

# New SMC Students Tackle Weighty Subjects at Orientation

By Jennifer Wake

Unlike many other college orientation programs, where the discussion might revolve around the location of the dining halls or hours of operation at the campus gymnasium, when students arrive at Saint Mary's College this weekend, they will have their first Collegiate Seminar discussion on Plato's Analogy of the Cave.

"Starting the course as a part of the orientation events sets the tone for the academic journey that the freshman are commencing," said Charles Hamaker, director of the Collegiate Seminar program. The Seminar course is at the core of a Saint Mary's undergraduate education and is required of all its students.

In addition, all incoming students were asked to read two documents as part of a Summer Reading Program before the start of classes. They were a paper by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability," and a statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled, "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good."

"The Summer Reading Program ties in with Seminar in that a response to any serious issue like global warming requires the capacity to interpret the facts, assess their significance, and form measured judgments, as well as recognizing the longstanding ideas and questions about the human condition that provide the context for such issues," Hamaker said.

Dean of the School of Liberal Arts Steve Woolpert explained that these original readings were chosen "in order to inform our new students

about the scientific, economic, and moral dimensions of global warming."

Students are engaged in questions about the works in an online blog, such as: Can you describe the expected impacts of human-induced climate change over the next 50 years? Are technological approaches more or less important than changes in people's values and patterns of behavior? What responsibilities, if any, do countries that produce the most greenhouse gases have to mitigate the effects of climate change experienced by countries that produce the least greenhouse gases?

Climate change will be an integrative theme in the 2007-08 academic year including English Composition writing assignments, and on-campus presentations on climate change by experts and public officials. Saint Mary's also plans to join in "Focus the Nation," an educational initiative that will culminate in national symposia on climate change. The events will be held simultaneously at over a thousand colleges, universities, high schools and other institutions across the country in January.



De La Salle statue at Saint Mary's College  
Photo by Andy Scheck

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