

Memo



ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

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To: All Deans*

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SUBJECT: 2026-2027 Academic Year Priorities for Faculty Members

As we embark on a new academic year, we do so during a period of significant change and challenge for higher education. Across our country, colleges and universities are navigating demographic declines in the traditional college-age population, increasing competition for enrollment, significant financial pressures, rapid technological changes driven by artificial intelligence, evolving workforce demands, and growing scrutiny regarding the value and affordability of higher education. These external forces require us to be innovative, strategic, and disciplined in our decision-making as we continue to position St. John's University for success into the future.

Despite these realities, we have much to celebrate through our shared accomplishments. During the 2025-26 academic year, faculty and staff advanced student success initiatives, strengthened academic programs and online education, expanded experiential learning and career-focused learning opportunities, enhanced research, scholarship and entrepreneurship, and continued to foster a culture of academic excellence. These achievements reflect the resilience, talent, and commitment of our faculty and staff and position us well for the opportunities that lie ahead.

The coming year will require us to build on this momentum and remain focused on the strategic priorities in our *Strategic Plan Reimagined 2025-2028*. By working collaboratively, we will face new challenges and opportunities together whilst keeping ourselves grounded in our core mission - to serve our students and ensure their success. With this in mind, the academic priorities for the 2026-2027 academic year are as follows:

Student Enrollment

Throughout the United States and especially in the Northeast, the traditional K-12 student pipeline continues to contract, the college-going rate continues to decline, students are less academically prepared, and yield rates (admitted students who enroll) are also declining. In addition, federal policy changes have negatively impacted financial aid and international student enrollment, resulting in further complexity and uncertainty.

Although the challenges facing private higher education are significant, so are our strengths as an institution. I am thankful to all faculty and administrators that continue to engage with students during the enrollment funnel, for their participation at numerous events, their outreach to students and their support of enrollment management.

As we move forward, I ask that all deans work with department chairs and faculty to stay engaged with the enrollment management team, continue with personalized outreach to prospective and admitted students, promptly review graduate admission applications, and participate in recruitment and yield events such as Open House and Accepted Student Day. All this combined has a positive and meaningful influence on a student's decision to enroll at St. John's.

Academic Advising

Academic advising remains central in our efforts to improve student retention, persistence, and timely degree completion. During the past year, the University began examining its advising structures and practices to identify opportunities to provide students with more coordinated, proactive, and personalized support. With new leadership now in place, this work will continue through a comprehensive assessment of the University's current advising environment.

The initial focus will be on developing a clear understanding of how advising currently operates within and across the schools and colleges. This will include reviewing advisor responsibilities, student populations and caseloads, undergraduate and graduate advising functions, staffing needs, and the processes that support students as they move through their academic journey. Because advising needs vary considerably by academic program, we will preserve the specialized knowledge and effective practices that currently exist while identifying areas in which greater clarity, coordination, or consistency will benefit students.

We will also examine the systems, data, and workflows that support advising and student outreach across our various technology platforms. Our goal is to better understand the current state, clarify ownership and responsibilities, and identify opportunities to use existing resources more effectively. At the same time, we will explore focused opportunities to strengthen early intervention and student support during the academic year which will include enhancing the connections among academic advising, the University Learning Commons, Career Services, and other support offices.

This assessment will require close partnership among deans, faculty, advisors, and student support offices. As we work with each school and college to understand its student populations, academic requirements, and specialized advising needs, I ask each academic unit to provide insights, challenges, success stories and new ideas. Findings from this process will guide recommendations for a coordinated, sustainable advising model that provides students with clear access to support while respecting the distinct needs of our academic programs.

Research and Scholarship

Research and scholarship are fundamental to St. John's because they advance the creation of knowledge, strengthen academic excellence, and support the University's Vincentian mission of service, innovation, and the pursuit of truth. Research and scholarship enable faculty and students to generate knowledge that benefits society. Research enriches the educational experience by connecting students directly with discovery, inquiry, and real-world problem solving, allowing them to work alongside faculty on projects that address important societal challenges. Through these experiences, students develop critical thinking, analytical, communication, and leadership skills that enhance their academic achievement, career readiness, and lifelong learning. Faculty scholarship also strengthens teaching by bringing new knowledge, emerging practices, and cutting-edge discoveries into the classroom. As a result, research and scholarship play a vital role in student engagement, experiential learning, academic distinction, and student success while elevating St. John's reputation.

It is because of these reasons and despite budgetary constraints, that we doubled the number of Summer Support for Research Grants last year and increased the award amount. We also doubled the number of Research Seed Grants and increased the number of faculty research reductions from 15% to 20% of all faculty. We will also continue with our Research and Teaching Infrastructure Grants this year because this is an important vehicle to fund critical research needs.

As we embark on this new academic year, I encourage you to involve your students in your research projects and opportunities, which will significantly contribute to student success outcomes.

Distance Education

We continue to focus on expanding our online program portfolio to provide high quality, accessible and flexible learning opportunities for students and to remain competitive in a rapidly expanding marketplace. Last year we made tremendous progress, and I would like to thank the faculty that have actively participated in moving this initiative forward.

This past year, St. John's Online officially launched. The Office of Distance Education has worked with our faculty to design 60 new asynchronous online courses that meet quality standards in partnership with faculty. A new website focused on St. John's Online programs (<http://online.stjohns.edu>) has been released,

and success coaching is now available to online students. Very early results are promising, showing an increase of approximately 33% in registered students compared to last year for similar online programs.

Our long-term plan is ambitious as we aim to launch a total of 21 market-driven undergraduate and graduate online degree programs by Fall 2029 with a resulting 1,100 incoming online degree-seeking students. Moving forward, I ask that you collaborate with the Office of Distance Education to design new online courses and launch new programs to accomplish this goal. Please communicate with the Office of Distance Education if you wish to explore transitioning your program to an online modality or if you wish to discuss new online program ideas.

Artificial Intelligence

Helping students and faculty navigate artificial intelligence with confidence, integrity, and purpose is a shared priority. St. John's is providing several resources to support this work, including introductory training, teaching-with-AI micro-credentials, academic guidelines, and secure tools such as Microsoft Copilot, which does not use our data for training or share it on the internet. An overview is available at www.stjohns.edu/AI.

In March 2026, St. John's entered a partnership with Superhuman, formerly Grammarly, to develop AI tools designed specifically for higher education. Through this partnership, the University is working toward a safe, sustainable, and ethically grounded platform that supports teaching and learning while reinforcing human judgment, transparency, authorship, and student responsibility. The goal is not to encourage students to offload learning to AI, but to help them understand when, why, and how to use it responsibly and effectively.

Faculty are essential to this effort. Students are already encountering AI and will likely use it in their future workplaces. They need more than just rules about what is allowed. They need guidance, examples, thoughtful assignments, ethical and technical foundations, and honest conversations that help them build judgment, protect academic integrity, and the ability to use these tools well.

I encourage all faculty to explore the new platform through the Canvas course, practical classroom experimentation, and upcoming training opportunities this Fall. Your experience and perspective will help shape an AI ecosystem that supports learning, protects standards, and prepares students for the future.

Faculty Handbook and University Senate

The Faculty Handbook Working Group, composed of faculty and academic administrators, successfully completed the first version of the Faculty Handbook through a collaborative and inclusive process that incorporated extensive faculty feedback to the draft version. Key additions to the Handbook include clarified amendment procedures, mechanisms for recognizing substantial credit-bearing activities within faculty workload, opportunities for research-related teaching load reductions for designated faculty, and provisions ensuring the continuation of annual faculty salary reviews.

At the same time, significant progress was made in revitalizing the University Senate. Following a comment period from current Senators and input from additional faculty members, revisions were made to the proposed statutes to clarify the Senate's role as a deliberative, reflective, and inquisitive body, provide authority for the Senate to define its own agenda, ensure faculty constitute a majority of membership, and enhance the Committee structure through the creation of new standing committees and governance roles.

Together, the Faculty Handbook and revised University Statutes create a stronger foundation for shared governance, academic excellence, transparency, accountability, and institutional effectiveness. These initiatives position St. John's University to address future opportunities and challenges with greater clarity, alignment, and a shared commitment to the University's mission and strategic priorities.

Moving Forward

Higher education faces significant challenges, but we enter the 2026-27 academic year with momentum, a clear strategy, and a deep commitment to student success. I encourage every faculty member to remain actively engaged in student recruitment efforts, advancing research and scholarship together with students, embracing innovation such as AI, and supporting student success through teaching, advising, and mentorship. By working together and remaining grounded in our Vincentian mission, we will continue to strengthen academic excellence and position St. John's University for a successful future.

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