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The Defender

THE VOICE OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE

Downsizing:

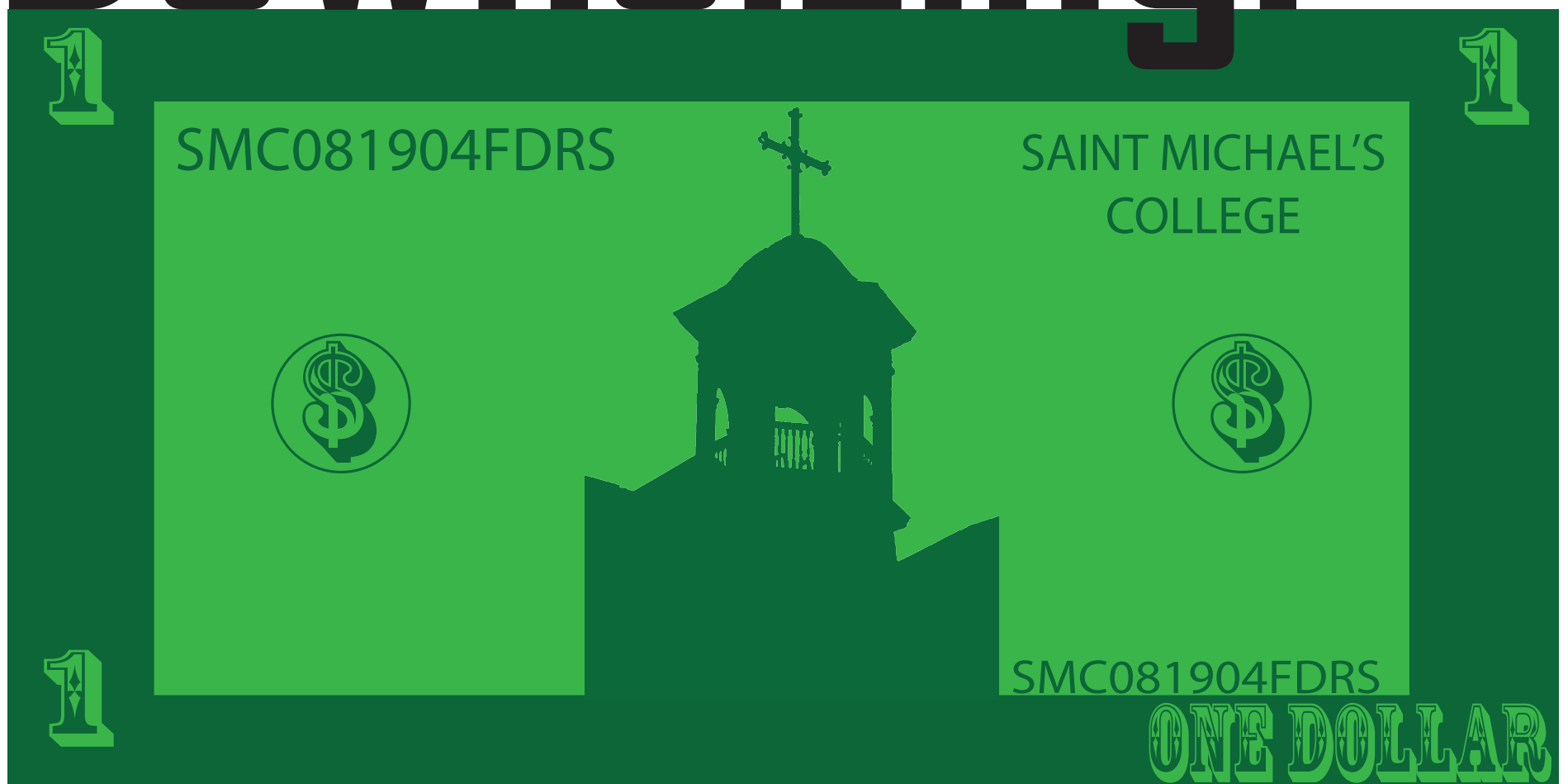


ILLUSTRATION BY TALIA PERREA

Lower enrollment decreases number of faculty positions

By Madeline Clark
Senior Editor

In the latest step of the ongoing effort to downsize budget demands at St. Michael's College, the school will opt to allow 15 faculty positions to dissolve by the end of the spring semester. The positions are a combination of retirements and expired contracts, said Dean of the college, Jeffrey Trumbower.

During the 2017-18 academic year, five full-time faculty members' positions at the college expired, according

to Trumbower. They join a series of faculty reductions that included voluntary separation packages (VSPs), which were first offered in 2016. Trumbower said that at the end of the semester, 10 faculty members will leave the college through VSPs.

Financial difficulties in higher education, including a declining high school demographic in New England, have affected St. Michael's and other colleges in the area. According to a January 2018 report from VT Digger, the University of Vermont has made plans

to eliminate 25 percent of all full-time non-tenured faculty and 40 percent of all part-time non-tenured faculty over the next five years.

VPR recently reported the College of St. Joseph, in Rutland, Vt. may close in the near future. Mount Ida, in Newton, Ma., will close permanently after this spring's graduation, the Boston Globe reported. According to the president of St. Michael's College, John Neuhauser, 85 positions were eliminated at Castleton in recent times.

Not renewed:

Marie-France Nelson has taught in the college's business administration department since 2010. She started as an adjunct professor and became a full-time instructor in 2014. On December 8, Nelson was informed her contract would not be renewed for the 2018-19 academic year.

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NON-RENEWALS

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"It came out of nowhere," she said.

"We felt we were really streamlining the department. We felt that we had cut and changed the curriculum so that we could fit the number of faculty." Nelson requested a meeting with the dean of the college during which she asked about the criteria for non-renewal of her contract. "He [Jeffrey Trumbower] never could answer my questions. He said it was 'numerous factors,'" she said. "They did reassure me that it was not because of the quality of my teaching; they were looking at departments and they felt that other professors could teach my courses, so I was expendable." Nelson teaches corporate social responsibility and two sections of marketing.

Her greatest concern is how the reduction in full-time faculty will affect students. "We're asking more and more of less professors. We're increasing class sizes which concerns me." She said she has always appreciated how small class sizes allow faculty get to know their students personally.

Alan D' Aiello, a visiting professor of media studies, journalism, & digital arts, is another faculty member who will not be returning in the fall. D' Aiello said he was hired as a visiting professor with a one-year contract. "It was made clear it was a one-year position, but I came under the assumption I'd have a shot at renewal." D' Aiello said that the department chair emphasized that the contract was for one year but had informed him the department was growing.

"My student evaluations were good, so I was quite surprised in February when I was told [the contract would not be renewed]," he said. "It's very hard not to be depressed about this, I believe in St. Mike's and what you're doing here."

Terryl Kinder has taught as a visiting professor at the college since 2004, and teaches art history, including the annual study trip to Burgundy, France. Two years ago her contract was not renewed, but her department negotiated to get her more time. This year, she

was informed her contract would not be renewed.

Kinder was hired by the college's former president, Marc vanderHeyden, who "found her" in Pontigny, France, the village where the Society of St. Edmund was founded. "When I came to St. Michael's it was unlike my college experience before [as a student at a large university]. I grew to love it; it really is like a family," Kinder said. She added that creating and instructing the "Culture and Society in Medieval Burgundy" study trip has been one of the "pinnacles" of her career. "It feeds into the Catholic Intellectual Tradition that's being set up now," Kinder said, adding that the course helps students to view the world around them, look critically, and become self-reliant. If Kinder does not return to the college after the next academic year, she will not continue the course.

In Vermont, she instructs art history in the college's fine arts department. Kinder teaches alongside seven other full-time faculty members whose areas of expertise span theater, music, art, and art history. She said she is the only professor of art history at the college. She is unaware of the institution's plans with art history courses but said cutting them would cause a deficit in the curriculum. "I think it would be a really unfortunate hole in this visual world."

Administrative voices:

President Neuhauser, in a recent interview, said he was unaware of the

sooner so that they would not have hired as many faculty and staff members. He said he hoped there would be no additional reductions of faculty positions. However, if there is a need to further reduce the faculty he would like decisions to be made before the new president, Lorraine Sterritt, arrives at the college in July. "I'd rather have her [Sterritt] come in with as clean a slate as possible, to make it easier on her."

According to Karen Talentino, the vice president of academic affairs, an ideal number of faculty for the college would be between 130 and 135 professors. At the end of this academic-year, the college will have 138 full-time faculty members, she said.

"In the short-run, I'd like to get down to 130 [faculty members] if we can," she said. Enrollment has been going down in recent years and the college does not have the same needs it once did in terms of full-time faculty. She said that full-time instructors and adjunct professors are a valuable part of our curriculum but that the nature of their positions is flexible. "At times the institution needs to take advantage of that flexibility and make what we [administration] feel are the best decisions on the part of the institution."

Talentino said some instructors and adjuncts whose positions were not being renewed were expected because they had been hired with a one-year contract. "It's never easy to tell someone that their contract is not being renewed, whether they are expecting it or not," Talentino said. "These are people who have contributed to the college. Their non-renewal is not because they

the marketing management class he enrolled in was cancelled. As a consequence, he had to enroll in "two mini classes" to make a full class. "I just had to take what I could get," Banazek said. If he cannot enroll in an English class for the fall semester he will have to take five courses in the spring 2019 semester or risk not graduating.

Impact:

Banazek said he was saddened when his advisor, Nelson, informed him her contract was not renewed. "The classes she teaches were so critical and important to my education," he said. He is concerned that the non-renewals will make it more difficult for the college to hire faculty in the future. "It makes the school less attractive to potential new-hire professors," he said.

For Rob Robinson, the chief financial officer and treasurer at the college, faculty and staff reductions make sense. "A year from now we will be 25 percent smaller than [four years ago], and our infrastructure is not 25 percent smaller, our staffing isn't 25 percent smaller," he said. "You can't get 25 percent smaller in customer base and not reduce your overhead." Robinson said that every component of the college must be looked at when considering where to make budget cuts. "Academics are important, but I think all of the co-curricular, nonacademic things are equally important to a lot of students." He proposed a hypothetical situation in which the institution would announce P-day was cancelled in order to funnel more money into academics. His point was that many students would be upset if co-curricular elements were reduced or cancelled. "It isn't as simple as academics over everything else. It's a much more balanced and nuanced sort of ecosystem," Robinson said.

Registration:

David Barrowclough, the registrar of the college, said going into this spring's registration Talentino, Trumbower and himself were aware of the lower enrollment numbers on campus and tried to be realistic about how many courses the college should offer in the fall. "The worst thing that I could do in my job is contact students over the summer and say, 'we're cancelling classes' or that 'we need to change things around.' That's definitely my least favorite thing," he said.

The registrar and administration use data to predict which courses will be needed or in high demand at a given time. He added that this year he felt as though fewer students came to his office or contacted him on registration days with concerns or dissatisfaction.

Barrowclough said retirements in the Psychology department made class registration for the fall tight for majors and minors. This registration period, he

"It's never easy to tell someone their contract is not being renewed, whether they are expecting it or not."

-Karen Talentino, vice president of academic affairs

number of non-renewals. "I actually don't know anything about them. That's the first number I'm hearing," he said.

"I would assume these would be untenured individuals, probably in areas where students don't have high demand, my guess is." He said that the college is strategically getting smaller and that the ideal capacity for the institution is around 1700-1800 undergraduate students. "In economic terms it's an industry restructuring. There's not enough students for the number of places," Neuhauser said. "I don't expect there to be massive changes here, it's not like Castleton where they laid off 85 people."

Neuhauser said that he wished the college had decided to get smaller

haven't done a good job."

Talentino's preference is to cut back in other areas of the budget before cutting faculty positions. She said she has been considering, if need be, a five percent budget reduction for all academic affairs. "If you spread it out over a number of budgets it ends up being a good amount of money but no one person in particular gets affected." Talentino has also been looking into more efficient use of the college's endowment funds. "We can't manufacture money, or students."

Some students said they believe the cuts have affected registration. For Joel Banazek '19, a double major in business and accounting, registration for the fall 2018 semester was difficult. He could not get the English class he needed and

Beyond St. Michael's

- Mount Ida College in Newton, Ma., will close after spring graduation 2018
- College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vt., contemplating closure
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had to limit psychology courses to declared psychology majors. He said his office received “quite a few” calls from psychology minors who could not get into courses. “That log jam effect will definitely happen as we go into next spring and next fall,” Barrowclough said, “Hopefully hiring works out in such a way that that log jam is easily remedied; but for right now that is probably the biggest source of dissatisfaction.”

Short-staffed:

Renee Carrico, the department chair of psychology, said, “the department

is indeed short-staffed as the result of recent retirements of long-standing faculty.” Professors David Landers and Jeff Adams retired in June 2017, and Professor Sue Kuntz retired in December 2017. Carrico said that Molly Millwood, another professor in the department, will be on leave in the upcoming year. Next year’s faculty will include seven faculty members: Carrico, David Boynton, Ari Kirshenbaum, Ron Miller, Tony Richardson, Melissa VanderKaay Tomasulo, and adjunct instructor Melissa McDuffie.

“It is certainly the case that we are able to offer fewer course sections as a result of our current staffing levels,” Carrico said. “Where scheduling

issues have arisen, we’ve worked hard to resolve them.” She felt that most psychology majors were able to get the courses they needed during registration. However, she said that fewer seats in classes may likely have made psychology minors and students in other disciplines unable to register for psychology courses.

In the business department, Barrowclough felt the correct class mix was offered but that some students were disappointed. “Topics that were of most interest closed out very quickly so there was dissatisfaction,” he said. “We thought we had the right mix, but the votes of student registrations told us otherwise.”

As for class sizes, Barrowclough does not believe reductions in class sections will automatically increase class sizes. “Even if there were no non-renewals or retirements I think that administration, in general, is looking at cap sizes.” The college has a cap review every semester to assess the right size for each course offering.

According to Robinson, “It’s too early to say [how the college will fare]. I continue to remain positive. We have a positive product. I think that we clearly have something that students and families are interested in but the market ultimately bears that out.”



Deficit and Endowment

- The projected deficit for the fiscal year 2018 is \$1.1 million
- The value of the college's endowment was approximately \$88 million as of March 31, 2018