

Ambassador Day 2019 - “State of the University”

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

Thank you for joining us for our sixth 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. Before I begin my Address, I would like 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 –

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

Of course, whether you are a member of one of our four colleges’ Advisory Councils, a community partner, 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. While there continue to be many challenges facing higher education both locally and nationally, I can assure you that the University of St. Francis is solidly-positioned and moving forward. We are excelling 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 USF offers to our students. 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 our University. The increased efforts of our admissions team have resulted in a positive impact on our enrollment.

Indeed, it was a historic year for undergraduate enrollment. I am proud to share with you that USF welcomed almost 500 new undergraduate (freshmen, transfer, and degree completion) students this fall, which is a 5% increase in comparison to last fall. That number includes a 10% increase in the freshman class. (Recognize that this comes at a time when many 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 2019 fiscal year last May. I am happy to report that USF's operations once again resulted in a million-dollar-plus surplus for a 7th consecutive fiscal year!

Our financial capacity continues to expand, with a \$25 million increase in the past 6 years, and our total net assets are at an all-time high of over \$53 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. In fact, in just the past four years:

- The **Plaster Free Enterprise Center** was opened at our St. Bonaventure Campus in downtown Joliet in 2015. 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. For your information, the Business Incubator will be celebrating its 5-year anniversary with a special open house event on Thursday, October 24th. We certainly invite you to attend and learn more about this wonderful program.
- Three 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.
- In February 2018, we opened and dedicated the new LaVerne and Dorothy Brown Science Hall. This magnificent, three-story, 35,000-square-foot facility hosts over 600 USF students in 40-plus different courses each week in state-of-the-art lab and classroom settings.

We continue to expand beyond Joliet, as well. We are proud to share that our MBA program in partnership with the Brno University of Technology in the Czech Republic will induct its 9th cohort into this program later this year...and has graduated 6 cohorts! 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 (COBHA) faculty, who teach half of the courses.

Since beginning our program in the Czech Republic, our COBHA team has established similar partnerships with the University of Finance-Marketing in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; the University of Economics and Business in Hanoi, Vietnam; and Cairo University in Egypt. All are recruiting students to begin their studies in 2020 or 2021. We plan to continue expanding USF globally by exploring future partnerships in Central and South America.

I would also like to tell you about our newest partnership. We are proud to announce that our College of Arts & Sciences has just launched a first-of-its-kind, (Chinese) Ministry of Education-approved dual degree program with the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (SUSE) in China to offer a Visual Communication Design bachelor degree. This is a 3+1 joint program that requires three years of study at SUSE, after which students may elect to complete one year of study abroad at USF. Our goal is to enroll 100-120 students per year in the program, and I'm proud to report that I'm just back from Sichuan, China, where I met with the 103 students who comprise our first cohort!

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 55% 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 decade, 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 also 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, 44% of our freshman class identifies as a minority.

Our students are doing a great job of representing the University on the athletic fields as Fighting Saints, as well as in the classrooms as student-athletes. Over 430 student-athletes participate in one or more of our 22 athletic teams.

Our teams had an impressive 2018-19 season on the field with 10 of our 22 squads advancing to NAIA national tournaments. Several student-athletes earned individual accolades, as well, including our 82 All-Conference athletes our 19 NAIA All-Americans.

And, because our student-athletes are “students” first, I am particularly proud that a school record 20 of our 22 qualifying athletic teams were named NAIA “Scholar Teams,” for having a team GPA of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale this past year. Also, 25 percent of our junior and senior student-athletes were named NAIA “Scholar Athletes” for boasting a 3.50-or-higher cumulative GPA and nearly one-third of our eligible student-athletes received academic all-conference recognition for having a 3.20 or higher GPA.

The combined result of these successes placed the University of St. Francis in the top 12 percent of NAIA schools in the 2018-19 “Learfield Cup” standings, which takes into account success on the national stage for all sports. USF also finished second in our conference’s All-Sports Cup standings and had three 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, over \$20 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 lower than many of our peers and half that of the state and national averages.

Our institutional support is funded by donors who give to the annual fund, special events like Caritas – which I will speak of in a moment – 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!

Recognized Academic Excellence

Last year, 93% of our nursing program graduates passed the National Council Licensure examination on their first attempt 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 98% 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 and other community partners...like so many of you here with us today.

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. The percentage of our students paying down their debts is higher than the average of our peers – in part, because our average annual cost is below their average.

And, in terms of outcomes, our graduation rate, percentage of students who return after their first year, and our 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.

To that end, USF continues to receive recognition from national ranking systems as a top university. This year alone, *College Consensus* ranked the University of St. Francis among the best universities in Illinois, the Midwest, and the U.S. They also ranked USF as the top Catholic university in Illinois (and #24 overall in the U.S.).

Other ranking systems such as *Colleges of Distinction* and *The Princeton Review* also offered high praise for USF. For the first time, USF moved up into *U.S. News and World Report's* "National Universities" category this year in its annual "Best Colleges" rankings and was ranked #202 among such degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the U.S.

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.

In addition to the recognition our academic programs receives, our student life programs are also noteworthy.

Every other year, USF invites its students who live on campus to participate in the nationwide EBI Resident Assessment Survey. This year's survey, which measured student satisfaction and learning outcomes in the residence halls through the lens of nineteen different factors, included data from 246 academic institutions.

When compared to all 246 participating schools, USF ranked:

- #1 in the Overall Learning factor;
- #2 in five additional factors, including Satisfaction: Room Assignment; Learning Outcomes: Personal Interactions; Learning Outcomes: Self-Management; Learning Outcomes: Sustainability; and Overall Program Effectiveness;
- Among the top 5% in seven factors in addition to those mentioned, including Overall Satisfaction; and
- Among the top 20% in an additional four factors.

These rankings demonstrate that our staff and students are able to successfully create a learning-focused environment in the residence halls. They also show the effort that goes into building a positive, community experience for students choosing to live on campus.

It is important to note the University of St. Francis' degree programs are fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. 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,
- the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiological Technology; 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 almost 50,000 alumni.

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

- over 2,330 in Joliet alone;
- close to 7,800 in Will county; and
- over 21,300 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 of Will, Grundy and Kendall Counties 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

I can tell you with great confidence that our mission 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.

We “make real” our mission through 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.”

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, wonderful 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.

Impact Through Partnerships

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 on that position us to make our community and our world better. Please allow me to share a few examples of the impact our University is already having by partnering with the community in a variety of capacities

Last fall, I told you about the College of Education's piloting of a dual-credit course entitled "Exploring the Teaching Profession" for aspiring teachers in Joliet Township High School District 204. While many high schools offer dual-credit courses that allow students to earn both high school and college credit at the same time, this course is unique because it 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.

The early success of this partnership has allowed us to form new partnerships with additional high schools in the region, including Minooka Community High School, the four Plainfield high schools, Lockport Township High School, Joliet Catholic Academy, Alan B. Shepherd High School, Richards High School, and Eisenhower High School. We are also proud to announce that the course will be offered in the three Lincoln-Way high schools beginning next fall.

To that end, I am proud to report that USF recently announced its first four Noyce STEM Education Scholars. The program is being funded through the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship grant, which was worth almost \$1 million, and was awarded by the National Science Foundation. The grant is being used to help recruit, prepare, place, and mentor excellent STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) educators in high-need schools in Joliet and the surrounding communities. 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.

This summer, USF announced that it was a recipient of another grant – this time through the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Advanced Nursing Education Workforce (ANEW) program. The grant, which will provide \$1.45 million in funding to USF and the Will County Community Health Center to offer high-quality clinical experiences for USF students in the Family Nurse Practitioner and Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurse Practitioner programs. The grant will also place USF graduates at WCCHC or in another rural or underserved community within Illinois and expand the availability of primary care and mental health services for residents of Will County in northeastern Illinois and, through the introduction of telehealth services, residents in rural Illinois. This is a prime example of how government entities and higher education institutions can collaborate to benefit the citizens of the communities they serve.

As you learned earlier this morning, service is one of the core Franciscan values upon which the University of St. Francis (USF) is founded. As part of New Student Orientation each year, freshmen students have an opportunity to experience the impact that service can have on a community by volunteering their time at organizations and sites in and around the Joliet area through the University's Foundations Service Project. Indeed, on Friday, August 16th, groups of students traveled to a variety of sites, including Habitat for Humanity ReStore, the Old Joliet Prison, the Will County Forest Preserve, Sharefest New Lenox, Hands of Hope, and the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Our students performed various tasks at each site – including organizing inventory, sorting donations, cleaning up the environment, and packing food.

Centennial Campaign

In December 2019, USF will begin a year-long Centennial Celebration. For the 13 months that follow, we will relive the memories of how we became what we are today, while continuing to lay the foundation for our next 100 years of “Building a Franciscan Future... Together, in Our Second Century.” Visit stfrancis.edu/100years for more information. Next year’s Ambassador Day will include a closer look at our Centennial, so I hope you will be able to join us next October to learn more.

As we prepare for the start of our Centennial Celebrations to commence in two short months, our Centennial Campaign is already well underway. The campaign, under the leadership of Campaign co-chairs are Diane & Bill Habiger and Gloria & Ed Dollinger, includes three strategic initiatives that will help to beautify the campus and increase scholarships and honor our heritage. 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, those of you familiar with our campus may have noticed that St. Albert Hall is no longer a physical part of our campus. The building was razed this past summer in anticipation of the creation of our new Centennial Quad, which is one initiative of our Centennial Campaign. 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 include a commons area in which students can study, collaborate, dine, and enjoy fellowship.

Our Centennial Campaign will also result in the creation of a Centennial Gateway at the corner of Wilcox and Plainfield Road. This new, welcoming entrance will feature 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.

As part of our Centennial Celebrations, we are excited to share that we are bringing the annual Caritas Scholarship Ball back onto campus for one year. This year’s event -The Caritas Centennial Scholarship Gala - will be held on Saturday, January 25, 2020 in the Pat Sullivan Center at 6 p.m.

Caritas is one of Joliet’s longest-running black-tie events, raising more than \$5 million for scholarships over its history – including almost \$2 million in the past six years – from the generosity of USF’s alumni and friends. This event will support the Centennial Campaign initiative of raising funds to provide even more financial support for students in the form of scholarships.

In addition to co-chairing the Centennial Campaign, Gloria & Ed Dollinger and Diane & Bill Habiger are co-chairing the Caritas Centennial Scholarship Gala. I’d like to pause for a moment to thank these four selfless individuals for all that they do for USF and our students.

They, along with our many other volunteers, donors and friends, make so much more possible for our students. So, I invite you to join us this January for a wonderful evening of gourmet dining, dancing and fun – all for a great cause. Please visit stfrancis.edu/caritas for more information.

Partnership Information

Throughout this morning's update, you have heard many examples of the impact our university has made and continues to make, especially when we partner with the community. At this time, I would like to take a few moments to ask for your thoughts on both existing and potential future partnerships between your organization and USF.

As Joliet's only four-year university, it is important to us that we engage in impactful partnerships with the community. A representative from USF is at each table and will guide this brief discussion. Before you leave today, I also encourage you to take a few minutes to complete the Partnership Information Form that has been placed at your table. This form will provide us details that will allow us to either start or continue a partnership conversation that we can take into the future.

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 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.

Again, I thank you for joining us this morning for the 6th annual Ambassador Day. In our Franciscan tradition, I wish you “Pace e Bene” – “peace and all good things”!

Thank you!