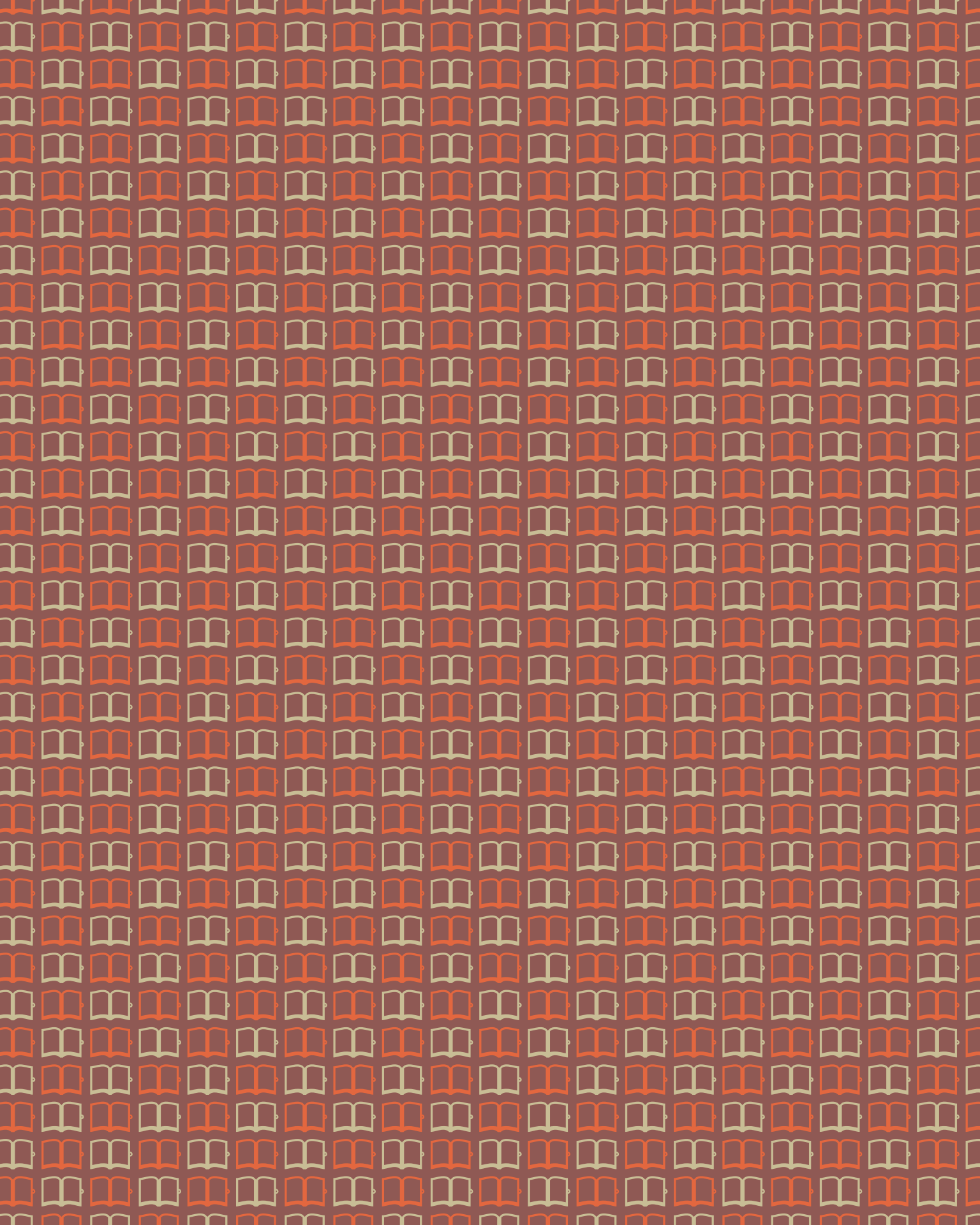


# HOLDING STRONG

2020 Report  
for Alumni & Friends

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE



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*Beautiful things are difficult.*

PLATO, *THE REPUBLIC*

Dear Alumni & Friends,

What a strange and frequently frustrating year 2020 has been.

It now feels quite surreal to look back on the opening letter to our previous annual report, written almost exactly one year ago. We were bracing for demographic headwinds that were (and still are) on their way, but we were also feeling rather optimistic, having just earned recognition as “Four-Year College of the Year.”

Little did we know how quickly the world would change.

There is simply no way to talk about 2020 without recognizing the damage this change has inflicted on the college. It was a year that hit us financially, although we did far better than most other small colleges. It was a wearying, stressful year for our staff and tutors and especially for our students, who spent nine months engaging with the Program remotely. While we believe we were successful at making the best of the situation and that many of our online classes were successful, we know that we did not provide the kind of college experience our students dreamed of or expected. Many struggled, and while we are optimistic that a vast majority will return to the college, more than a few chose to defer their enrollment.

This is our reality, even if it isn’t the one we anticipated or wanted. We cannot sugarcoat it but neither should we be overly dismayed. Because although 2020 might have indeed been a strange year, it was not a static one. It was a year in which we made considerable progress toward a number of important institutional goals, and we did so *in spite of* the challenges of the pandemic, and *because of* the generosity and perseverance of alumni and friends who are committed to seeing us through to the other side of this storm.

We have good reasons for thinking we can get there.

Our *Freeing Minds* campaign and, consequently, our endowment continue to grow, providing a protective buffer that helps to safeguard the college as we make our way through these challenging times. Although pandemic-related expenses and lost revenue have been painful, we were still able to meet our 2020 deficit reduction goal—a remarkable achievement that positions us to better absorb the challenges that are still to come.

We have also made great strides in our efforts to support and care for students, and we are doing more to help them find and afford St. John’s, to succeed at the Program, and to enjoy doing so.

The latter is especially important. Our Program is, after all, the heart of who we are as a liberal arts college, and it is the reason and the inspiration for all the goals we have set together. This part of our work cannot be adequately conveyed in facts and figures, so we have tried to let our students and tutors tell this side of the story, to reveal in their own words the strange year that was 2020 and the moments of magic and wonder that could still be found within it.

We hope the thoughts they have shared leave you feeling confident that the college is on a promising path, one that remains worthy of your involvement and support. No matter what 2021 brings, we must resolve to stay the course, to be vigilant, and to focus on our highest priority: providing an education that transforms the lives and frees the minds of all who seek it.

Gratefully,



**Mark Roosevelt**  
President, Santa Fe



**Pano Kanelos**  
President, Annapolis

# AS THE GLOBAL CRISIS UNFOLDED, HOW DID ST. JOHN'S RESPOND?

## We acted early and pivoted quickly.

*When it became clear in mid-March that the outbreak was spreading globally, we swiftly transitioned to remote operations, with both campuses open only to essential staff and to students who were unable to safely return home to their families. Driven by our shared purpose and a growing confidence in our institutional efficacy, we pulled together as a community to ensure that the work of the college would continue.*

Within a two-week time frame, staff were connected remotely and online classes were up and running—a rapid turnaround for a college that has long been skeptical of the virtual world.

## Our support systems sprang into action.

*We immediately mobilized our support services to care for the health and well-being of students who were forced to adapt to new circumstances and unfamiliar routines while isolated from their usual peer support systems.*

In addition to maintaining open lines of communication, St. John's staff and faculty helped students to access mental health care, connect with academic assistants, navigate changes to summer internships and fellowships, and locate additional resources in their own communities.

## Alumni and friends stepped forward in generous ways.

*As soon as the announcement was made that students would need to leave campus, our St. John's community rallied around students to ensure that their needs, ranging from food and shelter to transportation and moving supplies, were met. To provide additional support, the college launched the St. John's Student Emergency Relief Fund, raising more than \$77,000 to assist struggling students. Gifts came not only from alumni but also from parents and friends, who in some cases returned the refunds they received for room and board and canceled events.*

## We listened to and learned from our students and tutors.

*Throughout the crisis, we have done what Johnnies do best: ask questions.* Once we were confident that our students were safe, our next course of action was to survey our students and tutors to assess their technological needs and their perception of our initial efforts at delivering the Program online. What can be done to improve our labs and tutorials? How can we lessen the impact of screen fatigue? These are the kinds of questions we asked of those who are in the best position to judge the quality of our work together.

## “Jobs for Johnnies” helped connect students with potential employers.

*The economic hardships faced by our current students* have also been felt by new graduates, who found themselves entering the workforce at a time of rising unemployment. Through Jobs for Johnnies, a new initiative led by the St. John’s Board of Visitors and Governors, more than 50 students from the Class of 2020 were matched with 19 board members, who are leveraging their connections to help these new alumni find work in the toughest job market since the Great Depression.

## We took advantage of opportunities to offset our revenue losses.

*St. John’s was one of the first colleges to apply for and receive federal relief* funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Paycheck Protection Program. Funds totaling \$5.6 million helped to mitigate the losses we incurred from room and board refunds and the cancellation of on-campus programming and events. We also entered into an agreement with the U.S. Naval Academy to house approximately 380 midshipmen on our Annapolis campus during the Fall 2020 semester.

## We acted to protect our enrollment.

*Before the announcement was made that online classes would resume for* Fall 2020, St. John’s was on track to meet enrollment goals. Interest was especially strong in Santa Fe, where domestic applications rose more than 20 percent, in comparison to a nationwide decline.

Following the announcement, many students sought to defer enrollment to future terms, so we brought back a spring entry term for Annapolis freshmen, parallel to the “January Freshmen” experience already offered in Santa Fe. Of the 292 students we expected to enroll in the fall, 59 opted to wait until Spring 2021 and enter as “Febbies” in Annapolis or “January Freshmen” in Santa Fe. Another 65 students chose to defer for a full year and begin their St. John’s experience in Fall 2021, as members of the Class of 2025.

## We engaged our incoming freshmen early on as Johnnies.

*Staff and student ambassadors provided* new Johnnies with opportunities to sample the St. John’s experience during the crucial summer months—when admitted students are especially vulnerable to the lure of competing offers from other colleges and universities.

The *Meno* (complete with St. John’s branding) and the *Iliad* got students started on two of their first Program readings; the Summer Book Club series added their emerging voices to the Great Conversation; and “Goethe in a Box” offered a sneak peek into freshman lab and to the intersection of art and science.

## We are staying close to students who withdrew from the college.

*Student withdrawals have increased as the* effects of the pandemic continue to hit hard, prompting a vigorous effort to keep these students involved in the life of the college—and in their studies. This fall we took the unusual step of allowing students who withdrew for pandemic-related reasons to retain their St. John’s email accounts along with their access to many of the college’s resources, including our online platforms, study groups, social activities, and support services.

# WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM OUR RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC?

The pandemic thrust all of higher education into a virtual world—one where St. John's has far less experience than many of our peers. In doing so, the crisis has revealed much about our capabilities, our resourcefulness, and our capacity to make dramatic shifts in how we engage with the Program and one another.

The pandemic has not been the only author of these lessons, however. Our students, tutors, and alumni continue to point out the areas where we are living up to our reputation as the most rigorous, most contrarian college in America—and the areas where we still have work to do.

## 1 OUR PROGRAM IS BEST EXPERIENCED IN PERSON... BUT WE CAN MAKE ONLINE CLASSES WORK.

The transition to online learning has shown that many elements of our work are still possible in a remote format. Seminars in particular have gone quite well, with videoconferencing platforms serving as an accommodating, if imperfect, host for spirited discussion.

But what of the chalkboard and the pendulum? Can the online classroom still give rise to wonder or enchantment—or friendship? Like many of the questions we ask in the classroom, definitive answers are likely to elude us.

What is more certain is that our students and tutors have not shied away from the challenge. They continue to collaborate creatively and earnestly to bring the magic of our seminars, labs, and tutorials to life in the digital realm.



**Joshua  
Kaluwasha**  
(SF23)

## On the Great Books and a pandemic.

“Who would have anticipated that a Great Books education could teach students to cope with a pandemic?

I have come to appreciate Epictetus’ stoicism. It made me ask myself, ‘What can I control?’ and ‘How can I make that work?’ Making the uniquely contrarian classroom experience work during these times has been a team effort. I believe that every single Johnnie understands this, so we are doing our part. We are keeping the conversations going, we are translating our Greek, and we are adjusting to demonstrating math props via technological options.

Johnnies will always be Johnnies, and aspects of the in-person class have migrated over to this new frontier: the subtle interruptions, the occasional eerie silence, and the quintessential Johnnie phrase ‘it seems to me ...’ have all been a part of this virtual experience.

Perhaps our global situation is allowing us to put the philosophy we discuss into practice, teaching us that we must be willing to sacrifice and commit to whatever needs to be done in order to return to our beautiful campus that we hold dear. ”

**Jessie  
Tagliani**  
(A22)  
*Lab Assistant*

## On the science of soccer balls and a canoe.

“We quickly discovered that video can be a quite useful tool: it can be paused to point out a specific detail, rewound to a crucial moment, or simply played again from the beginning. Nevertheless, a video will always be a poor substitute for hands-on experience. One of my duties as lab assistant has been to encourage students to design their own practica—something that many students have taken to with gusto. So far, I have helped design practica that range from dropping soccer balls off fire escapes to investigating relative motion involving the use of a canoe!

Our laboratory director made sure that every junior received a Newton’s Cradle, which will allow them to conduct their own experiments on colliding bodies. To help freshmen with their module on measurement and equilibrium, we are sending them homemade baros kits, complete with a balance beam, a lump of clay, and the baros weight itself. ”

**Leah  
Sernas**  
(AGI)

## On the immediacy of seminar in a disconnected world.

“The Program is a deeply human experience because we get to talk about ideas regardless of our own identities—to transcend our locality, the limitations of our own bodies, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and enter the world of the author.

That we cannot be physically closer adds a barrier, but I am starting to get over the newness of ‘cyber-relating.’ I have found myself using technology to pore over Ancient Greek homework with a couple of classmates every week; to joke and complain about my children with a classmate who is also a parent; and to pray with another. I appreciate that I could spill my anxieties over the impending death of Antony in Shakespeare’s play with my literature tutorial tutor. I love that my Politics and Society seminar tutor is stoking in me a love for Ancient Greek harmonic chords. I appreciate that my Kierkegaard preceptorial tutor took the time to get to know me over a virtual coffee break.

I consider it a great privilege to be part of such a community, even though it is not yet fully experienced in person. ”

**John  
Balwit**  
(SFGI85)  
*Santa Fe  
Director of Labs*

## On DIY labs for the at-home scientist.

“Source texts provide the reflective core of our labs, but physical engagement with the phenomena plays an important role, whether we are classifying pine needles or cowering in a Faraday cage while electricity crackles overhead.

Interactive activities have allowed students to conduct experiments, albeit through the thin channel of screen and camera. Lab assistants are on site to offer commentary and respond to requests. While an assistant measures the mass-to-charge ratio of an electron, an online student might ask ‘Can you try increasing the voltage on the Helmholtz coil?’ In many ways, this parallels the kind of experience that students might have had in the labs.

Experimentation that can be done at home is supported with DIY kits. For example, students used small college-provided microscopes to re-experience some of the wonder that Robert Hooke experienced when the first microscopes changed our relationship with the knowable world and with our own senses. ”

## Aayush Thapa

(SF22)

### On keeping the seminar questions going.

“St. John’s classroom requires a kind of intimacy—we speak to each other directly, separated but related by the seminar table. In the absence of this physical proximity, the quality of conversation was bound to suffer, along with the connections and relations we would build. To some extent, this has been true, especially because the stake is reduced in an online conversation; people’s natural reluctance to unmute themselves in a classroom has been multiplied when it requires them to literally unmute themselves by a click of the mouse.

That said, the culture created by years of learning how to speak to each other and to ask meaningful questions has been our saving grace. It is my unashamed conviction that I would do the St. John’s program online over any other kind of in-person education. This is a testament to the fact that the highest kind of education can’t be destroyed by external constraints.”

## Margaret Wilson Merritt

(SF21)

### On the Program’s power to break barriers.

“Online classrooms are quite unlike physical classrooms, and yet in some ways similar. One by one, fellow students will pop into view like stars and the screen adjusts for them, not too different from entering a physical room and getting your chairs. The screen does have its drawbacks, but the seminar can still shake up our heads, spark insights, and bring us together.

The all-college seminar on Joseph Conrad’s ‘Amy Foster’ was no exception. On and on we went, with our understanding gradually growing underneath the banter. We were earnest but comfortable, jokes were made, and yet it was serious, a sort of intellectual communion. In fact, it felt like the barrier of screens made tutor and student alike want to grasp the most from those fleeting two hours. At the end, we stayed a moment to talk and enjoy a glimpse into each other’s lives that we might not have gotten otherwise. Who has a cat? Where are they? What’s your favorite mug?

At best, the online experience makes it so much easier for those who couldn’t be at St. John’s physically. At worst, it is a necessary but temporary roadblock on our quest.”

## Avi Kumar

(A21)

### On making the Program a priority over digital distractions.

“When classes moved online, the biggest fear in my mind was the possibility of being distracted. The almost-sacred experience of discussing the Great Books was under threat of being desecrated by a meme or social media post that was just another click or swipe away. Hegel and Einstein had to fight with Instagram and Facebook for my attention, and there was no ‘Johnnie bubble’ shielding my rendezvous with history’s greatest thinkers. I had to articulate for myself why the Great Books are worth reading.

Finding ways to demarcate that space for reading, thinking, and discussing was tougher in the absence of physical classrooms, but the reward was greater too. I developed a heightened awareness of the importance of our liberal education to society and the fragility of this experience in our age of distraction.”

## Brendan Boyle

Annapolis Tutor

### On finding hope beyond the fatigue.

“It’s been a hard semester. Conversation is the lifeblood of the college, and conversation requires presence. No one actually thinks that conversation can’t happen virtually; of course it can. But only conversation of a sort—and it can’t go on indefinitely, if only because it drains the conversation partners, without affording them the renewal that comes from physical presence.

I think that more than anything else our students and tutors are tired, literally and physically—which is all the more reason I admire just how much extra work my colleagues have done. They are creating videos to stand-in for practica, testing different kinds of ‘hybrid’ classroom technology, and accomplishing so much with tools they probably never imagined they would be using.

**I know that people often talk about ‘coming back better than ever,’ and that’s a cliché which I would normally prefer to avoid. But I actually think it will be true.”**



2

## ONLINE CLASSES OPEN NEW DOORS TO THE PROGRAM FOR ADULT THINKERS AND SEEKERS.

Through our Graduate Institute and community seminars, St. John's makes the Program available to intellectually adventurous adults who seek to wrestle with questions fundamental to the human condition and our shared pursuit of truth.

We have long known that our Program is attractive to lifelong learners, but residential requirements can make it an unrealistic option for adults whose circumstances tie them to a particular area.

The transition to online classes gave us an opportunity to test a solution that could potentially expand our accessibility—with surprising results: not only are adult students eager to engage with the Program, but they are also willing to connect remotely.

Following the announcement that the Graduate Institute would offer online classes for Fall 2020, demand for all degree programs surged, with more than 40 percent of new students indicating that the online option significantly influenced their decision to enroll.

To ensure that these new students—many of whom live far from Annapolis or Santa Fe—can complete their degrees at St. John's, our faculty approved an instructional proposal that will permit online classes to continue at the Graduate Institute for at least three more years.

↑25%

*Annapolis welcomed the largest entering class for the Master of Arts in Liberal Arts since Fall 2011.*

↑50%

*Half the "virtual" Johnnie chairs in our inaugural 2020 Winter Classics seminar series were filled on the first day of registration.*

↑75%

*The Graduate Institute saw a nearly 75 percent increase in fall admissions compared to 2019.*

↑200%

*In Santa Fe, the entering class for the Master of Arts in Eastern Classics tripled from 2019.*

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE RESIDENTIAL UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE?

While our older students are signaling their interest in online classes, our undergraduate students are telling us they want an education lived in physical community.

St. John's is committed to providing a fully residential undergraduate experience, and we have no plans to deliver the Program online to undergraduate students once the pandemic is safely behind us.

3

## THE VIRTUAL WORLD CAN DRAW MORE STUDENTS INTO THE WORLD OF ST. JOHN'S.

The pandemic has ushered in a new college recruitment experience, one in which traditional campus tours and college fairs have largely ceased to exist.

In their place are digital tools that have the potential to dramatically expand our reach in a highly competitive environment.

Our growing confidence with these tools is helping the college to creatively leverage our strengths—our Program, small classes, and two distinctive campuses—in ways that bring us into conversation with future Johnnies who might not find us on their own.

### OUR VIRTUAL RECRUITMENT TOOLBOX

*Although we assembled our virtual toolbox in response to the unusual circumstances of the past year, many of these tools are likely to outlive this moment and permanently supplement our in-person efforts.*

- ♦ **Great Books Summer Seminars:** This virtual twist on Summer Academy exceeded last year's record on-campus participation, attracting more than 330 high school students, almost all of whom signed up for multiple weeks.
- ♦ **School visits and college fairs:** Our admissions team conducted virtual visits with more than 900 schools over the Fall semester—some for the first time ever—and without the costs associated with travel.
- ♦ **Saturday Seminars:** These online tutor-guided seminars enable future students to go beyond classroom observation and dive right into the discussion. Our first three seminars attracted 60 students, with more seminars on the way.
- ♦ **Invitations to events and lectures:** Families who are unable to visit our campuses can still share in some of our most compelling moments together.
- ♦ **LiveChat:** The admissions section of the St. John's website is now a place for real-time conversation as well as content.
- ♦ **Virtual campus tours:** Future students can choose from quick tours that are available 24 hours a day on our website or register for real-time small-group sessions with a St. John's admissions counselor and a current student.

# 4 OUR SUPPORT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS.

As stress and loneliness take their toll, students have told us how deeply they miss our campuses, our cherished traditions, and the closeness that comes with physical community.

They have also told us that shared discoveries are being made even in separation, that they are finding strength in persevering together as Johnnies, and that our efforts to support them are helping.

Students, faculty, and staff have found clever ways to build connections and recreate the closeness and camaraderie of campus life.

“At first we were joking and acting giddy, then we delved into a conversation about what the seminar truly is and means for all students, especially underrepresented students. From awkward chitchat to deep conversations, the virtual sophomore dinner with the college president felt just like those wonderfully weird Johnnie experiences I remember on campus.”

Bryn Frye-Mason (SF23)

The majority of St. John’s resident advisors conducted their work remotely over the Fall semester, but they remained on the front lines of student support.

“Older students spend hours online helping younger students comprehend their seminar readings or prepare a Ptolemaic proof. A student mentioned her quarantine birthday with sadness; days later, flowers and stuffed animals appeared at her door.”

Tessa Wild (A23), resident advisor

Johnnie Family Feud was one of several online cross-campus competitions that gave students a creative outlet and an opportunity to win prizes.

“Johnnie Family Feud was exactly what students needed—to joke, to play, to use what we have learned to have a good time. It’s absurd that Aristotle can be both a Johnnie favorite and a least favorite! With the world as serious as it has ever been, what better way to relax than to make fun of the things we hold so dear?”

Campbell Lozuaway-McComsey (SF22)

Running has emerged as a community-building exercise for at-home Johnnies, with more than 100 Annapolis students participating in distance and time challenges.

“My experience with isolation has led to a deep appreciation for running with others, even if we are not running at the same time or place. There is something about working toward a shared goal that transcends geography. I have realized how important that feeling is, what it does for my mental health, and how it can spill over into other areas of my life.”

Ian Howell (A24)

Summer internships continued during the pandemic, giving students the opportunity to gain experience while they explore career options.

“I went into an internship with St. Philip’s in the Hills Episcopal Church to begin my discernment process—and with that, find faith. I have now been propelled into discernment and had my understanding of faith redefined. This internship has helped me wrestle with who I am and who I am meant to be.”

Christopher Campbell (SF21)

Aided by the Office of Student Life, 21 international students and four resident advisors spent the Fall semester living, learning, and supporting one another on a quiet Santa Fe campus.

“We gather for takeaway dinners, go on hikes, and we’re planning a ‘get to know someone from another residence hall’ event. We are on our way to becoming a very close-knit community.”

Elsie Jang (SF23), resident advisor

Fellowships also continued during the pandemic, enabling students to pursue postgraduate study or gain new skills.

“To study art with the old masters, you must retrain your eye, the relationship between your mind and hand, and your mentality. The most important thing I learned at the Schuler School of Fine Arts was that we do not come here to leave with one shiny finished product. We come here to leave with hundreds of attempts.”

Rory Quinn Johnson (A22)

Across two campuses, more than 70 student academic assistants offer peer to peer support. In true Johnnie style, some have invested in their own portable chalkboards.

“Despite being online, our freshman study group bounced ideas off one another with friendly energy. We even stayed an extra hour, pondering whether Euclid was implying exponents. I came away re-inspired, confident that the math culture from my own freshman year was alive and well.”

Maebh Hurley (SF23), math assistant

From squat-jumps to mountain climbing, intramural fitness challenges helped students fight mental and physical fatigue.

“Encouraged by all the fitness challenges, I exercise outside every day, and I join the online meditation classes regularly. Doing so has kept me active during a difficult time, helped me to maintain a healthy mindset, and released the accumulated stress of senior year and staying inside too long!”

Qingqing Lei (A21)

We didn't realize it at the time, but we started planning for the pandemic years ago—when we tightened our belts, lowered our tuition, and launched the *Freeing Minds* campaign.

The lessons of the past 12 months have been a reminder that change need not be unwelcome. It can instead be an impetus for progress as well as a lens that allows us to see more clearly where progress needs to be made.

That is the approach that we as a college community have taken over the past few years as we looked to the horizon and saw the potential consequences of evolving student demographics and our rising structural deficit.

Because we made changes when we did, the pandemic found St. John's in a position of relative strength—and we have reason to believe it will leave us even stronger.

But now is not the time to let down our guard.

The challenges that preceded the pandemic have not gone away. To be ready, we must hold strong to that which defines us—our commitment to a transformational and accessible education centered on discussion of the Great Books—and we must remain open to changes that help us to do so.

# WE'RE DOING MORE TO MEET THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEEDS OF STUDENTS.

As the most rigorous college in America, St. John's will never be easy, nor do we want it to be. What we do want is for St. John's to be a place where students who are struggling to balance the demands of the Program with other areas of life can find the support they need.

Over the years our alumni and students, including those students who ultimately withdrew from the college, have spoken of the difficulties they faced when seeking help—help that, for some students, might have enabled them to remain at the college.

Both campuses have responded by substantially expanding the scope of their health and wellness services and have taken steps during the pandemic to make them accessible to students who are connecting remotely.

## DOES ST. JOHN'S PROVIDE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS? CAN WE DO BETTER?

In summer 2020, the college convened a board-led Diversity and Inclusion Task Force as part of our continuing effort to learn how life at St. John's is experienced, particularly by students whose racial or ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, or political views are underrepresented at the college.

The first phase of this effort involved surveying our community and conducting interviews on both campuses. The 23 percent survey response rate was well above the norm, and 20 percent of completed surveys came from respondents who identify as Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. The next steps include analyzing the data and making recommendations aimed at creating a healthier campus culture.

**Community input is welcome at any stage of this process. Reach out to the task force at [taskforces@sjc.edu](mailto:taskforces@sjc.edu)**

Throughout the crisis, Annapolis has continued to provide a full range of medical services, including individual, group, and crisis counseling, via a telehealth platform. In Santa Fe, licensed therapists are available for private counseling sessions through videoconferencing.

Both campuses are collaborating to provide students with access to a variety of online wellness workshops covering topics ranging from suicide prevention to healthy eating.

The board is closely monitoring the efficacy of these and other initiatives using software that allows the college to track student withdrawals and identify emerging trends.

A new student support coordinator serves as an additional resource for students, with a special focus on supporting our international, Pell grant, and UWC Davis Scholars.

Both campuses are also supporting students in their efforts to support one another. In Annapolis, an LGBTQIA support group helps students cope with issues surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation. In Santa Fe, the SJC Student Circle gives students an opportunity to build relationships across grade levels and share coping strategies.

In addition to these organized efforts, tutors, resident advisors, and student assistants have maintained extensive office hours throughout the pandemic, often making themselves available for virtual coffee and conversation at all hours of the day, every day.

## WE'RE BUILDING BRIDGES TO STUDENT SUCCESS.

*I survived St. John's ... barely.*

For many alumni, these five words constitute a familiar refrain—and for the college, an unwanted one. Graduating from St. John's should be an accomplishment, not the matter of survival that our alumni feel it has too often been.

Surveys of graduating seniors reveal the depth of the love that students have for the Program, for our tutors, and for the lasting rewards of the St. John's experience. They also reveal that more than half of our students have, at some point, felt so unprepared for the unique demands of that experience that they gave serious thought to leaving the college.

**We have listened; we have made improvements; and as a result of support for the *Freeing Minds* campaign, we are making even more.**

In summer 2020, St. John's launched the Pritzker Promise Bridge Program, a cross-campus initiative aimed at equipping new students with the tools, skills, and resources they need to succeed at the college. Funded through a generous campaign gift from the Jay Pritzker Foundation, the program—the first of its kind at St. John's—is part of a collegewide effort to improve retention, particularly among students who have limited sources of outside support.

### SAMPLE WORKSHOP TOPICS INCLUDE:

- ◆ Financial literacy
- ◆ Time management
- ◆ Mental health resources and self-care
- ◆ Adjusting to seminar-style classes
- ◆ Finding a campus job
- ◆ Building relationships with classmates and tutors

### *How the Bridge Program works*

In its inaugural year, the program consisted primarily of faculty and staff-led virtual workshops, with content and availability tailored to meet the needs and distinctive demographics of each campus. In Annapolis, the sessions were open only to Pell-eligible students, who are among our most financially vulnerable students. Santa Fe made most of its workshops available to all incoming freshmen but reserved some sessions exclusively for particularly high-risk groups, including first generation students and international students.

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### WE ARE NOT ONLY DOING MORE TO PREPARE NEW STUDENTS FOR ST. JOHN'S, BUT WE ARE ALSO BUILDING STRONGER BRIDGES BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THEIR POST-GRADUATE GOALS.

- ◆ Through our board-led Jobs for Johnnies program, volunteers helped new graduates to polish their job-search toolkits and prepare for one of the toughest job markets in decades.
- ◆ The inaugural Johnnies in Tech+ panel discussion, led by four accomplished Johnnies in tech-related fields, brought students and alumni together for a conversation on the benefits of a St. John's education in a rapidly evolving industry.
- ◆ Despite the disruption caused by campus closures, Career Services in Annapolis and the Office of Personal and Professional Development in Santa Fe continued to host—albeit virtually—a full suite of workshops, with sessions on writing resumes, applying for internships and fellowships, and researching graduate schools.

# WE CONTINUE TO PRIORITIZE AFFORDABILITY.

Unlike the pandemic, which swept across higher education with little warning, affordability is a crisis that has been staring small colleges in the face.

At St. John’s we saw the writing on the wall, and we acted to keep the college within reach. We took the first big step in 2018 when we lowered our tuition by one-third, reversing a decade of increases and returning our sticker price to a level that better reflects reality.

Two years later, our lower and more reasonable tuition remains in place—but so too does the growing chasm between those who can and cannot afford to pay.

The pandemic did not create these conditions, but it has greatly exacerbated them. As is often the case, the financial impact of the global crisis has been an unbalanced one, with lower-income and working-class families experiencing the brunt of the economic pain.

**Against this backdrop, we are intensifying our efforts to keep St. John’s accessible and affordable to students from a wide variety of backgrounds.**

## Introducing the Fall Class of 2024

11%

First generation students

28%

Pell grant recipients

31%

Students of color

96%

Receive some form of financial aid from the college

Consistent with our commitment to accessibility and affordability, tuition will remain frozen at \$35,000 for the third year in a row.

Our percentage of Pell-eligible freshmen, whose families are typically in the lower and middle-income brackets, rose to 28 percent in Fall 2020, up from 23 percent, as the result of a transformational campaign gift—the Pritzker Promise—that allows us to match 100 percent of a student’s Pell funding.

St. John’s is now partnering with 21 high schools through the Southwest Scholars Program, a donor-funded initiative aimed at recruiting more students to our Santa Fe campus from the American Southwest. Applications from students at participating schools rose 33 percent in 2020, a strong indication that the program is extending our reach.

Prior to the pandemic, 18 partner schools were represented at our first fly-in event, which brought key school personnel to campus for an immersive three-day experience. These educators will serve as ambassadors who help students learn about the college and the resources, including \$5,000 scholarships for eligible students, that can make us an affordable option.

One of our most reliable pipelines for international students is the global network of high schools that make up the United World Colleges. This proved to once again be the case in 2020, with the number of UWC admissions up 50 percent.

We were able to offer donor-funded full scholarships to 31 students, although the majority deferred their enrollment as a result of the pandemic. Provided these students are able to join us and our current students are able to remain, we are moving closer to our target of 40 UWC students at St. John’s. At this point the funding we receive from the Davis Foundation will more than double, rising from \$10,000 per student to \$25,000.

St. John’s is participating in “Raise Me,” a digital platform that enables high school students to record their personal achievements and immediately earn scholarship rewards from their chosen colleges.

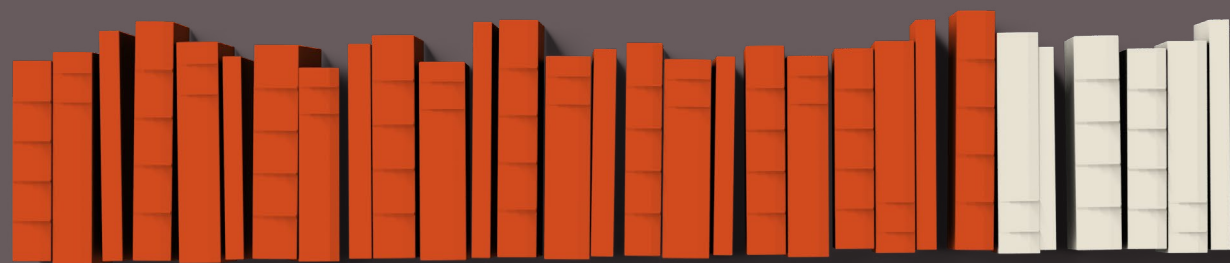


# GENEROSITY KEEPS US HOLDING STRONG.

In a year that tried to turn us upside down, generosity remained a powerful force that kept us steady.

Over the past 12 months, alumni and friends joined together to raise almost \$27 million to help sustain the college through these difficult times—so it can endure for all time.

**\$239M** RAISED\* TOWARD A **\$300M** GOAL FOR THE *FREEING MINDS* CAMPAIGN



## THE GOAL IS IN SIGHT FOR THE WINIARSKI FAMILY FOUNDATION CHALLENGE

Alumni and friends have now secured more than \$46.5 million in matching funds to benefit the St. John's endowment, an important vehicle for safeguarding the future of the college.



## GIVING TUESDAY 2020: OUR THIRD YEAR OF RECORD SUCCESS

**\$230,000**  
FROM 762 DONORS

We **doubled** our donor goal of 350 and achieved a nearly 45 percent increase in dollars raised.



## FY20 ANNUAL FUND

**\$3M**  
RAISED TOWARD \$2.9M GOAL  
103% OF GOAL

## SCHOLARSHIP SPRINT

**\$1.7M**  
RAISED TO RECRUIT AND SUPPORT THE INCOMING CLASS OF 2025\*

## ST. JOHN'S ENDOWMENT

**\$178M**  
TOTAL VALUE

Gifts to our endowment provide a permanent income stream, significantly affecting the amount of aid we can offer to students. By continuing to grow our endowment through *Freeing Minds*, we are better positioned to offer our distinctive education to students who would not otherwise be able to enroll.

\* As of December 31, 2020.

## OUR DEFICIT REDUCTION: WHERE WE STAND.

First, the good news. As a result of solid enrollment, strong support for the *Freeing Minds* campaign, and funding from the CARES Act and Paycheck Protection Program, we met our FY20 deficit reduction goal. The graph to the right illustrates just how far we have come since 2016, when our deficit peaked at \$12 million. To have put the bulk of our deficit behind us in the midst of so much turbulence is a remarkable achievement.

That makes it all the more disappointing to report that the college will not meet our goal of a balanced budget in FY21. We now anticipate a relatively small FY21 deficit of approximately \$1 million, although that figure could rise to \$3 million if we are unable to open one or both campuses.

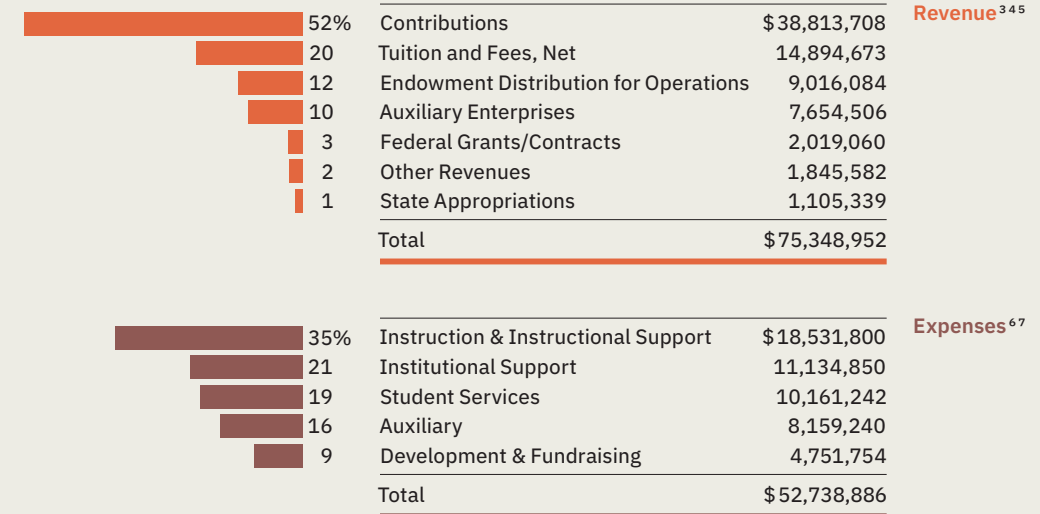
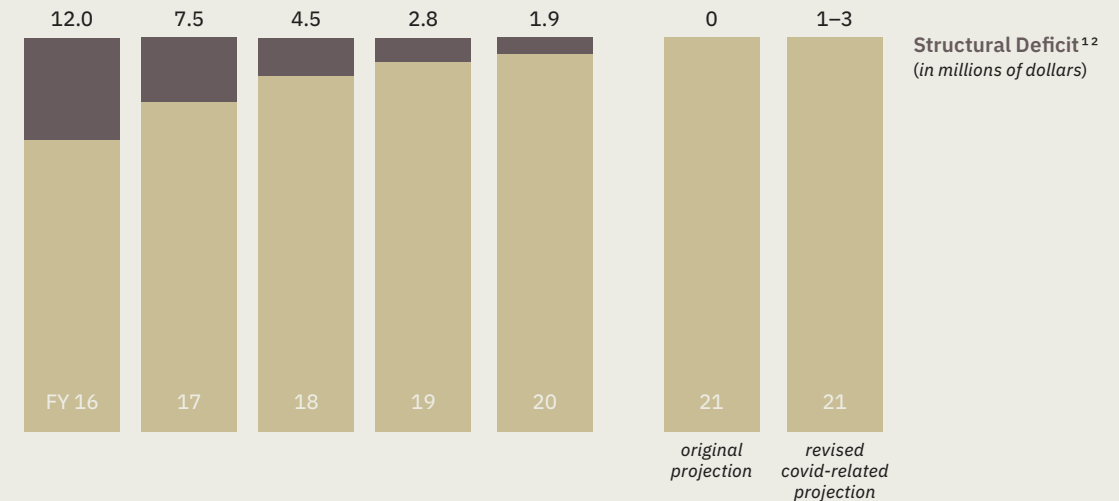
As disappointing as these revised expectations might seem, it is important to remember that we entered this crisis with a greatly improved financial picture—a claim that not many small colleges can make. When the year began, we were on course to achieve our balanced budget, and had the pandemic not intervened, we would have done so.

We also possess competitive advantages, including a philanthropy-centered financial model and an unwavering commitment to our distinctive academic Program, that position us to reach a balanced budget in the very near future.

### WHY DO OUR FINANCIAL STATEMENTS SHOW A SURPLUS?

Although our audited financial statements indicate revenue of \$75 million for FY20, our actual operating revenue was only \$44 million. Our *Freeing Minds* campaign is largely responsible for this discrepancy. For accounting purposes, multi-year pledges are recorded in the year in which the commitment is made. These gifts, however, are not available for the college to use until the pledges are honored and cash is received.

**This makes pledge fulfillment an important part of the campaign and of St. John's financial health.**



1. FY20 figure is based on an approximate annual operating revenue of \$44 million.
2. The projected FY21 deficit of \$1 million is contingent on the return of students to campus as well as the return of students who deferred enrollment.
3. Includes cash and pledge commitments received within the fiscal year ended June 30, 2020. Includes \$25.1 million from the Winiarski Family Foundation pledge matching grant.
4. Tuition and fees are net of \$17 million in student financial aid.
5. Auxiliary Enterprises: Room and board constitute the majority of this line item.
6. Includes college-wide depreciation and post-retirement medical expenses of \$3.5 million and \$51,000, respectively.
7. Instruction & Instructional Support: Tutors, Laboratories, Lectures, Community Programs, GI Tutors, Summer Tutors, January Freshman Tutors, Mellon Grants, Dean's Office, Library, GI Office; Institutional Support: College-wide Operations, Treasurer's Office, Information Technology, Public Safety, Human Resources, President's Office, Office Services; Student Services: Career Services, Internships, Health Services, Counseling, Assistant Deans, Admissions, Graduate Admissions, Registrar, Student Activities, College Activities, Athletics, GI Council, Student Polity; Auxiliary: Dining Hall, Conference Services, Bookstore, Print Shop Depreciation; Development & Fundraising: Alumni Office, Development Office, Board of Visitors & Governors, Communications, Website, Advancement Services, Events.

*A message from the Board of Visitors and Governors*

**Dear Alumni & Other Friends,**

In bringing this 2020 annual report to a close, we ask that you return for a moment to the first page and to this passage from Plato's *Republic*:

*χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ. Beautiful things are difficult.*

Every year our freshman encounter these words, critique them, wrestle with them. This year, more than any other in recent memory, they have been asked to live them, to turn difficult circumstances into something beautiful. As the stories in this report reveal, they have performed admirably.

Over the past 12 months, and indeed for the past few years, our larger college community has been asked to do something very similar, and we too have risen to the challenge. We have struggled our way through reducing an operating deficit that peaked at \$12 million in 2016. Without the loss of revenue due to the virus, we would have achieved a balanced budget in this fiscal year.

We have listened to the struggles of our alumni, many of whom told us of the difficulties they faced in transitioning to St. John's—how unprepared they were for our discussion-based classes and how unsupported they felt—and we responded by building new support systems.

This is heartening, and we can rightly be proud of all that has been accomplished in the midst of global upheaval. But Plato's words do not live only in yesterday. St. John's is not done with difficult times; and we are not done listening to the difficulties faced by others, especially our first generation students and our students of color.

So what does this mean for the year ahead and for the years to come? What will keep us holding strong ... and moving forward?

Our Program, sustained by the generosity of those who love and value it, will keep us holding strong. It is the indisputable core of who we are as the most rigorous, most contrarian college in America. It is why we build more support systems for students—so we can maintain the rigor of the Program while also increasing the number of students who can meet its demands.

What will keep us moving forward is a continued openness to changing what needs to be changed. The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force that the board convened this summer is just part of our continuing effort to reach out to our alumni and students to find out what we do well, what we can improve, and how we can ensure that our students have a life-changing experience, regardless of background or gender.

Our work over the past few years has already resulted in many changes, but we have more to do. Completing the task of strengthening the college's finances and the scaffolding that supports the Program will take time and effort; it will take generosity; and it will take all of us: every board member, every tutor, every alum, and every friend. We must continue to work together, and give generously together, with the understanding that a stronger future for St. John's College will be a beautiful reward.

**Gratefully,**



**Ron Fielding** (A70)  
Chair



**Leslie Jump** (A84)  
Vice Chair



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