

# 2017 “State of the University” Address

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## Introduction

Good morning! For those of you who are new to the University of St. Francis family, my name is Arvid Johnson, and it is my privilege to serve as the 9<sup>th</sup> president of this dynamic, Catholic, Franciscan university – indeed, Joliet’s only four-year university.

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

We hope that, as you go out and work in our community, you will recall what you learned today about the University and can talk about us when the subject arises. By the end of your time with us this morning, it is our hope that the University of St. Francis always comes to mind when you’re chatting with someone who is interested in high-quality higher education.

By the way, please feel free to continue enjoying your breakfast during my remarks... we hope you enjoy the meal our great 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. I’d like to acknowledge the presence of the many elected leaders – at all levels of government – who are with us this morning.

In addition to these leaders, I also am pleased to welcome some of my 30 or so bosses – namely, the members of our USF Board of Trustees – who are here as well as several members of our founding congregation – the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

Of course, whether you are a member of one of our four colleges’ Advisory Councils, a local business owner, a neighbor, an employee, or just heard there’d 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 continued challenges facing higher education both locally and nationally, I can assure you that we are solidly-positioned and moving forward. We are exceling in many areas, and I’m excited to share some of our accomplishments with you this morning.

## Financial Strength Enables Strategic Investments

We are continuing to share and spread the word about the high-quality education that the University of St. Francis offers to our students. Thus far, our visit days and information sessions continue to see a steady stream of interested students who know they will receive a high-quality education when they enroll at USF. Indeed, our admissions team will be visiting twice the number of high schools and their “college nights” than in years past. We are positioned to grow enrollment through an aggressive combined recruitment and marketing effort.

As a result, our financial outlook is equally strong...and promising. We remain in a solid fiscal position after the close of the 2017 fiscal year last May. I am happy to report that USF’s operations once again resulted in a million-dollar-plus surplus for the 5<sup>th</sup> fiscal year in a row!

Our financial capacity continues to expand, with a \$20.6 million increase in the past 5 years. Indeed, our total net assets are at an all-time high of approximately \$50 million.

This financial strength has allowed us to invest back into the University and to complete several construction projects that you may have noticed around Joliet.

- Just two years ago, the Plaster Free Enterprise Center was opened at our St. Bonaventure Campus in downtown Joliet. This building is home to the recreation and sport management and the history, political science and social justice departments. It also houses our Business Incubator, which has helped a dozen local businesses get started.
- Last year, Guardian Angel Hall was opened at our St. Clare Campus just a few miles up Plainfield Road. This space houses our ever-expanding Leach College of Nursing.
- And, on February 8<sup>th</sup>, we look forward to welcoming all of you to the dedication of the LaVerne and Dorothy Brown Science Hall, which is that “little project” on Douglas & Wilcox that you might have noticed on your way in this morning. This is the first new construction on the main campus in a generation – and consists of a 3-story, 35,000-square-foot facility that includes a multi-purpose lecture hall, teaching laboratories, tutoring spaces, and a green roof learning/reception space.

We continue to expand beyond Joliet, as well. Three years ago, I told you that we were establishing an MBA program in partnership with the Brno University of Technology in the Czech Republic. I’m proud to report that, just last month, we inducted our 6<sup>th</sup> cohort into this program...and graduated our 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort! 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 & Health Administration faculty, who teach half of the courses.

Since beginning our program in the Czech Republic, we have also established a similar partnership with the University of Finance-Marketing in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. And, I’m happy to report that they are actively recruiting students for their first cohort in 2018.

And, finally, we are in the early stages of partnering with Cairo University in Egypt. Once their approval process is complete, Cairo should recruit their first class in 2019.

### *Our Students Are Central to Our Mission*

While we're excited about this progress, we cannot – and will not – forget the most important reason the University of St. Francis is here, which is to prepare women and men – our students – to contribute to the world through service and leadership. We do this through challenging academic programs, which provide our students with the depth and breadth of knowledge that they'll need to be ready to hit the ground running both today and in the future. We also realize our mission through the many co-curricular activities that enrich our campus life and culture.

Sixty-four percent of this year's freshman class are first-generation college students – that is, the first in their family to attend college. That's the second highest rate since 2010. I am inspired by this because it means that we are successfully communicating the value of a college education to students with very little previous exposure to higher education. Additionally, and as importantly, forty percent of our freshmen identify as a minority.

Many of our students are also DREAMers – that is undocumented students who were brought to the US by their parents and who seek to remain in the country through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (or DACA) program. Regardless of what takes place in Washington, we will not change our commitment to these students. Our doors will remain open to them – for they are our brothers and sisters – and the educational opportunities they have pursued here will still be available. They are valued members of our community and our university.

Our students are representing the University on the athletic fields as “Fighting Saints”, as well as in the classrooms. A total of 416 students participate in one (or more) of our 22 athletic teams.

The Fighting Saints had an impressive 2016-17 season on the field with 11 of our 22 teams advancing to NAIA national tournaments – and many of our students' being selected as NAIA All-American and/or All-Conference athletes. And, because our student-athletes are “students” first, I am particularly proud that 18 of our 20 qualifying athletic teams were named NAIA “Scholar Teams.” More than 10% of our student-athletes were named NAIA “Scholar Athletes” and almost 25% received “All-Conference” academic recognition.

As a result of all of this, the University of St. Francis finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the 2016-17 “Learfield Cup” standings – the best in our almost 50-year history of athletics. We also finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in our Conference's All-Sports Cup standings – with 5 coaches named “Coach of the Year” for their sports. Go Fighting Saints!

### Keeping College Affordable

College affordability remains a concern of many families. To help ease this burden, the University of St. Francis provides virtually all of its students with some level of financial assistance and support – whether academic or athletic scholarships or other, need-based funding. This year, this totals over \$19.4 million in institutional aid and scholarships provided to our students. As a result, USF students have maintained a loan default rate that is almost half of our peers and a quarter of the state and national averages.

Our institutional support is funded by donors who give to the annual fund, special events like Caritas, and planned giving. Many of you are in this room today...and we thank you for your continued generosity!

And, speaking of Caritas and scholarship funding, to date, more than \$4.7 million in scholarship support has been raised through our annual Caritas Scholarship Ball, which is the university's biggest fundraising event each year. In fact, over \$1.3 million in funds have been raised in just the past 4 years! Please mark your calendars for January 20, 2018 for our next fantastic event, which will once again be held at Bolingbrook Golf Club. This year's Caritas Scholarship Ball will be chaired by alumna Stephanie Qualio and her husband, Tyler.

### Recognized Academic Excellence

Each year, virtually every one of our nursing program graduates pass the National Council Licensure examination on their first try and received their RN, and 100% of our teachers' education program students successfully complete all state certification tests. In addition, our students not only graduate, but 97% of our graduates report being employed or attending graduate school within six months of graduation – the vast majority in positions directly related to their fields of study. This is made possible, in part, due to the fact that virtually all of our undergraduate majors provide internship opportunities with local organizations.

Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education's "College Scorecard" provides further 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.

Now, it's one thing for me to tell you about the impact the University of St. Francis is making but it is something else entirely when professional groups and publications across the country recognize the work being done here. The University has been ranked highly by prestigious organizations such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Princeton Review*, *Money magazine* and *CollegesofDistinction.com*. We feel fortunate to be included in these rankings each year.

In addition, we have recently been recognized by...

- **College Consensus, Schools.com** and **Learn How To Become.com** as a top ten "Best College in Illinois" for 2017-18. On these lists, we were ranked among some of the major research institutions in the state;
- **BestColleges.com** as the #2 university in the nation for Online Nursing Administration programming; and
- **College Values Online** as a top 30 institution for online master's in health administration.

It's clear that USF continues to excel, and people are noticing! While it may not **exactly** be Franciscan to brag, we are making sure these rankings get noticed by "casually mentioning them" on our electronic billboards that are located along several major highways in the region.

Our accreditations set us apart, as well. 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 rigorous, specialized accreditation that our programs have earned from national associations that 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
- the Illinois Certification Board.

The quality education that USF provides our students will ensure that they're ready to become the next generation of servant leaders... and to join our strong, growing community of 48,000+ alumni.

These women and men can be found all over – with approximately

- 2,300 in Joliet alone,
- 7,500 in Will county, and
- 20,000 in the state of Illinois.

Another 28,000 of our alumni are spread across the country...and the world. We're committed to continuing to turn our 4,000+ students into dedicated, passionate servant leaders who remain connected to University of St. Francis family for years to come.

### *Telling Our Story*

You might be asking yourself, to what do we attribute all this success? I can tell you with great confidence that it is our mission that guides us day in and day out. This is who we are – our mission ensures that we will 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 conscientious of our future... serving our students the best that we can, and encouraging them to be the best they can be.

In an exercise earlier this year, our University Council closely examined how we “make real” this mission and from it determined four statements that embody what sets USF apart from other institutions. These statements include:

- That we are a “Welcoming Community of Learners”,
- That we provide our students with an “Ethic of Care”,
- That we are a “Campus of Doers”, and
- That we “Serve those who serve others.”

We’re becoming more intentional about incorporating these statements across our marketing materials as a means of communicating who we are in four simple statements.

The first statement, ‘Welcoming Community of Learners’ is born from our value of RESPECT. We often hear from our students that USF “feels like home”. We achieve this sense of belonging by supporting our students from all walks of life. This support includes our world-class faculty, who make educating students their top priority, and our administrators and staff, who work tirelessly to care for our students in non-teaching – but equally important – ways.

Our second statement, that we provide an ‘Ethic of Care’, comes from our value of INTEGRITY. As a small, high-touch institution we can give students one-on-one attention. With a faculty/student ratio of 12:1, we know this to be true. We are genuine in our care for each student as an individual and demonstrate who we are through our thoughts and actions.

In the very best of our Franciscan tradition and heritage, we are a ‘Campus of Doers’. Inspired by our value of SERVICE, the members of the USF community are active experimenters. Our students learn by doing – by student teaching, practicing in skills labs, presenting in mock trials, or creating a business plan for a local non-profit. Our patrons, Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, were doers and we’re committed to ensuring their example remains relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Finally, ‘Serving Those Who Serve Others’ comes from our value of COMPASSION. At least 80% of our undergraduate students are enrolled in majors that lead to a helping profession. We feel strongly that the best way to model compassion is by modeling service and putting others’ needs before our own.

These four statements try to summarize the USF experience – which is not limited only to our traditional undergraduate students. We want to ensure that this influence is felt by our commuters, our online students, our graduate students, and even our visitors – through the efforts and impact of the staff and faculty members that help to make USF the warm, wonderful place that it is. We hope that you will see these statements modeled out in the community, in the hospitals, in board rooms, in classrooms, and in the homes our graduates inhabit every day. They are called to serve and called to lead.

## Closing

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

At your tables, you’ll find a folder with a few pieces of information for you to take home and read through.

- This year’s update of our “*Effective and Affordable*” piece is there for reference as you help to tell our story. It’s “chock full of” facts and figures that we hope you’ll find of use.
- You will also find a quick one-page handout with admissions information and a listing of programs available here. USF offers undergraduate and graduate degrees with flexible enrollment dates and online classes designed for busy professionals like each of you...and your employees.
- And, because you’re our ambassadors, we’d also like to share the latest-and-greatest issue of the *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 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary – 100 years of serving and leading. Indeed, I believe that USF has all the pieces in place to become one of the nation’s finest Catholic, Franciscan institutions.

Before you leave today, please take a moment to explore the tables outside of this room. Each one is staffed by a USF administrator or faculty member who is making all of the things we talked about today happen on a daily basis. We encourage you to visit the tables before you leave and to interact with the outstanding individuals who are helping to make our powerful story a reality.

Finally, and in our Franciscan tradition, I wish you “Pace e Bene” – “peace and all good things”!

Thank you!