

# Ambassador Day 2018 - “State of the University”

Arvid C. Johnson, Ph.D.

*President, University of St. Francis*

## 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 9th president of this dynamic, Catholic, Franciscan university – indeed, Joliet’s only four-year university.

Thank you for joining us for our fifth 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. While I can’t believe that we are already hosting this event for a fifth year, it does prompt me to thank you for your ongoing support of this University. We are thankful you’re here and consider you an important part of the USF family.

Our hope is that, as you go out and work in our community, you will recall what you heard and learned today about the University of St. Francis and can talk about us and the impact we have on our students, the community, and beyond 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 are chatting with someone who is interested in high-quality, higher education.

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 members of our founding congregation – the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

I would also like to introduce to you members of my Cabinet –

- Frank Pascoe (Provost and VP of Academic Affairs),
- Julee Gard (VP for Finance and Administration),
- Sister Mary Elizabeth Imler (VP for Mission),
- Kristin Short (VP for University Advancement),
- Eric Wignall (VP for Admissions, Enrollment and Marketing Services),
- Terry Cottrell (VP for Information Technology & Planning), and
- Damon Sloan (VP for Student and Alumni Affairs).

Finally, I would also like to introduce David DiLorenzo – our new Director of Community and Government Relations.

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 am pleased to report that the state of the University of St. Francis continues to be 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 Continues to Enable 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. The increased efforts of our admissions team have resulted in a positive impact on our enrollment.

Indeed, we are proud to report that – unlike many of our peers – our overall student applications grew by 14.7% versus last year, our new student registrations rose by 10%, and our overall enrollment grew by 2%. Recognize that this comes at a time when colleges and universities across the state are faced with declining enrollments.

As a result, our financial outlook continues to be equally strong...and promising. We remain in a solid fiscal position after the close of the 2018 fiscal year last May. I am happy to report that USF's operations once again resulted in a million-dollar-plus surplus for the 6th fiscal year in a row!

Our financial capacity continues to expand, with a \$24.7 million increase in the past 5 years, and our total net assets are at an all-time high of almost \$52 million.

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

- Just three 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 over a dozen local businesses get started.
- Two years ago, 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 – including its state-of-the-art simulation and skills laboratories.

Of course, last February, we opened and dedicated the new LaVerne and Dorothy Brown Science Hall. This magnificent, three-story, 35,000-square-foot facility hosts over 670 USF students in 48 different courses each week. Brown Hall was also included as part of this year's annual CAPA (that is, Cathedral Area Preservation Association) Housewalk on Sunday, September 9<sup>th</sup>. Our own USF Student Ambassadors offered tours to close to 500 guests and provided them with a glimpse into the world-class facilities in which USF students learn each and every day.

We continue to expand beyond Joliet, as well. A few 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 we will induct our 8th cohort into this program later this year ...and have graduated our 5th 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 the University of Economics and Business in Hanoi, Vietnam. And, I'm happy to report that they are actively recruiting students for their first cohorts in 2019.

We are also in the middle stages of partnering with Cairo University in Egypt. Once their approval process is complete, Cairo should recruit their first class in 2020.

Finally, we plan to continue expanding USF globally by exploring future partnerships in Central and South America.

### *Our Students Remain Central to Our Mission*

While we are 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, by which we provide our students with the depth and breadth of knowledge that they will 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.

About 57% percent of this year's freshman class are first-generation college students – that is, they are the first in their family to attend college. In fact, over the course of the past nine years, an average of 58% of each of our incoming freshman classes were first-generation college students. I am inspired by this because not only are we continuing to support our mission but also we are successfully communicating the value of a college education to students with very little previous exposure to higher education... all while impacting future generations through these students' experiences at USF. Additionally, and as importantly, 43% of our freshman class identifies as a minority.

Our students are representing the University on the athletic fields as "Fighting Saints," as well as in the classrooms. Over 430 student-athletes participate in one (or more) of our 22 athletic teams. The "Fighting Saints" had an impressive 2017-18 season on the field with 10 of our 22 teams advancing to NAIA national tournaments. Several individual student-athletes earned accolades, as well, including our 92 All-Conference athletes and our 19 NAIA All-Americans.

And, because our student-athletes are "students" first, I am particularly proud that 15 of our 20 qualifying athletic teams were named NAIA "Scholar Teams." Close to 10% of our student-athletes were named NAIA "Scholar Athletes", and 22% of our student-athletes received "All-Conference" academic recognition.

The combined result of these successes placed the University of St. Francis in the top 10% of schools in the 2017-18 "Learfield Cup" standings. USF also finished 2<sup>nd</sup> once again in our Conference's All-Sports Cup standings and had two coaches named "Coach of the Year" for their respective 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, almost \$19 million in institutional aid and scholarships are being 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 through planned giving. Many of you are in this room today...and we thank you for your continued generosity and the impactful role that generosity plays in the lives of our students!

And, speaking of Caritas and scholarship funding, I am excited to share with you the news that we are **bringing Caritas back to Joliet in 2019!** This year's event will be held on January 26, 2019, at the Renaissance Center at 6 p.m. We have great live and silent auction items, wonderful food and drinks, and dancing – all in support of student scholarships. Since its inception over sixty years ago, our Caritas event has raised more than \$5 million for scholarships. This year's Caritas Scholarship Ball will be chaired by alumni Tracey (Carmack '92) and Dan Vogen '93. Please join us this year for great fun and camaraderie all for a great cause.

### Recognized Academic Excellence

Each year, over 90% 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 99% 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, because 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, especially in comparison to our local peers – which include Lewis University, Benedictine University, St. Xavier University, and Dominican University. While our percentage of students paying down their debt is equal to the average of our peers, our average annual cost is below their average; and, our graduation rate, percentage of students who return after their first year, and average salary after attending are all above our peer average. We are understandably pleased by this, but we are 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.

USF’s “2019 Regional Universities – Midwest” ranking by *U.S. News & World Report* increased to #28 (up from #32 in the 2018) in a year that saw close to half of Illinois’ schools drop from their previous *U.S. News* rankings. The *Princeton Review* and *College Consensus* continue to rank the University of St. Francis among the best universities in Illinois, the Midwest, and the US – as well as for offering the best graduate, online, and veterans’ programs. *Money* magazine rates us as a best value, while *College Consensus* rated USF as one of the 100 Best Small Colleges and a Best Catholic College/University.

Other rankings we are excited to share include:

- Bestcolleges.com
  - Best Online Bachelor’s in Healthcare Management
  - Best Online Colleges in Illinois
  - Most Affordable Online Colleges in Illinois
- Colleges of Distinction
  - College of Distinction - since 2011
- College Consensus
  - Best Catholic Colleges & Universities
  - Best Colleges & Universities in Illinois
  - Best Regional Universities—Midwest
  - 100 Best Small Colleges

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 are noticed by “casually mentioning them” through local, regional and even national media releases, social media posts, and on our electronic billboards that are located along several major highways in the region.

It is also important to note the University of St. Francis’ degree programs are fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. We are also especially proud of the rigorous, specialized accreditation that our programs have earned from national associations, including:

- 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 ensures that they will be ready and prepared to become the next generation of servant leaders...and will join our strong, growing community of 49,000+ alumni.

Indeed, these women and men can be found just about everywhere – with:

- over 2,300 in Joliet alone;
- 7,700 in Will county, and;
- 21,000 in the state of Illinois.

Another 28,000 of our alumni are spread across the country...and the world.

Indeed, we find it as a great source of pride that many of our alumni use the education and experiences they had at USF to continue making a positive impact on our local communities. In the tri-county area alone, over 900 USF alumni are teachers, administrators and staff members in private and public education, and over 600 USF alumni are employed in a variety of capacities in healthcare fields.

That said, we will maintain our commitment to turning our students into dedicated, passionate, impactful, servant leaders who will remain connected to University of St. Francis family for years to come.

### *Telling Our Story*

You might be asking yourself, “To what does USF 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.

Indeed, last 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 are 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, that we are ‘*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 13:1, 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 organization. Our patrons, Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, were doers and we are committed to ensuring their example remains relevant in the 21st century.

Finally, ‘*Serving Those Who Serve Others*’ comes from our value of COMPASSION. The vast majority of our students are earning degrees that focus on serving people, such as nursing, healthcare, business, and education. 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 of the staff and faculty members that help to make USF the warm, welcoming place that it is. Indeed, we hope that you will see these statements modeled out in the community, in the hospitals, in the board rooms, in the classrooms, and in the homes our graduates serve and inhabit every day. They – and each of us – are called to serve and called to lead.

### *Making an Impact*

As Joliet’s only four-year university, we do not take lightly our role in having a positive impact, whether that impact be locally, regionally, at a state level, or beyond. We take great pride in the

active roles we take, which position us to make our community and our world better. Please allow me to share a few examples of USF's "impact in action."

Our College of Education offers the dual credit course "Exploring the Teaching Profession" to aspiring teachers at Joliet Central and Joliet West High Schools. You may have seen the front-page article about this course in a recent edition of the *Herald News*. While many high schools offer dual credit courses, which allow students to earn both high school and college credit at the same time, our course is unique because it also places these prospective teachers in Joliet Grade School District 86 classrooms to gain first-hand experience with this important profession before they even graduate from high school. This helps students make an informed decision prior to investing time and money into a potential career path that typically does not present this type of experience until their final years of undergraduate study. Between this valuable, early experience and the partnerships we have formed with Joliet's public-school districts, the University of St. Francis is taking a unique, collaborative approach to preparing the next generation of educators.

To that end, I am proud to report that USF has received a Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship grant for almost \$1 million, awarded by the National Science Foundation. This grant seeks to encourage talented science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) majors and professionals to become effective teacher leaders in high-needs school districts in the immediate Joliet area. We hope – and plan – to partner with Joliet Junior College, as well as other local community colleges, to encourage students to apply for this great opportunity and become STEM teachers in the Joliet community.

Taking care of the environment is everyone's job, but USF has taken an active leadership role in meeting and educating people about that responsibility. USF has recently become a member of the **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)** to further campus efforts toward building a healthy and just world. Through membership in this organization, USF will receive support in advancing its sustainability initiatives throughout the institution and in the community. The USF Sustainability Committee has led the way on several sustainability initiatives on USF campuses – including the creation of a community garden, maintenance of campus beehives and a bee/butterfly-friendly garden, and placement of recycling bins in meeting and gathering rooms across all campuses. Currently, the committee is working to eliminate the use of single-use water bottles on campus.

Service learning at the University of St. Francis provides students with the opportunity to incorporate the university's values into impactful learning experiences. This past summer's "**Pay It Forward**" program gave area sophomore, junior, and senior high school students the chance to learn about our values through a 20-hour service project. Participants learned about the values of service, compassion, integrity, and respect through engagement with service projects within the Joliet community at four service sites – Joliet Hope Center food pantry, Will County Forest Preserve, a site designated through the "Sharefest" community outreach initiative, and Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, which is sponsored by the University's sponsoring congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

## Centennial Campaign

We are fast approaching our 100-year anniversary; and, as a part of that celebration, USF is embarking on a Centennial Campaign with three strategic initiatives that will help to beautify the campus, as well as to increase scholarships and honor our heritage. We are happy to announce that our Campaign co-chairs are Diane and Bill Habiger and Ed and Gloria Dollinger.

This campaign is an important part of how USF is enhancing the learning environment by showing its commitment to affordable excellence – that is, by ensuring that a USF education remains within the reach of bright, hard-working students and their families.

Indeed, student scholarship support is the highest priority for the University in this campaign – with our plan being to raise over \$1 million in endowed scholarships.

In addition, on the corner of Wilcox and Plainfield Road, USF will build a new, welcoming entrance – with a monument sign, landscaping, statue of Saint Francis, and patio/donor recognition area. We believe the charm, color, and beauty of the well-placed landscape elements will enhance the campus environment and help bolster recruitment efforts.

The last initiative of the Centennial Campaign is creating a new entrance to the Quad. With the removal of St. Alberts Hall, the new open space will create an attractive link between USF's LaVerne and Dorothy Brown Science Hall, Tower Hall, the Pat Sullivan Recreation Center, and the Motherhouse. The new quad will create peaceful seating conducive to learning – with a commons area for students to study, collaborate, dine, and enjoy fellowship. There will also be a new water feature that will help further beautify the campus.

Stay on the lookout for special Centennial events in 2019 and 2020. We hope each of you will participate in some way in our 100-year celebrations.

## 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 filled with 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 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. Please also keep your eyes open for our quarterly *Community Impact* e-newsletter from the USF Community & Government Relations Office as a way to keep up with university news and events.

Before you leave today, please take a moment to explore the tables outside of this room. The tables are staffed by USF administrators and faculty members who are 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.

As I have so often said in the past, I believe that USF has all the pieces in place to become one of the nation's finest Catholic, Franciscan institutions.

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

Thank you!