



The Rattler

A St. Mary's Student Publication since 1925 • Vol. 97, Issue 5 • 12-09-09



Online shopping

High prices are driving students away from stores and to the Web.

PG.8

Concert Band

Performers end the semester with a bang at the Christmas concert.

PG. 10

The price of education

St. Mary's 2008 graduates left with an average \$27,416 in debt — a figure of many factors.

By Sarah Mills
Editor-In-Chief

St. Mary's University 2008 graduates faced an average debt of \$27,416 on finishing their undergraduate education, according to data compiled by the university.

In contrast, students at The University of the Incarnate Word, a private university like St. Mary's, had a higher average indebtedness for graduates in 2008 — about \$39,985, according to UIW data. Graduates of the University of Texas at San Antonio, a public university, graduated with an average of \$20,083 in debt in 2008, according to data compiled by UTSA.

The data are contained in each institution's Common Data Set (CDS), an initiative by higher education institutions and publishers which is intended to improve the quality and accuracy of information provided and to reduce the reporting burden on data providers. The CDS is based on students who have attended a university since the beginning of their freshman year.

According to David Krause, St. Mary's director of financial aid, private colleges and universities generally tend to have higher tuition than public ones, and higher average indebtedness is associated with higher tuition. Other factors that affect average indebtedness include the amount of time a student takes to graduate, the endowment resources for financial aid, the average financial aid package offered, the cost of living in the area, the number of an institution's part-time and commuter students -- and student demographics, such as family income and ability to pay, he said.

Krause argued it's also important to look at how much average indebtedness a graduate has in relation to the university's tuition and fees.

"Based on the level of graduate indebtedness of St. Mary's compared to UTSA, a St. Mary's student will borrow more over four years, an amount that averages out to less than \$2,000 a year," said Krause. "However, the price differential between our tuition and fees [for this current academic year] is \$10,000 more than UTSA's a year. That means the price differential is not being put on the backs of students, mainly because of St. Mary's commitment to providing non-loan resources."

Lucha Ramey, director of media relations, argues that these factors provide "proof of why St. Mary's has been consistently ranked by the U.S. News & World Report as

one of the best values in the West."

The extent of students' college debt depends partly on how well they plan, according to Krause and Rosalind Alderman, assistant vice president for student retention.

"A lot of it depends on your priorities, choices and planning," Alderman said. "You have to figure out the big picture of this."

Some students come to her with as much as \$100,000 in debt for advice, she said. Others have debt as low as \$2,000.

"You need to be smart from the beginning about how much debt you want to be in and also what that debt really means," Alderman said.

In addition to early career planning, constant financial planning and monitoring is important to reduce or avoid debt, Krause said.

Krause advises students to apply for both departmental and outside scholarships, to complete the FAFSA by its deadline and to finish coursework early to minimize debt.

Looking at education as a value proposition and an investment is something Alderman said all students should do.

"You can't just figure out what to do for one year," Alderman said. "Every semester you tack on to your plan is money spent. The longer time you spend here, the longer you are not making money in the 'real world' with a job and the longer the propensity for needing loans will be."

Alderman pointed out that students can save money and time by taking up to 18 hours a semester since the tuition rate for 12 to 18 class hours is the same.

She also said that it is also important for students to consider how much money they will earn when they graduate because they must begin repaying their loans six months after entering the work force.

No matter what field a student is entering, students should plan early so that they are able to secure a job that enables them to pay their bills, said Leticia Hart, a specialist at the Career Services Center.

"We recommend that students start early with their career planning, so that we can start identifying opportunities that will benefit them," she said. "If they don't know where they are going, we encourage them to come visit us [Career Services] even sooner."

Alderman also stresses early career planning. "If you don't know what you want to do to begin with, then it doesn't matter what school you go to. You are still going to have issues with debt," she said.

Cont. on PG. 3, SEE "IN DEBT"