

## **Ambassador Day 2022 - “State of the University”**

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*President, University of St. Francis*

### *Introduction*

Good morning! 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 university. For those of you who are new to USF, I welcome you to our St. Clare Campus. For our returning friends and partners, I welcome you back.

I would like to begin by thanking you for joining us for our 9th 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.

This morning, you will learn more about USF and how we continue to proudly serve Joliet, Will County and beyond. 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 and the community, whenever the subject arises. By the end of your time with us this morning, it is my 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.

Again, 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, as well as members of our founding and sponsoring congregation: the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.

I would also like to acknowledge and recognize the members of my cabinet and the many other USF employees who are with us today. It is through them and their hard work that our mission is made real each and every day.

With that, I would like to share with you the 2022 State of the University Address.

### “State of the University” Address

I am pleased to report that the state of the University of St. Francis continues to be strong, and I can assure you that the University of St. Francis is solidly-positioned and moving forward. As each day begins, we renew our dedication to “Building a Franciscan Future... Together, in Our Second Century!”

### Start of the Fall 2022 Semester

This fall, we once again welcomed students back to our campus with a majority of our undergraduate courses scheduled to take place in-person and on-campus. Fall semester classes commenced on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, and the semester has proceeded with a high level of energy and enthusiasm.

Now while things seem to have returned to a much more familiar sense of normalcy, we continue to recognize and take very seriously that the challenges presented by COVID-19 still exist. That said, our campus community continues to do a wonderful job of keeping each other safe as “Saints United”.

### 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 (both in-person and virtual) continue to see a steady stream of interested students who know they will receive a high-quality education when they enroll at USF.

Our Admissions Office team continues to connect diligently with prospective students to reiterate the power of a USF education, which is deeply rooted in Franciscan values, and to ultimately enroll them as students for the fall.

The University’s financial outlook continues to be strong, even during these turbulent times. We remain in a solid fiscal position after the close of the 2022 fiscal year last May. I am happy to report that USF’s operations once again resulted in an operational surplus for a 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive fiscal year!

Our financial capacity continues to expand, as well, with a \$30.5 million increase in the past 9 years, and total net assets at \$58.8 million.

Even in the face of these challenges, USF continues to serve students and alumni from across the globe. We are proud educational partners with many international institutions, including Brno University of Technology in the Czech Republic – enrolling its 12<sup>th</sup> cohort this fall; the Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (SUSE) in China –

enrolling its 3<sup>rd</sup> 100-student cohort this fall; and, the University of Economics and Business in Hanoi, Vietnam, which is recruiting its 2<sup>nd</sup>, 50+ student cohort this fall.

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

We cannot – and will not – forget that the most important reason the University of St. Francis is here is to prepare women and men – that is, 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.

Approximately 50% percent of this year's freshman class is comprised of 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 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, 52% of our freshman class identifies as a minority.

### *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. Last year, \$23 million in institutional aid and scholarships were provided to our students. As a result, USF students have maintained a loan default rate (most recently reported at 1.0%) that is lower than many of our peers – which include Lewis University, Benedictine University, St. Xavier University, and Dominican University (and which have an average default rate of 1.5% - and less than half that of the state and national averages.

### Recognized Academic Excellence

Last year, 100% of our teachers' education program students – once again – successfully completed all state certification tests. 94% of our physician assistant students passed their PANCE national certifying exam, and 86% of our nursing program graduates passed the National Council Licensure examination on their first attempt and received their RN.

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. 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.

Our business classes often use the term "return on investment". Given that, I would like to now share with you some points of pride that demonstrate a return on your investment in USF and its students.

USF programs and the University as a whole continue to earn recognition by national ranking organizations. Last year alone, USF was named to The Princeton Review's "2022 Best Colleges – Midwestern" rankings, U.S. News and World Report's "2022 Best Colleges" listing, and Forbes' 2021 "America's Top Colleges" listing.

Additionally, our College of Business & Health Administration's online MBA program was named the top program of its kind in Illinois for a second year in a row by U.S. News & World Report, and our Leach College of Nursing's online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program was named the best of its kind in Illinois by Fortune. In fact, the program was one of only two Illinois programs included in Fortune's 2022 rankings.

This is the time of year during which accolades of this kind are announced, so I encourage you to visit [stfrancis.edu](http://stfrancis.edu) regularly to keep up-to-date on how your University continues to stand out amongst its peers locally, regionally and even nationally.

Campus safety - at all levels of education - continues to draw national attention. Campus safety is of utmost priority at USF. In addition to the day-to-day efforts of on-campus security team, our Crisis Management Team regularly participates in trainings and tabletop exercises to enhance our crisis response plans should they need to be activated.

This attention to detail does not go unrecognized. The personal finance website WalletHub, released its 2022 College and University Rankings, which compared more than 1,000 higher-education institutions across 30 different measures. In the “Campus Safety” category, WalletHub ranked USF #1 in Illinois among all colleges and universities included in the report...for the second year in a row.

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 440 student-athletes participate in one or more of our 22 athletic teams.

Our teams participated in another exciting year of competitions, as 9 of our 22 squads advanced to NAIA national tournaments. Several student-athletes earned individual accolades, as well, including our 108 All-Conference athletes and our 44 NAIA All-Americans.

And, because our student-athletes are “students” first, I am particularly proud that 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, 118 of our junior and senior student-athletes were named NAIA “Scholar Athletes” for boasting a 3.50-or-higher cumulative GPA and 128 of our eligible student-athletes received academic all-conference recognition for having a 3.20 or higher GPA. Additionally, our student athletes set a new spring semester cumulative GPA school record at 3.28.

In the 2021-2022 NAIA “Learfield Cup” standings, USF finished in the top 10%. The Fighting Saints also finished third in our conference’s All-Sports Cup standings and had three coaches named “Coach of the Year” for their respective sports. Additionally, USF Athletic Director Dave Laketa was named the CCAC 2021-22 Athletic Director of the Year. Go Fighting Saints!

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 all of those listed on the screen.

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 about 53,000 alumni, who continue to live the Franciscan values of Respect, Integrity, Service and Compassion in their workplaces and communities.

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

- close to 2,300 in Joliet alone;
- over 8,200 in Will county; and
- over 22,000 in the State of Illinois.

We even have over 90 alumni working right here at USF. The rest of our alumni are spread across the country...and the world.

We find it 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, there are over 6,000 USF alumni working in service-related professions such as healthcare, education, and social work.

USF also offers the Student Alumni Mentoring program (known as SAM) as a way to bring students and alumni together to help pave the way for students to succeed at USF and beyond. Established in 2012, the program also provides our alumni with great reason to stay engaged with their alma mater!

Since its inception, over 1,000 students have graduated from the SAM program. Through this and other programs, USF will maintain its 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 and sponsoring 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 as they create their own unique USF experience.

Creating this USF experience 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 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.

### *Our Town...Your University*

Throughout this morning, I have shared a detailed picture of USF and how we live our mission each day on our campuses. I have also alluded to how our university community focuses on creating a positive impact outwardly, be it locally or on a broad spectrum. At our core, though, we truly are the Joliet area's university. We take very seriously the responsibility we have to serve and to lead not only on our campuses, but also in our community. As neighbors and partners, we can all look at the Joliet and Will County areas and proudly say that this is our town – our community. And through the lens of service and leadership, I am proud to state that the University of St. Francis is *your* university.

USF regularly partners with agencies and organizations in Joliet and the greater Will County area. It is also important to note that we invest in the area's future. USF recently introduced its “**Will County Access Initiative**” to Will County and its high schools. This is a mission-inspired approach to offering a high-quality, private university education to students who may have never realized that this option was open to them, and creates additional opportunities for local students to earn their college degrees without the worry of incurring student loan debt. Created specifically for students at Will County high schools, the initiative is a way to create a new path to high-quality, private, higher education right here in Will County.

The **USF Center for Nonprofit Excellence**, launched just last year, provides efficient and value-added professional services to Will County nonprofit organizations with limited financial resources, whose mission is aligned with the Franciscan core values of respect, integrity, service, and compassion. This allows the nonprofit organizations to focus primarily on their core, mission-driven objectives in the community.

There are several benefits to what the USF Center for Nonprofit Excellence offers. For our nonprofit peers, you now have available to you a diverse talent pool of subject matter experts with different backgrounds and perspectives, along with an opportunity to learn

more about best practices – all at a manageable cost. For USF, we will be able to create new connections within our community while also providing practical experience opportunities for our students.

Visit [stfrancis.edu/cne](http://stfrancis.edu/cne) for more information.

In late 2021, the Joliet Police Department (JPD) was awarded a grant worth over \$476,000 through the **U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance grant program**. JPD will use the grant to fund crisis intervention training for its officers to improve service call responses involving individuals with mental health issues. The University of St. Francis (USF) was named a sub-recipient as part of the grant award and has supported the program’s overall design.

The comprehensive effort connects JPD and USF with other area agencies, including the Behavioral Health Unit of the Will County Department of Public Health and Cornerstone Services. This collaborative approach will better connect individuals with mental illness to needed treatment and services.

### *Bringing Franciscan Values to the Community*

So much has been said this morning about University of St. Francis students and programs, and rightfully so. We are infinitely proud of the achievements earned by our students and faculty, as well as of the accolades earned by several of our nationally-recognized programs.

However, I feel it is important to note an additional point of pride for the University of St. Francis, and that is the level of service our employees give back to the community. On any given day, you will likely see or even serve alongside a USF employee who is sharing the Franciscan values of Respect, Service, Compassion and Integrity as a member of an area organization’s board of directors or as a volunteer at an area event or agency. We sincerely value the partnerships that are created through opportunities such as these and understand the impact that all of us working together helps our towns and our communities become even stronger and more vibrant.

Speaking of partnerships, I am hopeful that as today’s event concludes, you plan to stick around and network with the many USF representatives here to explore ways that we can expand existing partnerships and even create new ones in an effort to enhance the impact resonating throughout Joliet, Will County and beyond.



### Join Us for These Upcoming Events

On Friday, November 25, I invite you to join USF at the annual “Light Up the Holidays Parade” in downtown Joliet as presented by the Joliet City Center Partnership. The Grand Marshal for the parade is none other than USF’s very own “Bernie [the] St. Bernard.” Please join us as we help kick off the holiday season in downtown Joliet.

I also invite you to mark your calendars for the Caritas Scholarship Celebration, which is shifting from being a winter event to being a spring event. One thing that remains the same is that Caritas has served as USF’s primary fundraiser for student scholarships for over 60 years, so please join us and help make a college education possible and affordable for USF students. Visit [stfrancis.edu/caritas](https://stfrancis.edu/caritas) for more information.

### Closing

As I begin to close this 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Ambassador Day, I would like to once again 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.

Before you leave today, please be sure to take with you the folder of information at your place setting. Included in the folder is information that we invite you to use to spread the word about USF, its programs, its students, and its positive impact on the community. This includes:

- The “*Effective and Affordable*” piece offers fast facts about USF that can help you tell our story.
- There is also a one-page handout with admissions information and *a listing of academic 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 our *latest issue of Engaging Mind & Spirit magazine* so you know some of the great things that have been happening on campus over the past several months. Please, also keep your eyes open for our quarterly *Community Impact* e-newsletter from the USF Community & Employee Relations Office as a way to keep up with university news and events.

Again, I thank you for joining us this morning for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Ambassador Day. And, in our Franciscan tradition, I wish you “Pace e Bene” – “peace and all good things”!

Thank you!