

2016 “State of the University” Address

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Introduction

Good afternoon! For those of you who are new to the University of St. Francis, my name is Arvid Johnson, and it is my privilege to serve as the 9th president of this wonderful University – Joliet’s university.

Thank you for joining us for our 3rd annual USF Ambassador Day, which is designed to educate friends and community partners about the University and to offer our expertise and resources to you and your businesses in return. If you didn’t already consider yourself to be so, today you officially become part of the USF family, and we’re thankful you’re here!

We hope that, just as you proudly talk about your family or your career – things that are a happy “part” of you – you can also share something about our University and how it is growing and serving the community in new and exciting ways. We want you to help spread the “good news” about how bright the future can be for students at a school that is committed to preparing women and men to contribute to the world through service and leadership.

By the way, please feel free to continue enjoying your lunch during my remarks. We hope you enjoy the food our wonderful Sodexo team has prepared!

It’s wonderful that so many of you have made time in your busy schedules to be with us here this morning. And, at the risk of singling only some of you out, I’d like to acknowledge the presence of so many of our elected leaders – at all levels of government – who are with us today. In addition to these leaders, I also am pleased to welcome the many members of our USF Board of Trustees who are with us today, as well as any members of our Sponsoring Congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

Of course, whether you are a member of one of our Colleges’ or Departments’ Advisory Councils, a business or banking partner, a neighbor, an employee, or just heard there would be food, welcome!

So, what is the “state” of the University of St. Francis?

I’m pleased to report that the State of the University of St. Francis is strong. Despite an unstable education climate in Illinois, we are well-positioned and moving forward. We are excelling in many areas, and I’m excited to share some of our finer accomplishments with you today.

I believe we can attribute many of these accomplishments to our mission, so let's start there...

A Welcoming Community of Learners

Our mission defines who we are – and ensures that we remain true to legacy of our founding Congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate. While our mission makes sure that we remain respectful of our past, it also ensures that we are focused on our future – serving our students and encouraging them to be the best they can be, as we prepare them to contribute to the world through service and leadership.

Our mission calls us to be a “welcoming community of learners”; and, to that end, I am proud to report that, whether in our classrooms, in our laboratories, on the Quad, or on the streets of downtown Joliet (especially when we “Light Up the Holidays”), our focus on “intentional community building” creates a warm, friendly environment in which everyone has a sense of belonging and a sense of “being home.”

This feeling of “home” comes from our people. Our students are both bright and committed to making the world a better place; and, our faculty members are world-class teachers, who make educating students their number one priority. In addition, our administrators and staff members work tirelessly to care for our students in equally important ways.

Our mission also calls us to “prepare women and men to contribute to the world through service and leadership.” We do this by “making real” our four core Franciscan values of respect, integrity, service, and compassion.

- Through **respect**, we recognize that we are all children of God – worthy of reverence and with inherent dignity;
- Through **integrity**, we accept personal responsibility for our actions and commit ourselves to the highest ethical standards;
- Through **compassion**, we commit ourselves to loving our neighbors as ourselves – promoting empathy, forgiveness, and peace in the global community; and
- Through **service**, we integrate the other values with a bias toward action – as we put others' needs before our own and recognize the divine, the good present in others.

And, do our students, our employees, and our alumni serve! Whether working in storm-damaged areas, preparing meals for those in need, or countless other selfless efforts, they are clearly called to serve and called to lead.

One way we have embraced this more formally is by initiating campus-wide service days, during which the entire University is invited to volunteer together in teams at various locations in the community. This is something that really makes me proud; indeed, it should make us **all** proud. As a matter of fact, our commitment to service is one of *several*

reasons why USF is a uniquely special place... and, as I hope you'll take away from today, USF is not your average university!

Indeed, we're certainly **not** your **average** university, but we are **your University!** And, we're not sitting back and resting on our laurels. Instead, we are moving forward, growing, and thriving in the higher education marketplace – excelling in our academic offerings, job placement rates, athletics, and so much more.

I'd like to start by highlighting USF's academic excellence and the recognition the University continues to receive among higher education institutions.

Recognized Academic Excellence

The quality of our degree programs is apparent when we look at how external groups evaluate us. The University of St. Francis continues to be highly-ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Princeton Review*, *G.I. Jobs Magazine*, and *CollegesofDistinction.com*. This is a testament to the high-quality outcomes that USF provides.

In addition to such traditional rankings, we have been recognized by

- **Eduventures** as a Top 20 National Private Master's Institutions in the entire United States;
- By **Value Colleges** as One of 50 Best Value Online R.N.-BSN Programs;
- By **OnlineMastersPrograms.org** as a Top Online Health Care Administration Program; and
- By many other organizations.

It's clear that USF continues to excel, and people are noticing!

Our accreditations set us apart, too. Our degree programs are fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and we are especially proud of the specialized accreditations that each of our Colleges and many of our programs have earned from national associations that require rigorous standards.

These include:

- the Council on Social Work Education;
- the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions;
- the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistants;
- the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs;
- the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education;
- the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education;
- and, our most recently-added accreditation from the Illinois Certification Board – which recognizes our Substance Abuse Counseling Program as an ICB Advanced Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Counselor Training Program.

While it's not without its controversy and even detractors, even the U.S. Department of Education's "College Scorecard" provides a testament to the effectiveness and impact of a University of St. Francis education. While the cost to attend USF is rated at about the national average, our graduation rate, first-year retention rate, percent of students paying down their debt, and student salaries after attending are all rated above the national average.

We're, understandably, pleased by this, but we're also committed to continued progress and improvement across these metrics. Indeed, through increased emphasis on student achievement and experiential learning opportunities, we look to increase our already-admirable graduation and employment rates – in order to continue to provide a positive "return on investment" to our students.

Student Impact – Providing a Return on Educational Investment

One of the most important indicators of our success is the fact that our students find jobs or go on to graduate school – with 96% of our graduates employed and/or attending graduate school within six months after graduation, with the majority employed in their field of study. Indeed, our students – our graduates – are the people you **want** to hire and see in your hospitals and health care facilities, in your classrooms, and in your businesses!

Also, thanks to our excellent internship opportunities – made possible by many of you here today – our undergraduates participate in a variety of experiential learning opportunities so they are prepared to hit the ground running upon graduation. Last year, 81% of our students participated in some sort of experiential or service learning.

And, as noted in your *Effective and Affordable* handout, our students continue to excel even after they leave us – passing national tests and licensure exams at rates far higher than the national average – with near-100% pass-rates in our education, nursing, and physician assistant programs.

Our students are the reason why we do what we do – so they remain the focus of a significant, on-going investment by the University. In order to ensure that we're not only effective but also affordable, USF annually provides \$18.5 million in institutional scholarships and other institutional aid to our students. This helps to keep our average student debt at graduation at a manageable level – as evidenced by the fact that USF students have maintained a loan default rate that is significantly lower than the national and state averages. With so many of our students being the first in their families to attend college, they are both financially responsible and grateful for the help they receive. We are proud that we are able to offer assistance to 96% of our full-time undergraduate students.

We, also, remain committed to increasing the diversity of our students and employees – evidence of which you can see in this year's entering freshman and transfer classes. As we seek to better reflect the ethnicity of the communities that we serve, the number of

minority students that we enroll continues to grow – and comprises approximately 40% of this fall’s freshman and transfer students. As in past years, over half of our entering freshmen are the first in their families to attend college.

USF remains relevant and continues to expand course offerings and programs to meet the needs of students. For example, we are the only university in the State of Illinois to offer a bachelor’s degree in Substance Abuse Counseling. Given the national shortage of employees trained in this area and increasing problems with drug abuse even right here in Will County, it’s hard to think of a better, more relevant example of USF meeting the needs of our communities.

And, with 47,000 alumni worldwide, the results and impact of a USF education can be seen and felt far and wide – especially as a result of our long history in online education. Indeed, this year, USF is proud to serve over 3,900 students including over 3,200 Illinois residents – and to count among its alumni nearly 20,000 Illinois residents, over 7,000 Will County residents, and over 2,000 Joliet residents. Our employees live here and support the community, too — with almost 350 living in Will County and over 150 here in Joliet.

In addition to improvements in our physical facilities – which I’ll discuss in a bit – we’re also growing our international footprint.

Two years ago, I told you that USF would be establishing an MBA program and partnership with the Brno University of Technology in the Czech Republic. Well, that program is thriving – with the first of four active cohorts having graduated last month and another cohort set to begin in February. This is not only an important way by which we can bring the value – and impact – of a USF MBA degree to students who might not otherwise be able to benefit from it but also a valuable international teaching experience for our College of Business faculty.

As a result of this success, in December, I will travel to Viet Nam – where we will celebrate the beginning of a similar collaboration with the University of Finance and Marketing in Ho Chi Minh City.

University of St. Francis students are as competitive and successful on the playing fields as they are in the classroom! Last year, 8 teams advanced to NAIA National Championship play and 31 student-athletes were named NAIA All-Americans – an achievement that placed USF #37 out of 250 colleges in the Learfield Cup standings. More impressively, our fall 2015 and spring 2016 athletes set a school record by earning an overall 3.17 GPA. Because of their academic achievements, 37 students were named NAIA Scholar-Athletes.

This year, we’re off to a great start – with 447 student-athletes – another USF record! In terms of our fall sports teams, both our men’s and women’s cross country teams are ranked among NAIA’s “Top 25.” Go Fighting Saints!

Financial Strength Enables Strategic Investments

While our student-athletes continue to be strong, our enrollments also continue to be strong – with fall enrollments presently at a 7-year high.

As a result, we remain in a solid fiscal position after the close of the 2016 fiscal year last May. Indeed, we have operated at a million-dollar-plus surplus in each of the past four fiscal years! This has, in turn, increased our financial capacity – with our total net assets having increased by almost \$16 million in the past three years. As a result, our total net assets are at an all-time high.

In addition to our institutional support, we also remain affordable because of the generosity of our loyal benefactors – including so many of you in this room.

To date, more than \$4 million in scholarship support has been raised through the annual Caritas Scholarship Ball, which is the university's single biggest fundraiser each year. Indeed, over \$1 million of that total has been raised in just the past 3 years! And, in case you were wondering, Caritas 2017 – the 60th anniversary edition of this incredible event – will take place on Saturday, January 28th at the Bolingbrook Country Club and will be chaired by Tom & Michele Vana.

Our financial strength also allows us to make investing in the facilities and capabilities necessary to deliver on our mission – specifically, in state-of-the-art study spaces to enhance student learning – a major focus of our Strategic Plan.

This year, our Leach College of Nursing moved into newly-renovated facilities at our St. Clare Campus – called “Guardian Angel Hall” in recognition of both its historical roots and the role that our nurses play in caring for their patients' health. We had a full house at our opening dedication with many USF family members sharing stories, touring the building, and viewing simulations in the labs – all hosted by our nursing students and faculty.

The over \$10 million renovation to Guardian Angel Hall and the St. Clare Campus has resulted in

- 4 “SIM(ulation) Labs” that will enable us to educate more students without more clinical placements;
- 2 state-of-the-art “Skills Labs”;
- 6 new, technology-enabled classrooms; and
- student study and research spaces.

With the expanded facilities available at Guardian Angel Hall, the Leach College of Nursing now has the space and facilities necessary to increase our full-time undergraduate enrollments by up to 50% – and to pursue other degree delivery options. More importantly, with these new facilities, we have ensured that our nurses will remain the best prepared in their fields – with our Franciscan values of respect, integrity, service, and compassion to guide them.

In addition, the deepening of USF's long-time commitment to math and science education continues – whether through new teacher preparation, nursing education, or the recruitment of new science majors. These efforts will be supported and enhanced by the construction of a new science building, where we plan to begin offering classes next fall. The LaVerne and Dorothy Brown Science Hall is the first “Main Campus” construction project to be launched in over 30 years. Many of you joined us for the ceremonial ground-breaking last spring; and, on your way in today, you no doubt noticed that we've made considerable progress since then!

This three-story, 40,000-square-foot building will house state-of-the-art learning spaces for our students – as well as spaces in which student-faculty interactions can be enhanced.

These will include:

- Teaching laboratories and laboratory support spaces;
- Faculty-student research laboratories;
- Faculty offices and “Student Commons” areas;
- a multi-purpose, reconfigurable lecture hall; and
- a rooftop garden and patio/reception area.

Telling Our Story

As I hope that you've sensed today, I believe that USF has an exciting future ahead of it; and, I hope you've also sensed that we are extremely proud of our accomplishments.

We're so proud, in fact, that we have begun sharing them through our new ad campaign, which is themed: “Not **Your** Average **University**.” The campaign is a “top ten” list, if you will, of some of the University's most impressive facts.

Our new campaign seeks to communicate that we have some impressive accomplishments about which to boast. On screen and around here today, you'll see some samples of the various ads and marketing pieces running with this campaign. You may have already noticed our messaging on digital and print billboards on I-55 and I-80 – and more is coming. Indeed, depending on your demographics, you may even have seen our ad messaging on Facebook or heard our commercials on Pandora!

The handout on your table provides the ten impressive facts about USF that are promoted in the ad campaign. You can read about them in more detail *via* the handout, but to highlight a few of them:

- Our College of Arts & Sciences is led by a Grammy-nominated dean;
- 96% of full-time undergraduate students benefit from USF grant and scholarship assistance;
- 16 of 21 athletic teams achieved NAIA “Scholar Team” status and 9 advanced to NAIA national championship events in 2015-16;
- Teacher candidates begin in-class training early, during second semester of freshman year; and

- USF's nursing students earned a 97% pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination.

I could go on and on, but I won't.

The key takeaway from the campaign is that USF is **not** a typical university. It has impressive things to offer students and has garnered accomplishments that make it stand out among the competition. Said another way, no matter how well or for how long you've known us, there's a lot more to the University of St. Francis than you might realize!

And, we're certainly **not** your **average** university...

Closing

Thank you for being with us today – and for being “ambassadors” for the University of St. Francis. We are grateful for your time and support...and your membership in the ever-growing “USF Family.”

At your tables, you'll find this year's update of our *Effective and Affordable* piece for you to take home and reference as you help to tell our story. It's “chock full of” facts and figures that you'll find of use. And, because you're our ambassadors, we'd also like to share the latest-and-greatest issue of our *Engaging Mind & Spirit* magazine so you know some of the great things that have been happening on campus over the past few months.

USF is well-positioned for future success and growth. And, speaking of the future, in 2020, USF will celebrate its 100th anniversary – 100 years of serving and leading. I believe that we have all the pieces in place to become one of the nation's finest Catholic, Franciscan institutions. And, in case you can't tell, I truly believe that we are **not** your **average** university — we are special and unique, with much to offer and a powerful story to tell.

Before you leave today, if you haven't already done so, please take a moment to explore the tables set up around the perimeter of the room. Each table is staffed by someone who is making all of the things we talked about today happen on a daily basis – outstanding individuals who are helping to make our powerful story a reality. You are also welcome to “sign the beam” of our new Science Building on your way to your car.

Finally, and in our Franciscan tradition, I wish you “*pace e bene*” – peace and all good things!

Thank you!