

SPRING 2020

# FREEMING MINDS

Campaign Impact Report

[FREEINGMINDS.SJC.EDU](http://FREEINGMINDS.SJC.EDU)

# HOLDING STRONG TOGETHER

Through the *Freeing Minds* campaign, St. John's is laying the groundwork for tomorrow while supporting the students who are coping here and now with a strange new reality. [Learn how your gifts are making a difference during the ongoing coronavirus crisis.](#)

## Dear Alumni & Friends,

**WITH THE SPRING SEMESTER WINDING TO A CLOSE**, we find ourselves in the unusual position of assessing the past few months from the vantage point of a computer screen. Stuck behind doors that are too often closed, we miss the human contact and closeness that normally characterize campus life and the deep, meaningful discussions that occur around a seminar table. We search, like so many others, for inspiration, for a reassuring answer to the question: *is this what the future holds?*

In some ways the feeling of uncertainty is even more pronounced at St. John's, as we place so much value on our small communities. Even though we can happily report that the essence of the St. John's experience has remained wonderfully, beautifully alive, with spirited conversation flowing across a digital landscape, we yearn to get back to in-person, on-campus learning.

Our students, who felt the ground give way beneath their feet, have been buoyed by a community that would not let them fall. As soon as it became clear that in-person classes would be suspended, the support structures we have built together sprang into action and remained on high alert. The semester might have ended in physical isolation, but students

and faculty forged connections and continued their work together, displaying the creativity, perseverance and problem-solving attributes we like to think of as central parts of what it means to be a Johnnie.

There is other good news as well. Our fall admissions figures have been strong on both campuses, with initial deposits that handily beat expectations, contrary to national trends. The support of our alumni and friends has enabled us to better share our story, and prospective students are signaling their interest.

Now more than ever, we must ensure that this momentum does not wane. It is entirely possible that the pandemic will prove to be a defining moment for the generation that is now coming of age. This is

not something we can control. What we *can* control is whether *Freeing Minds* will be a defining moment for St. John's and for our students.

You give us confidence that this will be the case. After all, you are the reason that this crisis did not catch us unprepared, and when it hit full force, it did not find us fragile. Because of your outpouring of support for our new philanthropy-driven financial model, we are stronger than we have been in years. And you are ultimately the reason that, come what may, the Program can still enchant and inspire, perplex and provoke.

More than anything else, that is why the future remains so bright for St. John's and the students we are privileged to serve.

## Gratefully,



**Mark Roosevelt**  
President, Santa Fe



**Pano Kanelos**  
President, Annapolis



📍 COLLEGE WIDE

St. John's wouldn't be St. John's without the sense of community that defines it. From the moment students learned they would need to leave campus and transition to remote learning, the college was flooded with inquiries about the best way to help. In response, St. John's created the Student Emergency Relief Fund to assist students who are experiencing hardships or require additional resources to continue their studies remotely.

The fund has raised more than \$62,000—an extraordinary boon during chaotic times.

In addition to financial support, members of the St. John's community are also sharing their time—and in some cases their homes. Volunteers have stepped forward to offer packing supplies, car rides, and even spare bedrooms for students who have been unable to safely return home. ❖

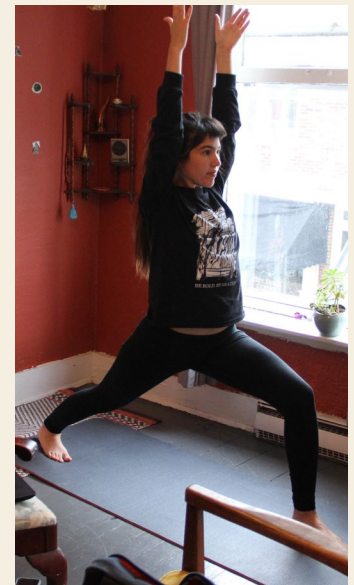
📍 COLLEGE WIDE

Ready to tackle the SquatDropPlankPushup or chill with an online jam session? Just as education has taken on new forms during the crisis, so have opportunities for community.

“Just because I'm in quarantine doesn't mean my St. John's life has stopped,” says Gabriela Sanchez (AN20), pictured right, who regularly joins her friends for yoga, one of multiple fitness classes that are available to students through videoconferencing.

While navigating the technological demands of remote learning, the college also mustered its support systems to help students cope with the stress of self-isolation. Popular initiatives have included live music sessions, study groups, and a cross-country race (narrowly won by Santa Fe) that had students hiking, biking, running, and rowing their way from campus to campus—all from home.

Most importantly, staff have strived to maintain open lines of communication and help students find additional sources of care in their local communities. ❖



📍 SANTA FE, NM

When Alexandra “Lex” Gentsch (SF18) was a student, she didn't face a global pandemic. But she does remember what it felt like to have financial worries gnaw at her concentration. Many of her friends were in a shakier boat, tackling their classes “without being able to afford laundry or get their glasses fixed.” Some considered dropping out. A few did.

She says those who graduated did so through the kindness of others. Much of it came from her father, Dale, who helped Lex and her friends with basic necessities and unexpected expenses. Now father and daughter have teamed up to do the same for students today.

The SF18 Koina Ta Ton Philon Student Support Fund, established with a generous gift from Dale Gentsch, will provide emergency support for students who are at risk of leaving due to financial setbacks.

“My father has a favorite saying,” Lex explains. “If you can't make philosophy personal, then you're missing the point.” ❖

WE NOW HAVE \$228 MILLION IN CAMPAIGN COMMITMENTS TOWARDS OUR \$300 MILLION GOAL!

\$228 \$300



Even in the midst of uncertainty, St. John's alumni, staff, faculty, and friends continue to make students a priority, with more than \$15 million raised towards the campaign in the first four months of 2020.

#### 📍 SANTA FE, NM

Mario Moreno (SF20) has come to accept that the Class of 2020 will be remembered largely for what they will miss: a traditional commencement, senior pranks, and one of the healthiest American job markets in half a century.

What they haven't lacked, he says, is the support they need to move past the crisis and toward their post-graduation goals.

"I am thankful for having the Office of Personal and Professional Development (OPPD) as a resource," says Mario, pictured right, who has been accepted to Georgetown University's graduate program in sociolinguistics. "The St. John's curriculum was invaluable in building a passion for language, but the OPPD gave the pursuit definition."

From the safety of home, students can receive feedback on resumes, attend virtual workshops, or conduct mock interviews by video. Normal life might be on hold as the coronavirus pandemic plays out, but long-term plans won't have to be. ❖



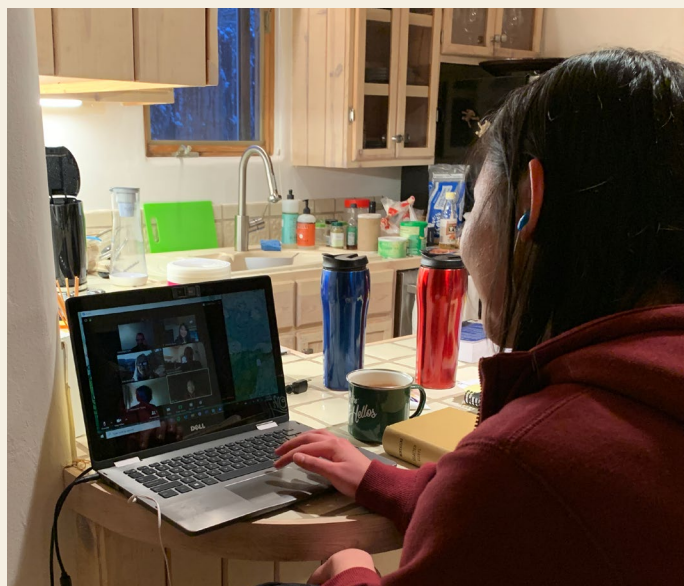
#### 📍 COLLEGE WIDE

At the beginning of March, St. John's students were immersed in the usual routines of spring semester: essays, senior orals, the lure of spring break. By mid-March, everything had changed.

In response to the escalating pandemic, the college moved swiftly to cancel on-campus classes and pivot to online instruction, an unprecedented move for a college distinguished by its emphasis on the communal aspect of learning. Challenges ranged from those that were expected—providing tech support and accommodating students in a range of time zones—to the unforeseen. "We talk over one another when an internet connection lags," says Onysha Boak (SF22). "I've had to learn new ways of reading visual cues."

Support for the campaign has allowed St. John's to invest in many of the student support systems that are now being mobilized to assist students like Onysha, pictured right during class, who was unable to return home and is currently staying with a Santa Fe staff member. She misses the sound of everyone laughing together in class but says "we're still getting some good discussion done."

Spoken like a true Johnnie. ❖



#### 📍 SANTA FE, NM

Minjun Lee (SF23) chose a complicated route to a college that isn't known for easy paths. He initially dropped out of secondary school, exchanging classwork for military service—not because the classes were too tough, but because they weren't tough enough. When he finally made it to college, the situation was the same. "Everyone studied for tests, and I still felt a thirst for knowledge." That thirst led him from South Korea to Santa Fe, not in the fall with other St. John's freshmen but in the middle of winter—and the beginning of a pandemic.

As a "January Freshman," Lee, pictured left, participates in a program that enables students from other colleges to transfer to Santa Fe, complete coursework over the summer, and join their fellow sophomores in the fall. To help ease the transition, all 25 current January Freshmen were enrolled in the pilot phase of an advising program that pairs students with tutors, who offer support and advice beyond the classroom.

The pandemic, like Great Books, raises questions about human nature that demand self-reflection. One of the biggest advantages to having an advisor during the crisis, Lee says, "is having that chance to reflect." ❖



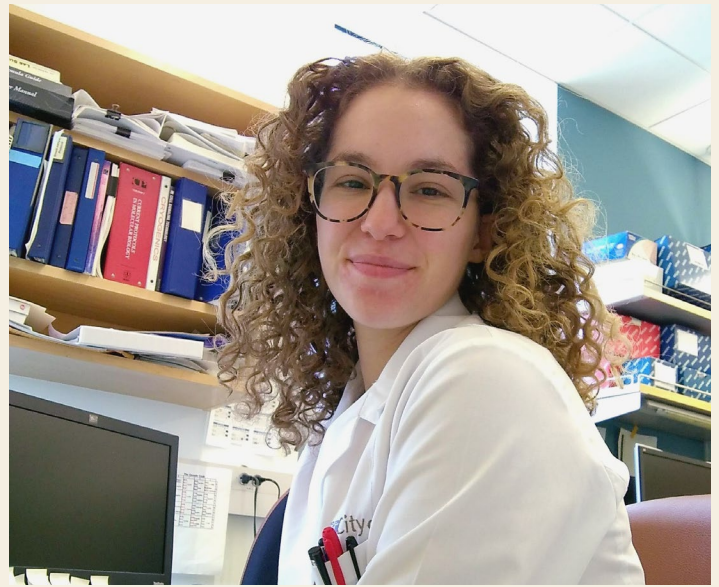
📍 ANNAPOLIS, MD

Nancy Hilton (AN20) has set a firm course for her career, and it includes saving lives in a post-pandemic world.

She credits St. John's for paving the way with "an education that is for and about the human being" coupled with a revitalized commitment to career preparation.

During her four years at St. John's, Nancy, pictured right, relied on the Annapolis Office of Career Services, which has bolstered its services since the launch of the *Freeing Minds* campaign, to help her find part-time work at the U.S. Naval Academy; secure a competitive internship with the City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center; and apply—successfully—to the highly selective Post-Baccalaureate Pre-Medical Program at the University of Virginia.

"I have been asked to think about life, but I've also been pushed to live it," she says. "That will be a tremendous asset in medicine." ❖

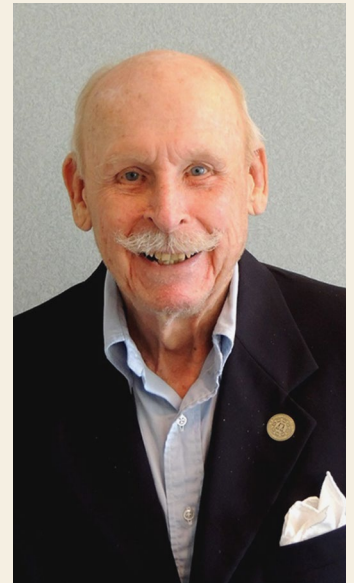


📍 ANNAPOLIS, MD

For honorary alum Chuck Trefrey, pictured right, it all began at a gas station. There behind the cash register he found a student looking down at a yellow pad, pencil in hand. On one side lay a copy of the Bible, on the other, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trefrey was hooked. "The college seal and the challenge to become free set that hook for the rest of my life."

Chuck never had the opportunity to be a traditional Johnnie, but that hasn't stopped him from supporting the college that gave him a *raison d'être*. In addition to arranging seminars at his Annapolis retirement community, Chuck is among the many friends who are making St. John's a philanthropic priority. This spring, 10 members of the St. John's Friends Board, including Chuck, pooled their resources to help sponsor the annual croquet match. When the event was canceled, all 10 opted to redirect their sponsorship refunds to the Student Emergency Relief Fund.

Why the desire to support a college they never attended? Chuck has an answer. "Let me quote a friend of mine from the Class of '17: 'I get a sort of joy in knowing I will forever be a student.'" ❖

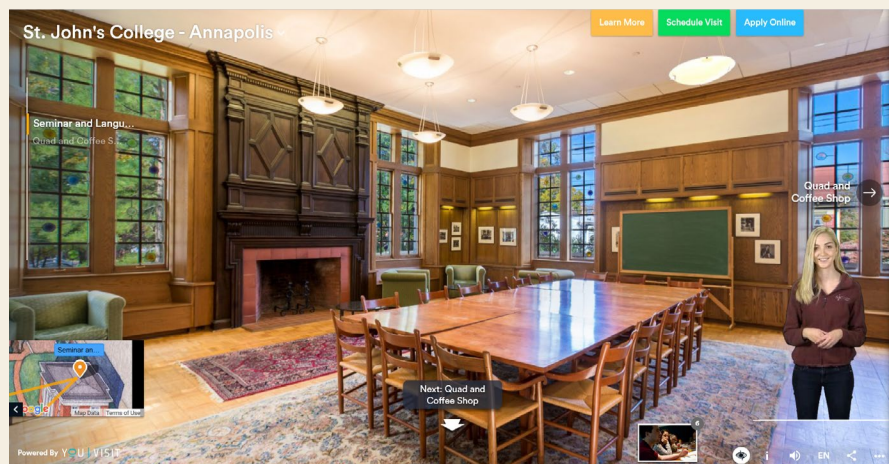


THE WINIARSKI CHALLENGE SOARS PAST HALFWAY MARK!



**\$36M**  
MATCHED

New and repeat donors can still give to claim the remainder of the \$50 million Winiarski Family Foundation match.



📍 COLLEGE WIDE

Stay at home. Don't go out. Only in an *Alice in Wonderland* world where down is up and backward is forward could a college hope to conduct a successful admissions effort under those conditions—unless you have an education that few colleges provide and a campaign that continues to spread the word.

Then you have your best turnout in years.

With the use of videoconferencing, the two campuses welcomed more than 200 students on April 4 for Virtual Admitted Students Day, a twist on an annual event that introduces future Johnnies to the college experience. Ben Baum, vice president of enrollment, calls the program a "strong success," with participation exceeding that of previous years, when the event was held on-campus. The college has also received an uptick in requests for virtual meetings with admissions counselors.

Baum says digital initiatives could become a part of his department's post-pandemic recruitment toolbox and help to engage an important audience: students who have the heart and mind for St. John's but lack the means to visit campus. ❖



# ST JOHN'S College

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