For example, the Education Department offered Teaching in a Multicultural Society as early as 1971 and the English Department offered Multiethnic Literature and Chicano Literature. In addition to studying about the effects of prejudice, poverty, and the various cultural groups, students learned from speakers of various cultures and field trips.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the sisters at MMU also extended their work on diversity issues beyond the campus. A partnership between Mount Mary, Marquette, Cardinal Stritch, and Alverno, offered a tuition-free program 26% minority in 2000 and 46% minority in 2010. As diversity has increased so have the services that the university offers to support student. Personal, academic and financial support services are important for student success, especially for the success of first generation, low-income, and students of color.

The following graph provides a visual representation of how student demographics at MMU have changed from 1980 to the present day:
to 100 Milwaukee Public School teachers and students. Each week national level speakers from various minority groups addressed the class and held robust discussions that challenged and enriched students. During these years, Sister Joanne Poehlman worked with a young man who followed Father Groppe and the city-wide Interinstitutional Committee to initiate and deliver a “Career Orientation Program for Inner City Youth.” Their program helped expose seventh and eighth graders to possible careers through a multifaceted effort. Faculty at the university planned field trips to take youth out of the inner city while students in teacher education volunteered to serve as chaperones. In some cases, these were held at Mount Mary - Sister Aloyse Hessberg planned a fashion program for them; Kay Elsen gave them a lesson in the chemistry lab on how to make cosmetics.

Notably during these years, a collaborative program led to the creation of Milwaukee Achiever Literacy Services, which exists today. It began when leadership from Alverno, Cardinal Stritch, and Mount Mary came together to discuss the academic under preparedness of many disadvantaged students. They realized that many retired sisters were former teachers and might want to volunteer for such an effort. Opportunity collided with a Ford Foundation’s planning grant proposal and the problem of high rates of adult illiteracy was addressed - and Milwaukee Achiever was born. While the need was clear, it would not have happened if Sister Mary Catherine Dundon had not accepted the position as the director. She had been the chair of Mount Mary’s Education Department, and a teacher prior to that with a deep concern for the needs of the poor. “She was asked to take on a program that had no budget, no site, no teachers, and no curriculum. Single-handedly, she took this on. Within a short time she had located a place on the South Side for the center, had developed a curriculum to teach basic skills, located tutoring materials, engaged volunteers, recruited students, and raised funds. Within a few years, three centers to serve the neediest in Milwaukee had developed.”

During the 1990’s and 2000’s, diversity increased on campus. MMU began to form and then broadly implement comprehensive student support services to promote student success by addressing a full range of academic and non-academic barriers that especially hinder underrepresented minorities and disadvantaged students. In 2005 MMU launched two initiatives to engage and support our changing student population: 1) service learning across the curriculum and 2) comprehensive, wrap-around supports. The goal was to help MMU’s diverse student population increase its sense of belonging as college students and as college graduates as it is critical to retention and success.

In the mid-2000’s, MMU faculty and administrators participated in the Milwaukee Mosaic Partnership Program, which built social capital by integrating individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to weave social networks to enable the Greater Milwaukee community to realize its full social and economic potential. Near 2010, MMU launched its out Building Bridges for two years thanks to a generous grant from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Building Bridges was designed to build trusting relationships between diverse students. It provided intentional community-building activities to foster relationships in order to increase understanding and appreciation among various cultural individuals who are educated in diverse settings are far more likely to work and live in racially and ethnically diverse environments and are better prepared for life in an increasingly complex and diverse society.
groups. Activities included monthly one–on-one, group events and community celebrations. It yielded positive outcomes. With individuals reporting changes in perception via pre and post-surveys. However, while the Mosaic Partnerships engaged faculty and staff, Building Bridges involved primarily students and only 5% of faculty and staff.

Service Learning is a high-impact retention practice which MMU has invested significant resources to implement. **Service Learning** builds life-long learning skills, helps students form connections with the larger community, increases students’ commitment to social justice and academic performance, and enhances professional competence and empathy (Astin et al., 2000). Leadership for Social Justice (SYM 110) is a core course required of first year students at the university. It is a three-credit seminar introducing students to the depth of thinking called for in a college environment and addressing the mission and values of Mount Mary University. This interactive and reflective course addresses MMU’s mission, leadership, social justice, creativity, and service-learning through human-centered design/design thinking. LSJ explores the difficult topics of race, gender and class as it nurtures student voice and leadership.

Civil Rights Leader James Meredith, who spoke at Mount Mary in 1968.

Comprehensive wrap-around support involves student advising, academic counseling, tutoring and other learning services, advising and career development as well as access to counseling services. Close faculty student relationships are important at the university. Class sizes are small and advising is required before students can progress in their major. When students do not have a major, they are assigned an advisor from Advising and Career Development. Professional and peer tutoring are available free of charge to all members of the MMU community who wish to enhance their academic skills. In addition to specializing in content areas such as writing, reading, math and science, tutors work with students to teach strategies for study skills such as time management, test taking and active reading. The Advising and Career Development Office provides assistance to all students in all stages of academic and career planning (self-assessment, information gathering, gaining experience, and job search) via individual counseling, workshops, classes and activities available throughout their university years and within a year after graduation.

Access to services is important. MMU has invested in an early alert system, connecting faculty and staff to the university’s Student Outreach and Support Team. When students demonstrate a need by missing classes, consistently performing below standards, facing financial difficulty, and discuss personal problems, faculty and staff alert the Student Success Center through a central electronic early alert system. A Student Outreach and Support Team responds to help the student, let the faculty and staff member know that the student has been contacted, and continues to check-in with the student’s progress over the semester. The Student Outreach and Support Team meets daily to review the progress of students with early alerts.

In 2011, the current Student Success Center was configured. Located in the Haggerty Library and Learning Commons, MMU’s Student Success Center offer students one-stop access to a range of individualized services including Academic Advising, Academic Counseling, Accessibility Services, Career Development Services, Counseling Center, Service Learning, Tutoring and Testing Services. Tutors are available through the Student Support Center. Career Services helps students learn about career and employment opportunities while at Mount Mary and after graduation. They help with resume building, applications, interview preparations and continuing professional development.
Two grant funded programs were also specifically designed to attract and retain disadvantaged students and underrepresented minority populations:

**Grace Scholars** – MMU’s Grace Scholars Program increases access to post-secondary education in communities where college might otherwise be out of reach. Each year, the program provides 30 incoming freshman with 85 percent tuition coverage for four years. To qualify, students must be incoming freshman from the city of Milwaukee who demonstrate leadership skills and have financial need. MMU focuses on reaching out to urban, under-resourced high schools to inform prospective students about the program. In addition to financial aid, Grace Scholars receive academic and personal support.

**Promise Program** – MMU’s Promise Program, a federally funded TRIO Student Support Services program, also serves first-generation and low-income college students at the university in order to help them remain in good academic standing, persist in college, and graduate with a baccalaureate degree. Promise Scholars benefit from resources such as tutoring, academic and personal development workshops, FAFSA assistance, and financial literacy information and training, personal counseling, college success and career advising, and advanced degree planning.

More recently, Mount Mary University has implemented a First Year Student Program to facilitate student success during the critical first year period. Research has found that the first year is a critical period for student success, particularly low-income and minority students (Urcraft and Gardner, 1989; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, Astin 1993, Tinto 1993). Today the Director of First-Year Student Outreach to intervene when students become academically at-risk during the critical first year. This position provides one-on-one support to students who are identified as at-risk through the university’s early alert system by connecting them to a variety of services on campus to help them overcome barriers to success and persist in college through graduation.

In order to further cohesion across student services, Student Affairs was reorganized in the spring of 2016. Student Success Center staff now report to the Dean of Student Affairs, Sarah Olejniczak, in order to centralize services and processes for students. In addition, efforts continue to be made to improve teaching and learning for a diverse student population. Dean Kathleen Dougherty led the development of a proposal to secure funding from the Wabash Center to help MMU theology and philosophy faculty revise *The Search for Meaning*. The grant will support faculty development activities from the summer of 2016 through the spring of 2018 to explore evidenced-based pedagogical approaches to better engage our diverse student population.

**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION TODAY**

Today, MMU continues to invest significant resources each year to ensure that there is a diverse student body on campus. The university also continues to provide a continuum of financial, personal, academic, and professional supports that improve retention for disadvantaged and underrepresented minority students. Reflecting the success of these initiatives, MMU has an overall retention rate of 76%. The six-year graduation rate is 42% which, after controlling for spending and student demographics is better than peer institutions when data is disaggregated.

MMU’s 2015 NSSE results show that our students report significantly more interactions with diverse others as compared to students at comparison institutions. This is important because college students’ interpersonal interactions with diversity are associated with improved cognitive skills, leadership skills, civic engagement, self-concept, sense of belonging, cultural awareness, and intergroup attitudes (Antonio
In addition, individuals who are educated in diverse settings are far more likely to work and live in racially and ethnically diverse environments and are better prepared for life in an increasingly complex and diverse society (Hurtado et al., 2003).

MMU is in the final planning stages of a new strategic plan that builds on its success and commitment to educating and elevating a diverse student body. Two focus areas of the strategic plan relevant to this program are academic excellence and student success. In academic excellence, the focus is on initiatives that will increase active learning in the classroom, an approach which has been shown to help students, especially underrepresented minority students learn (reviewed by Freeman et al, 2014). Active learning also fosters equity and excellence in education. The area of student success includes diversity initiatives to promote a sense of community and a supportive environment for learning, and career development services to connect classroom experiences with vocation and professional skills.

MMU and its Council on Diversity and Inclusion seek to cultivate inclusive excellence at the university and beyond.


