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Saint Mary's Hopes to Host Presidential Election Debate

By Sophie Braccini

The Commission on Presidential Debates announced on April 1, 2011 the short list of 12 colleges that wish to host the 2012 general election debate. Among them is Saint Mary's College in Moraga. The announcement came on the heels of the State of the College address that SMC President Brother Ronald Gallagher presented in Lafayette on March 31. The address emphasized the local successes and the global reach of Saint Mary's College (SMC).

The President highlighted some of the college's strengths that also make the site very appealing for a debate. The college is a 150-year-old institution teaching the Lasallian values of social responsibility and justice, and education for all. This mission, coupled with the economic crisis, creates a conundrum for the college's administration. "We are getting more applications this year than we did last year, our mission is to make it as affordable as possible," explained Gallagher, "the college distributes five million dollars in Cal Grants to some 800 students every year." The current budget crisis could jeopardize these options.

Gallagher said that SMC plays an important role in this area's economy. "17,000 alumni live in the East Bay, 630 students transferred last year from local community colleges," he said, "but we are also a global institution." The Christian Brothers manage educational institutions in 80 countries, the students and faculty are involved in community service and serve social justice all over the world.

He also framed SMC's athletic results as part of the college's outreach. "The goal is to be competitive," he said, "We are tiny, but playing against giants." The same is true in the College's quest to become a site for the 2012 general election debate. According to SMC Director of Community and Government Relations Tim Farley, in the next months the Commission will visit the different sites and a decision will be announced in November.

Other competing sites:

Belmont University (Nashville, TN), Centre College (Danville, KY), Dominican University of California (San Rafael, CA), Eastern Kentucky University (Richmond, KY), Hofstra University (Hempstead, NY), Indiana University (Bloomington, IN), Lynn University (Boca Raton, FL), The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (Pomona, NJ), University of Denver (Denver, CO), Wake Forest University (Winston-Salem, NC), Washington University in St. Louis (St. Louis, MO).

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