

Bellarmino: The Private University in the Public Interest

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be with you today. Since 1912, the Rotary Club of Louisville, one of the country's largest I understand, has been providing humanitarian and civic service, while promoting integrity, understanding and goodwill. Thank you for inviting me here today to share the good news about what's happening at Bellarmine University!

I believe it is vital for prominent business and civic leaders such as you to be "plugged in" about what we are doing at Bellarmine, because while we are a private university, we operate entirely in the public interest.

Our Commonwealth and City have great public universities, of course. But our Commonwealth and City also need Bellarmine to continue its ascent as a nationally pre-eminent, private university of significant size and stature – in order to fully realize our state's and city's potential in the 21st century and beyond.

And we are doing our part – by attracting top level talent to this city and this region, and by educating students for excellent lives of leadership and service.

In your mind's eye, perhaps, you have an image of Bellarmine as a "hidden gem" of a college, housed in a couple 1950s yellow-brick buildings, and doing a good job of educating a small number of commuter students. If this is your perception, you REALLY need to come and visit us and see for yourselves the Bellarmine of today. I believe you will be impressed.

Our almost 4,000 students are men and women from 42 states and 22 countries. More than a third of our undergraduates are first-generation college-goers. Students choose from more than 50 undergraduate majors and 26 graduate and professional programs, including doctoral programs, participate in more than 80 student groups, and play on 21 NCAA varsity teams. More than 95 percent have jobs or are enrolled in graduate programs within a year of graduation.

Every student gets some financial aid. Every student not only is guaranteed to have financial aid, but if they do their part, to be graduated in four years, to have an internship opportunity and a study abroad opportunity.

Some things have not changed: Our student-teacher ratio is still 12 to 1, allowing us to have close faculty and student interaction. We still educate the whole student – mind, body, heart and soul – as reflected in our tag line, Explore the World. Start Within.

From my perspective, I see Bellarmine's history, present and future can be viewed in five phases:

The first phase was Foundation. From 1950-1972, President Monsignor Alfred F. Horrigan laid the foundation for an excellent Catholic liberal arts college for men. While the institution was founded in 1950 by Archbishop Floersch, in 1968 the Archdiocese turned over the institution to an independent, self-perpetuating board of trustees and Bellarmine merged into the internationally recognized Ursuline tradition of higher education.

The second phase was Connection and Development. From 1973-1990, Bellarmine's second president, and first lay president, Dr. Eugene Petrik, strengthened the college by connecting it with the economic and business leadership of the city, and ramping up Bellarmine's offerings in professional education in business, nursing, and education.

The third phase – the one that began upon my arrival as Bellarmine's third president in 1990 and continuing through our 50th anniversary in the year 2000 – was developing a Capacity for Competitive Excellence. I focused on the basics to strengthen the base: by growing enrollment; by beginning to develop the campus to be more residential and regional; and by growing the faculty in size and quality and improving their compensation and benefits.

I also saw to the refreshing and strengthening of our liberal arts core in undergraduate education; strengthened athletic opportunities for students; and built a new library to serve as the hub of the campus technology backbone.

While much was accomplished on many levels during this time, basically what I was able to do from 1990-2000 was to help the Bellarmine community – trustees, faculty, staff, and alumni – become more confident, more aware of the great potential of the university and our opportunity and responsibility to realize that potential.

Our fourth phase – the one we currently occupy – is summed up by the phrase “Vision 2020.” By the early 2000s, it became apparent that we needed to add further passion and focus to our competence. We had to imagine an ambitious and far-reaching future, believe in that future, and begin to create that future for the great benefit of our city, state and region.

And so, in 2005, we launched a 15-year Vision 2020, a bold roadmap and strategic plan for continuous improvement as the premier independent Catholic university in the South, and the leading private university in the Commonwealth and region.

To date:

Our enrollment has grown by 34 percent and our full-time faculty has grown by 37 percent.

We have vastly increased the percentage of students living on campus – this year with about 1,200 full-time undergraduates in residence. A few years ago, therefore, we achieved Carnegie's definition of a “primarily residential university.”

To accommodate that growth, since 2005 we added to our existing four halls – four new residence halls as well as the state-of-the-art Owsley B. Frazier Stadium and Joseph & Janet Clayton Field. We have added a second dining hall and expanded the original one, doubling capacity and increasing room for our Communication School.

We have completely renovated historic Knights Hall. We have added a three-story addition to Nolen C. Allen Hall to accommodate the tremendous growth in Physical Therapy and Health Sciences. The School of Education has grown in leaps and bounds with two Ph.D. programs and we launched our new School of Environmental Studies.

Thanks to generous alumni giving, we also added a beautifully landscaped signature main entrance from Newburg Road – St. Robert’s Gate, an important symbol of hospitality.

All told, Bellarmine, which began with one building in 1950, now has 42 buildings, owns a total of 180 acres, and our total assets are valued at over \$200 million.

Currently, we are well underway on the most significant construction project ever undertaken at Bellarmine: Bellarmine Centro.

Centro, the center of our campus hill town, is a new classroom and office facility housing the W. Fielding Rubel School of Business, the Institute for Advanced Analytics, a new Welcome Center, the Career Development Center, and Campus Ministry. Teaching and learning technology throughout will be fully appropriate for students of the 21st century.

Speaking of learning, the quality, variety and relevance of our academic programs has been enhanced since 2005, too:

We have added a School of Environmental Studies and a School of Communication, bringing our total number of schools to seven:

Bellarmino College of Arts & Sciences

W. Fielding Rubel School of Business

Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education

Donna & Allan Lansing School of Nursing & Health Sciences

School of Communication

School of Environmental Studies

School of Continuing & Professional Studies

In addition to our Thomas Merton Center and the Institute for Media, Culture, and Ethics, we also have added a much-needed and highly-valued Institute for Advanced Analytics that will prepare students across disciplines to draw meaning and value from ever-expanding data.

In the process, we have launched more than 24 new degree and certificate programs, including two new Ph.D.s – a Ph.D. in Education and Social Change, and a Ph.D. in Leadership in Higher Education – and we are enjoying a strong partnership with not only the Catholic and independent schools, but especially with the Jefferson County Public Schools. And we are strategically adding online degrees to accommodate the interests of today's learners.

We have spotlighted Bellarmine and Louisville and Kentucky by winning the 2011 NCAA Division II National Basketball Championship, and last season our men's basketball team advanced to our third Final Four in five years. The Knights are currently the reigning NCAA Division II Midwest Region champions.

We have won several conference championships in a number of sports, a National Dance Team championship, and the NCAA regularly selects us to host Division II National Championships in 10 team sports and 4 individual sports. And this weekend, Bellarmine is hosting the NCAA Division II regional tournament in women's soccer.

Under serious consideration at the moment is adding Division II Football and Division I Women's Lacrosse.

And as many of you know, we house the largest collection of Thomas Merton writings and artifacts in the world in our Thomas Merton Center – a center which saw a huge increase in interest when no less a personage than Pope Francis mentioned Thomas Merton as one of four Great Americans having a huge influence upon him. In his recent historic address to the U.S. Congress, several times he referenced Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton.

As the University continues to realize its vision and potential, our success is being recognized regularly with top-level ratings in U.S. News & World Report, America's Best Colleges, the Princeton Review, The Washington Monthly and other publications.

Three-quarters of this year's entering freshman class come from outside Jefferson County, and 35 percent from other states. Well over 90% of these talented first generation students will graduate in four years and are most likely to stay in this region.

According to a 2014 Kentucky Center for Education & Workforce Statistics report, almost 80% of Bellarmine 2012 graduates worked in Louisville. That figure demonstrates that Bellarmine not only attracts but retains talent; indeed, nearly a third of the out-of-state graduates pursue their careers in Kentucky.

When Bellarmine graduates who enroll in Kentucky graduate schools are considered, the net gain is even more pronounced. In short, nearly 84% of BU graduates stay in Kentucky – and that figure exceeds all 4-year public institutions and far outpaces the mean for all privates.

And a recent Brookings study found that Bellarmine graduates' mid-career salaries are 16% higher than those of similar universities nationally, and No. 1 among all Kentucky schools in the study.

All of this sets the stage for Bellarmine's fifth phase in its development.

Bellarmino now has a tremendous opportunity to emerge, in this fifth phase of its development, as a nationally recognized, private university of significant size and stature for Louisville, for Kentucky, our region and nation – to graduate and employ more highly educated workers, to attract and retain more top-level talent not only here but from elsewhere as well, to build Louisville's creative class, and to do so within Bellarmine's distinctive mission, which emphasizes social justice and therefore equity in access to higher education and its benefits.

Given our opportunity as a private university in the public interest, the public will benefit from our growth, with the chief beneficiary being the City of Louisville and our region.

But this opportunity and the potential of Bellarmine will be realized only if Louisville, the Commonwealth, and the region have a strong culture of support not only for public institutions but just as importantly for private higher education.

To drive home that point, let me reference an article that ran in Atlantic Monthly a few years ago, when the city of Detroit's economic problems were much in the news. That article really resonated with us at Bellarmine -- because it made the important point that to thrive a city must have a thriving private university of significant size and stature, in addition to its public institutions, in order to be competitive and successful.

Detroit has had many problems, the author pointed out – and one is that it never had a large, successful, well-endowed private university. Even though the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, just 35 miles away, is “one of the best public universities in the world,” the author said, the city of Detroit never developed “a strong culture” of private higher education. He wrote:

“Imagine visiting Detroit in 1920, then journeying to the farmland of Pala Alto, CA, and finally the tobacco warehouses of Durham, NC. Which place would you have bet on to become a global research and education powerhouse? Yet among those three, only Detroit failed to do so.”

We know that a strong private university culture is important to the success of cities. Nashville has Vanderbilt; Atlanta has Emory; Durham has Duke. The list goes on, and it is really quite clear that successful private universities are a key hallmark and contributor of successful cities. Private universities can thrive in proximity to public universities; they graduate and employ highly educated workers; they attract and retain top talent from elsewhere, build a city's creative class; and stabilize neighborhoods in hard times. Public and private universities together make each other and the publics they serve stronger and better.

Obviously, Louisville is not Detroit. And Bellarmine is not Duke – yet! However, Bellarmine is well on its way to becoming for Louisville what Vanderbilt is for Nashville, what Duke is for Durham and the Research Triangle, what Emory is for Atlanta, and so forth.

We need you to help us maintain a strong culture of community support not only for public higher education but also private higher education to make that happen. And so again, I thank you for your invitation and for your attention today.

And I will close by inviting you to watch a three minute video in which Bellarmine students describe in their own words the essence and value of the Bellarmine experience in their own words.

Thank you.