

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 60

Growing the Coalition If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org.

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Mount Mary University (WI)



Mount Mary University's dedication to nurturing bold, brilliant women is built on the traditions of social justice and educational opportunity upheld by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. First opened as St. Mary's Institute in 1872 in Prairie du Chien, the Institute was chartered by the state of Wisconsin in 1913 to grant college degrees and became St. Mary's College, the first four-year Catholic college for women in the state. In 1926 the College moved to Milwaukee, was renamed Mount Mary College in 1928 and, in 2013, became Mount Mary University. Throughout these changes of name and location, the University continued the legacy of the School Sisters through a mission of connecting creativity, social justice, leadership and a deep sense of purpose. A charter member of the Yes We Must Coalition and a valued partner through June 2018, Mount Mary University rejoined the Coalition in 2023.

Mount Mary provides students with the knowledge and confidence to transform their careers and communities. The University's focus on STREAM (science, technology, reflection, engineering, art and math) prepares students to be leaders and game changers, ready to solve future challenges. Statistics for undergraduate students entering in the fall of 2023 include:

- 75% identify as a person of color,
- 41% identify as Hispanic,
- 73% are Pell-eligible, and
- 44% are first generation in their family to attend college.



Accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, Mount Mary offers over 50 undergraduate majors open to women, and 12 graduate programs — including a master's of science in food science program announced in 2019 — open to all genders. Notably,

- Mount Mary is the only private college in Wisconsin with an accredited interior design program.
- Mount Mary's fashion bachelor's degree program was the first four-year fashion degree program in the state of Wisconsin.
- Mount Mary's social work bachelor's degree program was the first at a Wisconsin private college to become accredited and currently is one of only three accredited social work programs in Milwaukee.
- Mount Mary has the largest occupational therapy program in Wisconsin.

The University is committed to removing barriers to education by providing financial resources and scholarships to students, particularly those who are first-generation, single parents, and/or come from traditionally underserved communities. Resources include the Grace Scholars Program (a community building and leadership development partnership with the Burke Foundation designed to make higher education accessible to young women in Milwaukee's central

city), and the Caroline Scholars Program (a four-year award to full-time undergraduate students with a passion for social justice). In addition, the Madonna Fund provides financial assistance to student mothers and offers on-campus housing opportunities for single mothers and their children.

The University earned a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation in 2020 and helped form the Hispanic Serving Institution Network of Wisconsin (HSI-NOW), a coalition focused on expanding opportunities for diverse students. In 2023, the University was named number one in the Midwest for providing upward social mobility to our graduates by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Mount Mary University is committed to fostering personal growth through creativity, social justice and professional success. For more information, please visit www.mtmary.edu or contact Jen Janviere, Director of Communication, at janvierj@mtmary.edu.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Mentorship Programs at Williamson College of the Trades

The impact of mentorship on academic performance is well-researched and documented, especially for first-generation students who may not have the collective family experience of higher education. In a 2009 study, the mentorship of college students from underrepresented communities was shown to result in a significantly greater persistence to graduation and higher overall grade point averages (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Williamson College of the Trades (PA) fully embraces the value of student mentorship and has recently expanded its mentorship programs to help fill the student support gap found in many of its applicants.

At Williamson student mentorship is a multi-tiered program focused on key support service needs. Freshmen begin their journey by attending the First Year Experience (FYE) program. Conducted prior to orientation, FYE introduces the College's core values, rapidly builds camaraderie within the new class through shared experiences, and introduces a cadre of alumni mentors to aid freshmen in their transition to college life. Students transition to orientation as a more connected and supported class.

Following FYE, freshmen are paired individually with senior upperclassmen who aid students as they adjust to the rigors and pace of college life. Not only do freshmen receive support from a more experienced peer, but this mentor relationship also provides seniors with an opportunity to develop their leadership and communication skills. Students identified as potentially needing additional academic support are paired with a tutor/academic mentor prior to the first day of classes. The tutor assists the student in honing study skills and addressing specific academic issues. Students having trouble adjusting to the code of conduct and daily routine at Williamson are provided with a conduct mentor to assist the student to better adjust and understand expected requirements. Alumni mentors return several times throughout Williamson's three-year mentorship program, assisting students in mock interviews in preparation for college career fairs and by expanding networking opportunities as students near graduation and transition to their careers.

The results of Williamson's mentorship program have been promising. Over the past three years, 92% of surveyed freshmen noted that the senior mentorship program had a direct impact on the success of their first year. In that same time frame, 75% of students who met

routinely with their conduct mentor saw a dramatic decrease in further conduct issues. Over the past two years, 100% of students reported that the College's alumni mentoring program helped to prepare them for future employment opportunities. Perhaps this student's comment on the value of effective mentorship best captures the program's impact: "[My mentor] knew I was going through a rough time in my life. She built me up, inspired me and made me feel welcome. She didn't suffocate me with questions on why . . . I did bad on my test. She guided me in the right direction and ultimately changed my life and perception on life."

There is no Rosetta stone or silver bullet to solve the problem of student retention, especially for first-generation students or those from underserved communities. Retention is highly individualistic and requires a wide array of programs designed to meet the unique and varied needs of today's students. Mentorship, combined with other support services, recognizes the needs of the individual student and creates a welcoming and engaging connection that not only shapes the student's college experience but their life as well. For more information, please contact Todd Zachary, Provost, at tzachary@williamson.edu.

References

Crisp, G. & Cruz, I. (2009). "Mentoring College Students: A Critical Review of the Literature between 1990 and 2007." *Research in Higher Education*, 50: 525-545.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org.