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Ave Maria University Establishes Honors College, Appoints Dr. Michael Breidenbach as Dean

New college strengthens university's Catholic mission and commitment to academic excellence

AVE MARIA, Fla., Jan. 15, 2026 - Ave Maria University announced today the establishment of an Honors College, marking a significant milestone in the university's ongoing commitment to form its students in the pursuit of truth, wisdom, and holiness within the Catholic intellectual tradition.

The Ave Maria University faculty voted to create the Honors College at its meeting on Jan. 9, 2026, following the unanimous approval of the university's Board of Trustees on Nov. 7, 2025. The Honors College builds upon the foundation of Ave Maria University's longstanding Honors Program, which was established in 2012.

Dr. Roger Nutt, provost of Ave Maria University, stated, "The establishment of the Honors College represents the full maturation of Ave Maria University's founding vision—to provide the highest-achieving students with the best of collegiate life so that they reach their God-given potential and have a fruitful impact in whatever endeavor they are called to pursue."

Alongside the announcement, Ave Maria University named Dr. Michael Breidenbach as Dean of the Honors College, effective Jan. 12, 2026.

"As a professor at Ave Maria University for over a decade, I am delighted that the Honors College will advance our pursuit of academic excellence in the Catholic liberal arts tradition," said Dr. Breidenbach. "Students will enjoy enriching Honors courses with select professors, live

and study in the Honors Residential College, and engage in rigorous interdisciplinary colloquia with intellectual and cultural leaders.”

Dr. Breidenbach currently serves as associate professor of history at Ave Maria University and served as director of the Honors Program during the past academic year. A nationally recognized scholar, he is the author of *Our Dear-Bought Liberty: Catholics and Religious Toleration in Early America* (Harvard University Press, 2021), which was runner-up for the *Journal of the American Revolution* Book of the Year Award. He is also co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the First Amendment and Religious Liberty* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Dr. Breidenbach's writing has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, and *First Things*. He earned his Ph.D. in History from King's College, Cambridge, and his M.Phil. with Distinction in Political Thought and Intellectual History from the University of Cambridge.

Belmont Abbey College is the only peer Catholic institution with an Honors College; the Ave Maria University Honors College will distinguish the university from its other Newman Guide institutions, raising the university's national profile.

From 2017 to 2025, the Honors Program flourished under the leadership of Dr. John Colman, offering Ave Maria University students small, rigorous seminars, close mentorship, and a strong sense of academic and spiritual community.

The transition from an Honors Program to a full Honors College reflects Ave Maria University's renewed commitment to recruiting and forming high-achieving, mission-aligned students. The new structure will allow for expanded resources, deeper curricular offerings, and enhanced opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and cultural enrichment.

To schedule an interview with Dr. Breidenbach, please contact Kevin Wandra, vice president of Carmel Communications: KWandra@carmelcommunications.com or 404-788-1276.

About Ave Maria University

Ave Maria University is a Catholic institution of higher learning located in Ave Maria, Florida. Ave Maria University was established in 2003 as a Catholic university, according to the guidelines of the Code of Canon Law by the Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane, Bishop of the Diocese of Venice in Florida. The recognition of Ave Maria University as a Catholic University is granted upon the university's commitment to continue to be guided by the teachings of the Catholic Church and faithfulness to the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Ave Maria University is committed to helping its students develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life and grow in their appreciation of truth. The goal of AMU is simple: to build the foundation of a truly Catholic university that forms future generations of truly Catholic men and

women faithful to the Magisterium of the Church. For more information about Ave Maria University, please visit www.avemaria.edu.

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