

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

Olympia Agnew '09

7th Grade Science Teacher

Durant Road Middle School, Raleigh, N.C.

Wake County native Olympia Agnew grew up in the Knightdale/Wendell area with an older sister and brother. By the time she was in middle school, her dad Otis had already started looking at future colleges when he discovered Saint Mary's. Because of Saint Mary's, Olympia has come full circle and is now a teacher herself, connecting with students by emulating what she experienced as a high school student in the late 2000s.

Future Teacher in the Making

In 1991, Otis and Jean Agnew welcomed their third child, Olympia. The close-knit family lived in Wake County with Olympia and her siblings attending Raleigh-area public schools. When Olympia was in 8th grade at Durant Road Middle School, Otis began looking at local colleges.

"My dad thought Saint Mary's was still a junior college, but when he went to the website, he discovered it was a four-year college preparatory high school for girls," Olympia explains. "After talking with my mom, they thought it would be a good opportunity for me to enroll as a ninth grader."

Olympia says they presented the idea to her together. "They made it seem like I had a choice at the time. Later I realized if I hadn't said yes, I still would have been told to go!" she says and laughs.

The young teen liked the idea of smaller classes, the all-girls environment, and the leadership opportunities offered and applied. After becoming a prospective student, she says the school called and asked her to do a photo shoot for some materials for prospective families.

"I was honored to be asked, so I went and did the photo shoot," she says. "It was in the Grove in front of Smedes, and I remember feeling so nervous because I didn't know anyone. My parents kept saying, 'You'll be fine.' But, it was so weird because I was nervous about the 'older girls' – I mean. Wow! They were in high school and I was being asked to be in photos with them. I felt so little, but they were so nice, so I went through the interview process because they made me feel so comfortable."

Olympia enrolled as a day student. "My parents dropped me off every day and picked me up each afternoon," she recalls. "It became a running joke with our faculty and staff because I would get dropped off so early that I'd have to report to the Library where Ms. Williams the Librarian was. The dining hall didn't open until like 7:05 a.m., and I would be there waiting alongside Mr. Esthimer, Mr. Davis, and so many others! It became a ritual practically."

Beginning her freshman year, Olympia played on the Saint Mary's softball team and became co-captain her sophomore and junior years. She also became involved as a day prefect, a mentor to day students attending the school, and worked as a summer camp counselor for three summers. She also graduated from Saint Mary's with honors and received the King Medal, which is awarded to a graduate who, in the opinion of the faculty, has the most conspicuously practiced good citizenship at Saint Mary's and inconspicuously served as an example to others.

"I was also involved in chorus from ninth grade through my junior year, but one of my favorite and most influential faculty was Mr. Tyson, my Spanish teacher," she recalls. "I remember he took everyone in the class to El Dorado restaurant. He made us order in Spanish to eat!"

That influence didn't stop at dining out. She also got involved in Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica, the Spanish National Honor Society. "Dr. Tyson told me I had to take AP Spanish and there was no saying 'no' to him! While at Saint Mary's, he also told me I should think about majoring in Spanish. Over time, I went back and forth before making my decision. When I enrolled in college at Queens University in Charlotte, I decided to major in Biology with a minor in Spanish."

In December 2012, Olympia graduated early from Queens, achieving this in just three-and-a-half years after taking 20 hours her sophomore year. While in school, she worked part-time doing administrative work. After graduating, she took a position with Wake County Public Schools and in January 2013 started teaching High School Biology. "At the end of the summer in August 2013, I took a new position at a private school in Morrisville, N.C., teaching grades 6-12 science," she says.



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Finding Her Passion

As a faculty member at an independent school, Olympia was able to teach several classes in addition to science, some of which were keyboarding, "And, even Spanish!" she adds and smiles. "I stayed for three years, and then decided to take a hiatus from teaching to determine if it was a true passion of mine, after dealing with various aspects of being in the public and private sector."

In August 2016, Olympia worked in an administrative role full-time while completing a full-time online master's program at Appalachian State University for Middle and Secondary Teaching in Science. While working in the administrative role, she felt rejuvenated to get back into the classroom, and Olympia soon realized teaching wasn't just what she wanted to do. "I NEEDED to be in the classroom," she explains. "That time off paid off because I felt my passion for teaching."

Olympia started working at another private school in 2017, while finishing her master's program, and then transitioned in 2018 back to the public sector where she felt she was most needed. She is currently still in the public school system and recently completed her National Board Certification. This December, she will get the news if she has become a Nationally Board Certified Teacher.

Olympia also serves as an assistant softball coach at the school and last year helped the team become conference champions. In her spare time on Sundays, she also plays on a co-ed softball league.

"I love my students and what they each bring as individuals to the classroom," Olympia says. "Each kid has their own story, and I'm so excited for those 'light bulb moments' when something suddenly makes sense to them after trying so hard, or for them to realize their own potential."

She also enjoys seeing her former students who are now moving up to the 8th grade. "I love the relationships I have with my students, and I am so happy when they come up to me after the summer and say how much they miss having me as their teacher. I feel I've done my job helping them love learning!"

Part of her connection comes from making sure her students don't feel like just a number. "As a teacher, I try to show them I'm interested in them by getting to know their names and faces by the second day of class. I want them to feel how Saint Mary's made me feel. Even if I'm just one teacher doing that, it's important."

As an alumna, Olympia keeps in touch with her former classmates through Facebook and supports Saint Mary's Annual Fund. She's also looking forward to coming to events and reunions held on campus in the future. She also lives in Wake County and loves going to work as a teacher every day, although some days are more difficult than others.

Olympia's advice for today's Saint Mary's girls? "Get out of your comfort zone early, even though it feels uncomfortable to do so. Believe you have the power to achieve things that others might underestimate. At Saint Mary's, faculty believed in me and I came to believe in myself. Here, I was challenged, and you will be, too. Don't walk away from it, embrace it."

Saint Mary's alumnae like Olympia Agnew '09 graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising their families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change in their communities. We are grateful for the impact she's having on students and for being able to share her story today.

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