



ST. MARY'S
UNIVERSITY

NEWS RELEASE

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St. Mary's hosts ribbon-cutting for the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center

University unveils \$20 million building, home to the new Nursing Program and cutting-edge labs

St. Mary's University and its School of Science, Engineering and Technology opened the doors today to the new \$20 million [Blank Sheppard Innovation Center](#), bringing cutting-edge facilities for science, engineering and technology education to the heart of San Antonio's West Side.

The 30,000-square-foot center will empower St. Mary's students and faculty to pursue the highest-caliber interdisciplinary liberal arts education, dive into research, invite industry projects and incubate innovative ideas for the common good.

"So many partners — our St. Mary's University family, donors, area officials and more — created the momentum to bring the vision of the Blank Sheppard Innovation Center to reality," said Winston Erevelles, Ph.D., St. Mary's University President. "This incredible new facility represents one of the tenets of a Marianist education: to educate for adaptation and change. For me, this ceremony marks a moment of immense gratitude toward those who helped us reach this ribbon-cutting and those who will continue educating St. Mary's students on their path to becoming the ethical leaders our communities and industries greatly need."



Funding collaboration

The three-story building includes new laboratories, collaboration spaces and programs focusing on advanced manufacturing, instrumentation, data science and machine learning, additive manufacturing and reverse engineering, logistics and supply chain management, human/computer interaction and engineering design. The third floor is home to the new [Nursing Program](#) at St. Mary's University.

St. Mary's worked with design firm PBK Architects and general contractor SpawGlass to complete the building.

The building is named for benefactors [Leland T. Blank \(B.S. '67\), Ph.D., P.E., and Sallie V. Sheppard, Ph.D.](#), who donated to help give the educational idea a physical home. In addition to the contributions of many other donors, [federal appropriations](#), secured by Congressman Joaquin Castro, who represents U.S. House District 20, helped fund construction.

“This Center offers our students the latest technologies and opportunities to innovate and generate ideas. Those innovations promise to improve our communities and society,” said Lynda Ellis (B.A.S. '81), Chair of the St. Mary's University Board of Trustees, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. “The future is a little brighter thanks to Leland Blank and Sallie Sheppard, as well as the many other donors and alumni who invested in St. Mary's.”

Building a user-friendly future

The building is now home to new labs, which will remarkably change the educational landscape for St. Mary's students. One noteworthy space is the **engineering human-centered design lab**, which offers a specialized workspace that bridges the gap between traditional engineering practices and user-centric design principles. This hub for innovation will enable engineers, designers and researchers to collaborate on creating products and solutions that prioritize user needs and experiences.

Rapid prototyping with 3D printers and iterative testing will allow researchers to develop more intuitive, efficient and satisfying engineering solutions. The lab enables an approach to design that will not only solve technical problems but will also address the human aspects of technology interaction, resulting in products that are both functionally superior and user-friendly.

Simulating a nursing environment

At the heart of the new Nursing Program educational facilities are new **nursing simulation labs**, cutting-edge educational facilities that replicate real-world health care environments, from home health to intensive care, to provide hands-on training for nursing students and professionals.

These labs, housed within the [IBC Foundation Nursing Wing](#), feature high-fidelity patient simulators, realistic hospital settings and advanced medical equipment to create immersive learning experiences.



Students engage in simulated patient care scenarios, practice clinical skills and participate in team-based exercises, all within a safe, controlled environment. By utilizing sophisticated technology, such as computerized mannequins and virtual reality systems, these labs allow learners to encounter a range of medical situations, including rare and complex cases, without risk to actual patients.

This approach bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, fostering critical thinking, decision-making and communication skills essential for effective patient care.

The lab is equipped with 12 beds provided by University Health. St. Mary's will assist University Health in its ongoing efforts to recruit qualified nurses through job fairs and information about benefits, including student loan repayment. University Health will participate in the St. Mary's Nursing Advisory Council and collaborate on nursing research.

"We are committed to supporting St. Mary's University's Bachelor of Science in Nursing program," said University Health Chief Nurse Executive Dina Perez-Graham. "Nurses are the heart of health care. We are enthusiastic about the potential to recruit skilled nursing graduates from this program and see this partnership as a valuable way to attract top talent."

"This Innovation Center represents so much more than bricks and mortar," said Teresa "Teri" A. Beam, Ph.D., Dean of the St. Mary's School of Science, Engineering and Technology. "It is a testament to the power of collaboration, the spirit of discovery and the pursuit of transformative solutions to the challenges facing our world. Within these walls, our students will have unparalleled opportunities to engage in hands-on learning, cutting-edge research and interdisciplinary problem-solving."

St. Mary's University, founded in 1852, is the first institution of higher learning in San Antonio and the oldest Catholic university in the Southwest. It offers 75 programs, including doctoral and law programs. Its vision, as a Catholic and Marianist liberal arts institution, is to become one of the finest private universities in the region, a gateway for graduates to professional lives as ethical leaders in Texas, the nation and the world.