



One University. One World. Yours.

LEAP Program

2010 - 2013



Report to the Saint Mary's Community

Submitted by:

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Centre for Academic and Instructional Development

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Acknowledgements:

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we would like to thank:

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The LEAP Peer Mentor team

On the Cover, from left to right: LEAP students win freshman, sophomore and junior of the year (2013-2014), Dr. Marty Zelenietz (Anthropology) teaching LEAP students, LEAP students getting to know their group on the first day of class, LEAP peer mentors engage in training.

Saint Mary's Support of Student Success

Interest in creating the conditions that enhance student learning and supporting students in achieving their educational goals is at an all-time high in Canadian universities. Saint Mary's focus on student success was clearly articulated in the 2000 – 2006 Academic Plan. It was reinforced in 2007 – 2011, and again most recently in the 2012 – 2017 Academic Plan: *Building A Community of Global Learners*. www.smu.ca/academic/vp/plan.html

At Saint Mary's, student success is focused on providing programs and services that support students academically and socially, enabling them to experience personal growth and academic success over the course of their studies. In Commerce, Arts and Science, students encounter professors who connect with them as individuals, while linking them to their disciplines through excellence in teaching and research. Additionally, the dedication of staff in academic support offices ensures that students have access to an array of services designed to support them in their social development and in their physical and emotional health.

In 2006, A Task Force on Student Success presented a report to the Saint Mary's community entitled *Promoting Student Success: Shared Goals, Shared Responsibilities*. In 2008, in 2011, and as recently as March, 2014, Saint Mary's students participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In combination with the Canadian University Student Consortium (CUSC) Survey, feedback provided by students has enabled the university to respond by improving existing services and developing new initiatives. In recent years, initiatives include the creation of academic advising centers within the Faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce; extensive renovations to the Library, to classrooms and student space in McNally and Burke; and to the construction of the Atrium Building and the student-focused Global Learning Commons. More recently, an International Student Success Initiative has funded projects designed to address international student needs and to support the goals of an increasingly internationalized campus. This initiative increased support for services and activities such as peer mentoring, career counselling, writing and language acquisition and financial aid. Saint Mary's support for student success is designed to assist all students through the various transitions they face as they move through their academic programs and progress towards graduation.

This report focuses on the LEAP program. LEAP was developed in 2009 as a response to the needs of first-year students transitioning *into* university life and scholarship. Student feedback, combined with the current literature in higher education, indicates that early connection, integration (academic and social) and meaningful engagement with the campus community are strong predictors of success and persistence in first-year students. These research-based findings provided the foundation for the development of the LEAP program.



LEAP Origins...

LEAP was developed as a unique signature program for Saint Mary's University to specifically support first-year students as they make the critical transition from high school into university life.



Following the release of the 2006 report, *Promoting Student Success: Shared Goals, Shared Responsibilities*,

Saint Mary's Board of Governors recommended that the university focus on first-year student success. This recommendation was received with widespread support. Subsequent to the Board's recommendation, the Senate Committee on Student Success held a series of meetings to discuss the issues, and to identify a response unique to Saint Mary's that would support first-year transition into university.

The research literature on the first-year experience identifies three key factors that influence the success and persistence of first-year students: academic competence, development of life skills and social engagement. The Committee on Student Success approved development of a program which incorporated these key student success factors and requested that the Centre for Academic and Instructional Development (CAID) take a leadership role in developing and administering the program.

CAID began the work of developing the pilot in January 2010. Through a consultation process that included the Vice-President, Academic and Research, Deans, faculty, student service professionals, the Associate Vice-President, Enrollment Management and others interested in participating (Library, Writing Centre, etc), the program came together over the summer and LEAP was piloted with 94 first-year students in September, 2010.

The program's name, LEAP, was derived from the various components and strengths of the program: Learning, Engagement, Achievement, and Peer Mentors.

The LEAP initiative had, and continues to have, the support of the university community.

This report describes the LEAP program and its goals, including feedback from participants – first-year students, faculty, staff and peer mentors – over the past four years, 2010-2013.

LEAP is targeted at traditional-aged first-year students admitted to the Faculty of Arts, Commerce or Science. LEAP students are simply new students entering university from high-school who choose to make LEAP a part of their first-year experience. For the past four years, LEAP students have reflected the overall demographics of Saint Mary's first-year student cohort.

Program Goals

- 1) To help students develop the academic skills necessary for success, both inside and outside the classroom.
- 2) To create opportunities for students to build social connections early in their university careers.
- 3) To give senior students the opportunity to contribute to the success of new students and to develop leadership skills through peer mentoring.
- 4) To provide a unique program for recruiting and retaining first year students.

Program Overview

The main components of the LEAP program were designed to support students in the three areas identified in the research as key factors in student success and persistence:

- 1) **Academic Competence through Learning Communities:** A LEAP learning community is comprised of 30 students who take a number of first-year courses or labs together. Students select a learning community which contains a pre-determined group of courses identified in consultation with the Dean, Academic Departments and individual faculty. In addition to their first-year courses, each learning community of 30 students also take LEAP 1000 together and have the support of peer mentors.
- 2) **Development of Life Skills through LEAP 1000.** Students participate in an organized series of weekly workshops called LEAP 1000. These workshops are built into students' academic schedules and are designed to help them develop important academic and life skills. Students register for LEAP 1000 when they register for the block of courses associated with their learning community.
- 3) **Social Engagement through Peer Mentoring.** Peer mentors are an integral part of the program. They provide on-the-ground assistance and support and, as students themselves, they have an unparalleled ability to connect with LEAP students. Mentors represent both domestic and international students and many were past LEAP participants. The LEAP program provides a mentor-to-student ratio of about 1:6-8.

LEAP Learning Communities

Sample LEAP Learning Communities

In 2013, there were 10 LEAP learning communities: 4 in Arts, 4 in Business and 2 in Science. Communities in Business and Science were full at the start of term, with capacity remaining in three of four Arts communities.

Each learning community consists of a core course or lab that is capped at 30 students, plus linked courses, which are usually larger first-year courses. In a linked course, the 30 students from the core course will be registered along with students from the general student body. The structure of the learning community ensures that LEAP students always know at least 30 students in the majority of their courses. Below is a *sample* of a LEAP community in each of the Faculties. Students select additional courses of their own choosing for a full course load.

Arts	Business	Science
PHIL 1200 (<i>core with 30 students</i>) ACST 1000 - linked ENGL 1205 - linked	ECON 1201 (<i>core with 30 students</i>) MGMT 1281 - linked lab CISY 1225 - linked	BIOL 1201 (<i>core lab with 30 students</i>) CHEM 1210 - linked lab
LEAP 1000	LEAP 1000	LEAP 1000

LEAP 1000

Participation in the workshops and a student exercise (through BlackBoard) contributes to a small percentage of the overall grade earned in a LEAP student's core course or lab. This schedule is an example of workshops offered during the Fall term.

Workshop #	Workshop Topic	Facilitator/Resource
1	LEAP Introduction	LEAP Coordinator
2	Time Management = Being in Control	LEAP Coordinator
3	Professor's Expectations & Taking good Notes	Centre for Academic & Instructional Development
4	Your Academic Advisor & Mid-term Awareness	Academic Advisor (Faculty specific)
5	Library I	The Library
6	Midterm Check-in & Library II	LEAP Coordinator & The Library
7	Academic Writing	The Writing Centre (Faculty specific workshop)
8	Developing Your Career Success Plan	Career Services
9	Financial Literacy	Financial Aid & Awards
10	First term wrap up - <i>congrats! You made it 😊</i>	LEAP Team

By the numbers...

The annual budget for LEAP covers:

- Faculty stipends for the core course or lab in each learning community
- Salary for LEAP Coordinator (contract position)
- Honoraria for peer mentors
- Operational costs (Orientation for new LEAP Students, Fall leadership training for peer mentors, training supplies, LEAP Office expenses, etc.)

Saint Mary's wishes to acknowledge and thank the Windsor Foundation for a generous grant of \$400,000, spanning 2012-2017, to support the LEAP program.

The Windsor Foundation grant (\$80,000 annually), combined with matching funds from Saint Mary's University, provided for the expansion in the number of LEAP Learning Communities in 2013, the hiring of more senior students as peer mentors, and the expansion of the LEAP Coordinator's position from part-time to full-time to manage the growing program.

LEAP Program Growth: 2010 - 2013

Year	Learning Communities	Student Participants	Peer Mentors Employed	Core Faculty Teaching
2010 <i>(Pilot year)</i>	5	94	17	5
2011	5	127	21	5
2012	6	146	23	5
2013	10	233	39	8

Our Students

Since the program pilot in 2010, 600 first-year students have participated in LEAP. LEAP is open to any new student and is targeted to those coming direct from high school. LEAP participants are simply new students coming to Saint Mary's who choose to make the program a part of their first-year experience. LEAP students reflect the student demographics of Saint Mary's University as a whole in terms of academic achievement, country of origin, etc. Students self-select for the program and many go on to become peer mentors. By the fall of 2013, for example, two thirds of the peer mentors in LEAP had formerly been LEAP students.

As of December 2013, of the 600 students who participated in LEAP between 2010 - 2013, 482 were still registered at Saint Mary's.

What we have learned...

Our experience of the LEAP program confirms a generally accepted view that many first year students require extra support to make a successful transition to university. We have found that, for LEAP students, ‘support’ has meant:

Relationships. Positive, helping relationships are critical as first-year students learn to mediate, navigate and translate what they experience in their new postsecondary environment; and that helping relationships are beneficial whether they are with other students, faculty, or university staff. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) tells us that an important predictor of whether students rate their educational experience positively is the extent to which they feel they belong to a *‘supportive campus environment’*. Our interactions with students in LEAP support this finding.

Academics. First-year students are generally underprepared for the rigors of academic work, which they are newly experiencing alongside the freedoms of university life. Moving out of the high school *mindset* is difficult, and many may not make the transition to a fully fledged “first-year” student until they finish their entire first academic year. LEAP’s program structure was intentionally designed to create a positive space where participants can move from being a high school ‘kid’, to a university student while developing academic skills and confidence.

Engagement. First-year students increase their overall engagement with the campus community when they make friends early and know where to find guidance and support. LEAP makes it easy for students to interact with one another from the beginning and to build meaningful relationships. This is critical to their sense of support and belonging on campus, and to their participation in curricular and extra curricular campus activities.

Leadership. First-year students are interested in learning about and exploring the many opportunities of campus life. LEAP provides a forum for student leadership. First-year students interact with student leaders in meaningful ways and peer mentors continually develop their own leadership skills. LEAP encourages students, both international and domestic, to see themselves as leaders and many have taken leadership roles on campus.

“LEAP has had a strong impact in keeping me at Saint Mary’s. I will recommend this program to any first year student. I would love to be able to put my name on this program and become a peer mentor.”

Evaluation Snapshot...

The students involved in LEAP are asked to evaluate the program each year; below is a snapshot of responses taken from the 2012-2013 evaluations. These responses and their statistical rates are typical from year-to-year:

A) On the LEAP Program in general

- 85% would recommend LEAP to others
- 87.5% are satisfied with their decision to attend Saint Mary's
- 95% say they are confident in accessing help when needed

B) On the effectiveness of the learning community structure

- 84% of students indicated that the core course (30 student cap) allowed for good interaction and an opportunity to get to know other students (compared to other courses)
- 86% feel linked courses are an important part of the LEAP program
- 76% of students believe LEAP 1000 is an important part of the program

C) On peer mentoring

- 85% of students indicated that it was helpful to see their peer mentor every week during LEAP 1000
- 89% indicated they feel that they can get help from their peer mentor
- 95% indicated that peer mentoring is an important part of LEAP

Next Steps for LEAP...

- Expanding the reach of the LEAP Program through existing connections with the Arts, Commerce and Science Faculties. LEAP will explore with faculty partners how LEAP may benefit additional students, particularly within the Faculty of Arts.
- Growing the peer mentoring aspect of the Program by creating more leadership opportunities for senior students and by developing additional peer mentor training initiatives.

Comments and Feedback

From *LEAP students*

“ The LEAP program was very useful when it came to adjusting to university. It was nice to have the familiar LEAP faces in some of my classes and LEAP made it easy to make friends and be able to ask people about the class work and form study groups. The orientation with the tour of the campus with our peer mentor was good too because I was able to become more familiar with the campus right before classes started. LSWs that were focused on school related things, such as co-op, financial aid and academic advising were some of the most informative workshops we had.”

“ LEAP is amazing in getting students comfortable within the university and with other students. This is very important in university because when students are comfortable they tend to do better in school and feel better about themselves.”

“ Great program. Most of my friends in my classes are from LEAP. I look forward to applying as a peer mentor!”

“ I was in the Physics LEAP. The meetings that our group had with Professor Sarty were extremely helpful. We did problems from the homework for physics as well as discussed how we were transitioning to university. It made me feel not so scared of professors.”

“ Very well organized. The profs that were picked were all very enthusiastic about having the LEAP classes, and designed the classes differently which made learning more fun and almost easier. The workshops were beneficial as well.”

“ LEAP has a small atmosphere, so you get to know the people easily. And you see them in your linked classes as well. I should have gone into the Writing Centre before I submitted my History book review, but if it wasn't for that Learning Strategies Workshop (LSWs) I probably would never have even considered it.”

“ The Learning Strategies Workshops (LSWs) helped put a face and place to the people I needed to speak with. In some cases it was the kick I needed to go and seek out those services.”

“ LSWs were helpful throughout the semester and I got a chance to learn what Saint Mary's University can provide for me. I learnt about the co-op program where you can get job experience on your majors, SMU exchanges where you go to another country to earn Saint Mary's credits, eating healthy to avoid diseases, organization in your rooms, buying groceries on Tuesdays at Sobeys/Atlantic Superstore, counselling services, and developing a career success plan.”

Comments and Feedback

From *LEAP students*

“I loved LEAP. I could not have asked for a better first semester experience. I took some time off before going to university and was worried about getting back into the school scene. I made great friends who I talk to all the time. My marks were amazing, because I was more engaged thanks to the profs being so enthusiastic about their teaching. I learned a lot, used resources that the school had (which benefitted me with marks) that I would never have known about if it were not for LEAP. Thank you for this program and making me a more confident university student. Also giving me skills and workshops with information I will take and use for my whole university career.”

“LEAP has given me a strong group of students that I can work with and collaborate with on work. LEAP is a strong program that helps students with the transition into university.”

“LEAP’s strengths are how it helps to bring students together to make friends, and also helps to educate students on resources available on the Saint Mary’s Campus. I was glad that the learning strategies workshops and my chemistry class were with the students in the Biology LEAP (I was in the physics LEAP) as I ended up making friends there as well.”

“Coming to university for the first time is definitely stressful, and LEAP helped ease some of the stress and worry. The weekly seminars were good for introducing what campus services are available, as well as talking about some important habits and skills that are necessary to get through school.



“In speaking with parents on the phone and in person at Open Houses, I see they are excited to learn about LEAP and pleased to see that Saint Mary’s offers this kind of support for first-year students.”

Leigh Gillis, LEAP Coordinator

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Comments and Feedback

From *Peer Mentors*

“ I ran into a student and her family and after the student introduced me the mother took me aside and said that her daughter looks up to me, and then thanked me for providing support and being a young role model for her daughter. It was really touching! Another one of my students reached out to thank me for noticing they were burning out and providing contact links to SMU’s counselling services. They said they would have dropped out if it wasn’t for the help I suggested.”

“ In my case, one of my students became very involved in the society I am a part of, and will be working on the executive next year. Not only was she successful in her studies, she was able to branch out in her first year.”

“ Some of the students I mentored directly thanked me, or their parents did, so I feel like I made a positive contribution to their transition.”

“ Most of my students have plans to continue on next year with their studies, and have a confident plan on how to do so.”

“ I loved being able to help students get the most out of their first year. Oftentimes, students don’t start participating in things until 2nd or 3rd year, and my students were actively involved in things in their first year.”

“ I have learned to have patience and I have learned when to help and when to restrain from helping.”

“ I improved on my leadership skills, as well as my organizational skills.”

“ I am very proud! I am proud that the students I helped have transitioned so well and are successful, and I am proud of my own personal growth.”

“ I organized many successful Study Sessions with some of the highest attendance for any programs.”

“ Learning Strategies Workshops do make a difference. I also see the Peer Mentor role as important. Learning from someone who has “been there, done that” does help.”



“I wish there had been something like LEAP when I was in school.”

Comment frequently heard from parents of LEAP participants.

Comments and Feedback

From *Professors*

“ There is definitely a sense of community....It is a pleasure to teach this course, because you know the students well and because you can give closer attention to their learning issues.”

“ From my first year of doing LEAP, I know that a number of Leapers are developing into university leaders -- several have become peer mentors, members of the Students Council etc. I think LEAP may well have its best success in pulling these stars from the pack from first-year.”

“When I see a former LEAP student taking on the role of peer mentor, and then describing the new LEAP class as “so young” (this a year after they were in the same situation), I know that we are doing something right.”



“ The more “hands on” approach to new university students provides the opportunity for more guidance and advising, more discussion of their experiences and issues.”

“ I fell short of covering all the material I wanted to cover with the LEAP course, but the positive trade-off was that I got to know the students better, and help them (I hope) deal with some of the problems of transitioning to university life.”

“ It facilitates the kind of close attention and community which junior students need. It motivates faculty to work hard for better educational outcomes. It is a program I can feel proud to be part of.”

“ I appreciate the close contact with students: being able to build a relationship with them. Also, closer monitoring of their progress and their concerns. Helping them transition.”

“ I see LEAP students in all kinds of campus activities later in their studies; they also become peer mentors.”

Appendix 1

This is a sample of the letter that goes out to new students in late March/early April from the Office of the President.

Dear parent / guardian,

Every year we look forward to welcoming a new group of first year students to Saint Mary's University. We know that the transition from high school to university can be challenging for many students, as well as parents, and we provide an array of programs and services to help with this transition. One of them is LEAP, a program designed to help students succeed during their first year in university.

Using a learning communities approach, LEAP supports three key factors essential to student success: a strong academic program, learning strategies, and engagement in campus life. Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement indicate that a key factor in student success is a "supportive campus environment". LEAP was designed with this principle in mind.

Each LEAP community consists of 30 students who take selected courses together. LEAP offers students a small class experience and the opportunity to get to know at least one professor well; mentoring by successful senior students; and learning strategy workshops focusing on important academic and life skills such as money matters, time management, career planning, etc. Research indicates that students who participate in learning communities are more likely to succeed both academically and socially because they make new friends and adapt more quickly to their new environment.

LEAP is a signature program for Saint Mary's that we are pleased to share with you. If you feel your son or daughter would enjoy being part of a LEAP community, please talk with them about this opportunity. There are several learning communities scheduled for September 2013, enrolling a total of 300 students. LEAP is open to all first year students; therefore there are no entering criteria, except student interest in the program.

Registration for first year students begins April 30th at 5:00pm (AST) with the LEAP program filling on a first-come basis. To learn more, visit the LEAP website www.smu.ca/LEAP or contact the program's coordinator, Ms. Leigh Gillis, by e-mail at LEAP@smu.ca or phone 902-420-5045.

To learn more about other programs and services available to new students, including FYI Boot Camp, visit: www.smu.ca/orientation/welcome.html

Thank you for supporting your child's education and choice of Saint Mary's as their university. We will welcome them and do everything we can to help them succeed.

Sincerely,

Dr. J. Colin Dodds
President and Vice Chancellor
Saint Mary's University

Appendix 2

Celebrating Student Success

Gift Guarantees the Next Five Years for Proactive Program

Saint Mary's students, staff and faculty gathered today in the McNally Theatre Auditorium to celebrate the success of this year's LEAP Program and to hear the announcement of a generous gift that will allow Saint Mary's to take this proactive 2-year pilot program to the next level.



Universities have a range of interventions to support first year students who face academic difficulties. The LEAP Program (Learning, Engagement, Achievement and Peer Mentors), addresses these difficulties before they occur through dynamic First-Year Learning Communities that help new students establish the academic, social and life skills essential to a successful transition from high school.

Designed to create a sense of connectedness, LEAP catches students before they arrive on campus and provides an enhanced level of early support through small class sizes, individual attention from professors, targeted skills development and peer mentoring. The aim is to engage first year students more quickly and effectively and mediate the challenges which often lead to academic difficulties and early drop-outs.

For the past two years, Saint Mary's LEAP program has consisted of five learning communities, each with a cohort of 30 students who take three courses together, participate in weekly learning strategy sessions and receive mentoring from senior students. Thanks to the generous support of The Windsor Foundation, a charitable organization that has recently expanded its mandate to address the challenges faced by today's youth, Saint Mary's will be able to expand the LEAP Program in 2012 and guarantee it for the next five years.

Published on the Saint Mary's website, February 3, 2012

<http://smudevel.smu.ca/newsreleases/2012/02-03-2012LEAPcelebration.html>

Appendix 3

Peer Mentors – Helping Students LEAP to Success

Over the Labor Day weekend, an engaged group of students attended early ‘classes’ at Saint Mary’s University. These 40 students are training to be peer mentors – successful students who help those in their first year make the adjustment from high school to university. Thanks to the LEAP program, many of them made that same adjustment with their own peer mentor when they themselves were new students.

“The LEAP program is designed to help first year students navigate and succeed in a new learning environment”, says program coordinator Leigh Gillis. In addition to taking three courses together and participating in workshops to enhance their learning and life skills, the program provides each student with a peer mentor – a senior student they can turn to for advice and support throughout the year. “LEAP really connected me to Saint Mary’s and gave me the confidence to get involved with campus activities” says Science student Paige Fleet, “My peer mentor was so amazing that she motivated me to be a peer mentor as well”. Paige was in training this past weekend, learning to be a peer mentor as she moves into her second year of studies.

Gillis sees training “as an essential time when peer mentors develop confidence and a sense of being part of a leadership team, while also learning the importance of maintaining boundaries within helping relationships.” One peer mentor described training as “empowering and made me feel like part of a “team” of mentors”. Sometimes, giving up the last long-weekend of summer isn’t such a big deal, given the rewards.

The LEAP program is offered by Saint Mary’s University with support from the Windsor Foundation. Since the Program’s inception in 2010, over 350 first year students and 56 peer mentors have participated in LEAP - making lifelong friends, succeeding in their studies, building confidence in their abilities, and developing leadership skills. (For information view the program webpages at www.smu.ca/leap.)

Published on the Saint Mary’s website, September 15, 2013

<http://www.smu.ca/about/news/2013/peer-mentors--helping-students-leap-to-success.html>

Appendix 4

First Year Student LEAPs to Leadership

Paige Fleet wasn't looking for a leadership opportunity when she signed up for LEAP last year at an Open House for high school students who had registered at Saint Mary's.

"I liked the idea of small learning communities and having a peer mentor to turn to if I needed advice," says Paige, who has just completed a very successful first year in a Bachelor of Science Program at Saint Mary's, thanks in large part, to LEAP. "I only thought about how that could help me."

"The LEAP Program is designed to help first year students navigate a new learning environment," says program coordinator Leigh Gillis. "Some choose LEAP because they see the value in cohesive learning communities and small, first year classes where they have the opportunity to get to know their professors. Others are influenced by their desire to make friends more quickly, or even by parents who promote the importance of mastering study skills and making use of the broad range of University resources and support services such as the Library and the Career Development Centre. Very few LEAP students realize, at first, that they're accessing a leadership opportunity, yet for many, that's essentially what the program becomes."

Making Connections

"LEAP really connected me to Saint Mary's and gave me the confidence to get involved with campus activities," says Paige. "And my peer mentor was so amazing that she motivated me to apply to be a peer mentor as well."

Come September, Paige will be the one paired with a small group of first-year students. She'll help them cope with new learning material, make new friends, discover important resources and gain confidence.

"In high school I always enjoyed helping my classmates," she says, "so I know that I'll love contributing to a program that helped me to have such a wonderful first year."

LEAP Grows

The good news for future Saint Mary's students is that the LEAP Program is growing---as one might expect---by leaps and bounds. For the 2013-14 school year, the number of seats available in the program will jump from 150 to 300, a doubling of opportunities for first-year students, and, just as exciting, according to Paige, a doubling of positions for peer mentors.

"I'm really happy to see LEAP expand," she says. "I would have survived first year without it, but I wouldn't have felt as comfortable, I wouldn't have made friends as easily, and I certainly wouldn't be looking forward to a leadership position in my second year at Saint Mary's."

Published on the Saint Mary's website, June 6, 2013

<http://www.smu.ca/about/news/2013/first-year-student-leaps-to-leadership.html>

Appendix 5

Published in the Maroon and White Magazine, issue Fall 2012, page 27

http://www.smu.ca/webfiles/MW_Fall_2012_WEB.pdf



Sasha Power is a science peer mentor in the Saint Mary's LEAP program

Universities have a range of supports for first year students who face a variety of transitional issues. Thanks to generous funds from The Windsor Foundation, Saint Mary's is expanding a proactive two-year pilot program that addresses these issues before they occur.

Designed to create a sense of connectedness, the LEAP program (Learning, Engagement, Achievement, and Peer Mentors) links first year students in six Faculty-based learning communities in Arts, Commerce and Science, each comprised of 30 students. With the support of a senior student who acts as a Peer Mentor, and a series of workshops on learning strategies, new students find it easier to establish the academic, social, and life skills essential to post-secondary success.

PREPARING THE CANVAS

Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others. —Jonathan Swift

“The LEAP peer mentor and buddy system made my transition to University infinitely better than I expected,” says Mary Sasha Power, a LEAP Science student from 2011. “Having an older student to go to for help and seeing a bunch of familiar faces in those giant lecture halls eased my anxieties and allowed me to focus on succeeding.”

This fall, Mary Sasha Power returned to the LEAP program as a Science peer mentor. Third-year Science student, Katie Ryan, who mentored Mary Sasha in 2011-2012, also returned. Ryan recommends the LEAP Program to every first year student attending Saint Mary's University. “I believe it provides new students with a head start and strengthens their academic achievements,” she says. □