

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile Series

by Lauren Gerber

Chelsea Ward '09

**Development Officer
Saint Mary's School
Raleigh, N.C.**

Strengths Over Weakness

"I remember when my parents asked me if I would consider going Saint Mary's," Chelsea Ward '09 recalls. "I grew up in Raleigh and went to public school from kindergarten through eighth grade, I was open to the idea. And, I remember being so proud when I opened my acceptance letter to Saint Mary's."

Now a staff member at her alma mater memories surround Chelsea.

"Pittman has always been my favorite place on campus. I'm excited that through the *Saint Mary's Forever* Campaign, Pittman will be renovated to become even more functional for students and the community in ways that honor the building's historical integrity and beauty, while also becoming a center for performing arts that the Raleigh community can also utilize."

Chelsea also says, "Pittman is one of those places that every Saint Mary's girl has a memory or story about. As students, we're there for performances, weekly assembly, Sigma/Mu pep rallies, and special events. Some of us remember the trek to Chan-Poyner to use the restroom because it didn't have one," she says and laughs.

During her time as a student, Chelsea was on the school's first Lacrosse Team, a member of Echo, a Sigma Captain, and was on Senior SGA as the Day Life Representative.

"Being one of the Sigma Captains was very special to me, because it's a position chosen by Saint Mary's faculty and staff," she shares. "I also really enjoyed my classes, especially English, even though they were challenging. I knew working hard was important and I felt that if I could do well in Dr. Robert Belknap's AP English Class, then I could handle any workload in college."

Chelsea also says she enjoyed the Western Religious Thought course taught by her advisor, Dr. Steve Esthimer. "As an advisor, Dr. Esthimer always focused on strengths, not weaknesses. It's something I've always remembered and appreciate more as I get older," she recalls.

Working for Her Alma Mater

After Saint Mary's, Chelsea attended East Carolina University where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication with a concentration in Public Relations. During her senior year of college, Chelsea began working as an intern at the East Carolina Alumni Association (ECAAA).

"I credit a lot of my work ethic to Saint Mary's. During that time, I was taking 18 credit hours to complete my degree, working part-time, and then decided to add an internship on top of all that. But I knew I could handle it because Saint Mary's taught me how to do that."

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"I also enjoyed my time at East Carolina and I'm a proud pirate, but Saint Mary's holds the biggest piece of real estate in my heart," she says and smiles.

In the summer of 2013, Chelsea received a full-time position at the ECAA where she served as the Board Liaison and Executive Assistant to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Alumni Relations. "The ECAA falls under the Division of University Advancement, and that's where I was originally exposed to fundraising."

After four years of working at E.C.U., Chelsea decided it was time to move back home to Raleigh, and she knew that the job search would be tough with the capitol city growing daily at such a rapid rate.

"The job search definitely wore on me, which I think everyone can relate to. Applying for positions is at times like having another job. You have to spend several hours each day putting in the work to apply, update your resume, and think of how to market yourself to employers so you stand out."

After a several month search, Chelsea applied for a job at her alma mater and received an offer.

"Saint Mary's has always been there for me during important transitions in my life. This job happened for me at just the right time," she says.

Today, Chelsea serves as a Development Officer, a position that allows her to get to know current parents, their daughters, and other Saint Mary's alumnae. She's also one of the advisors for the Development Ambassadors program, which consists of 35 current students who assist with a variety of aspects through the Alumnae and Development office, including fundraising events and networking with alumnae and donors.

"Our ambassadors receive incredible exposure into what development work looks like at Saint Mary's and they learn skillsets that will propel them ahead in the professional arena," she says.

Participation Matters

"One of my biggest personal motivators as a fundraiser and donor is ensuring that our current students have an even better Saint Mary's experience than I did," she says. "Giving is such a critical thing to an institution because there are many components to it that matter, including both dollars raised and participation. When we apply for corporate grants, foundations look at giving participation across the board – alumnae, faculty/staff, and parent giving. Participation percentages can definitely turn the tide and can make all the difference," she says.

Chelsea also appreciates the time she is able to spend with current Saint Mary's girls and witnesses how students are directly benefiting from the Annual Fund.

"All gifts make an impact on our students, whether that be a \$25 gift that pays for transportation to an athletic event or the gift of education through experiences such as District C. Everyone in the Alumnae and Development Office believes in what we do and Saint Mary's mission. One of the best parts, is that we get to see first-hand how the girls are making an impact in our school community and also beyond the gates of 900 Hillsborough Street. It's certainly inspiring and gives deep meaning to our work," she explains.

Chelsea encourages all Saint Mary's alumnae to stay connected to their alma mater. "I've treasured this time to serve my alma mater and have enjoyed getting to know our alumnae. I encourage alumnae to stay connected, and if you aren't as engaged as you would like to be, it's never too late!" she says.

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