



Fall 2025 Talking Points

Developed by the Office of University Communication. Send questions and feedback to [Jason Cissell](#)

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About Us

Bellarmino is a Catholic university that educates an increasingly diverse community of students in mind, body, and spirit for meaningful lives, rewarding careers, ethical leadership, and service to improve the human condition. Since adopting a bold strategic plan in 2019, the university has been intentional about its commitment to make a Bellarmine education affordable and accessible to students of all backgrounds. This includes those striving to become the first generation in their family to complete a college degree, a type of student Bellarmine serves extremely well through unrivaled outcomes that create upward economic mobility.

Bellarmino finds its Catholic identity in the inclusive spirit of Thomas Merton and through the vibrant spiritual life practiced on its campus. It offers an education rooted in the rich tradition of the Catholic liberal arts and sciences, a broad-based curriculum that eschews narrow specialization and instead prepares graduates to be lifelong learners and ethical decision-makers who can apply their knowledge in a range of contexts while adapting to changing circumstances.

The university offers a growing number of graduate and doctoral programs that align with changing workforce needs throughout the surrounding region – part of its role as a private university for the common good. Since offering its first online degree in 2015, Bellarmine has accelerated development of online and hybrid programs and certificates at all levels in response to student and workforce demand.

College Rankings

Bellarmino is consistently ranked among the nation's top colleges and universities, appearing on lists published by [U.S. News & World Report](#), [The Princeton Review](#), [Forbes](#), [Washington Monthly](#), [Niche](#), and [Money Magazine](#), among others.

See our [Rankings & Accolades webpage](#).

Some noteworthy highlights:

- Bellarmine is one of the top 75 colleges in the United States for embedding a mission-driven commitment to service into the student experience, according to Washington Monthly
- Bellarmine's Respiratory Therapy programs are recognized as #1 in the nation at the [undergraduate](#) and [graduate](#) levels.

Enrollment Growth

Bellarmino University enters its 75th anniversary year with strong signals of growth, stability, and mission alignment. Fall 2025 brought the university's largest incoming undergraduate class in years, an overall enrollment rebound, and stronger first-year retention rates.

Notably:

- Our first-year undergraduate cohort of 660 students is our largest since 2017 (up 22% year over year) and the most diverse in our history, with 39% being students of color. It is our second-largest incoming class over the past decade, and they carry a median high school GPA of 3.6.
- Our total student headcount of 3,077 has us above the 3,000-student mark for the first time since 2021.
- Our graduate student enrollment of 711 is our highest since 2021, up 10% year over year.
- Our incoming transfer student headcount of 90 shows an 18% year-over-year increase.
- Students who are Pell-eligible and/or first-generation make up 66% of our incoming class. Scholarships through our Hope Kentucky Scholars Program, when combined with federal and Kentucky aid, make Bellarmine surprisingly affordable for Pell-eligible students from our own state, reflecting our mission to increase college access.
- Our first-year retention rate of 78.7% is up 3.6 percentage points year over year.

Three Points of Distinction

Knights Get Hired – Unrivalled Career Outcomes

Aligns with Strategic Priority 1

Knights get hired. 99% of Bellarmine graduates find employment or pursue an advanced degree within six months of graduating, an [outcome](#) that is 16% above the national average for other colleges and universities. 97% of those employed graduates are already working in their career field of interest.

Bellarmino grads earn more than graduates from any other Kentucky institution, whether it's after 6 months, 3 years, 5 years, or 10 years. Three years after graduation, Bellarmine bachelor's degree recipients earn a median income that is 19% higher than the average median income for those holding bachelor's degrees from all Kentucky institutions. For master's degrees, the average median income is 23% higher. Measured over a lifetime, a Bellarmine degree generates a \$1.93 million return on investment, significantly higher than the \$1.51 million average for Kentucky private institutions and the \$1.56 million average for Kentucky public institutions.

Online & Hybrid Program Expertise Aligned with Regional Workforce Needs

Aligns with Strategic Priorities 2, 3 & 5

Since launching its first online degree program in 2015, Bellarmine has developed expertise in crafting high-quality online and hybrid degree and certificate programs that don't lose the university's signature personal touch. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this work – 25 online and hybrid credentials are

currently available at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, with more under development. In response to student demand and national trends, programs the university launches over the next few years will generally be developed for online delivery, often with some important campus-based experiences baked in. The university has committed to ensuring that its culture, soul, and unique character are preserved and palpable in the educational experiences it offers. That commitment – combined with the pathways to local employment that Bellarmine can offer through its partnerships – has made its online product compelling in the region.

In all, Bellarmine offers more than 25 graduate degrees in healthcare, education, business, communication, and technology, closely aligned with the region’s workforce needs through ongoing dialogue with the area’s top employers. For this reason, Bellarmine graduates enjoy a competitive advantage when seeking jobs.

Bellarmino’s online undergraduate degree completion program for adult learners with some college credit has opportunities to serve more students in Louisville and the surrounding region.

Bellarmino IMPACT – Transformative Experiences for Student Success

Aligns with Strategic Priority 1

[Bellarmino IMPACT](#) is a commitment to providing a distinctive and transformative learning experience centered on Catholic and liberal arts foundations. With a focus on personalized pathways to success, students can tailor their education to their individual needs and interests. Students have access to a wide range of hands-on experiences, internships, clinicals, fieldwork, study abroad, and volunteer opportunities, allowing them to gain valuable knowledge and skills. An IMPACT Network of faculty advisors, career coaches, professional advisors, and peer coaches works together to help students find purpose and achieve their goals. With their guidance and support, Bellarmine graduates are well-prepared to create a future that exceeds their imaginations.

IMPACT pillars: Engagement • Belonging • Wellness • Purpose

Additional Key Points

Strong Catholic Traditions & Identity

Aligns with Strategic Priority 1

Bellarmino, founded by the Archdiocese of Louisville, has shaped its Catholic identity in the inclusive spirit of Thomas Merton and through the vibrant spiritual life practiced on its campus. It offers an education rooted in the rich tradition of the Catholic liberal arts and sciences, a broad-based curriculum that eschews narrow specialization and instead prepares graduates to be lifelong learners and ethical decision-makers who can apply their knowledge in a range of contexts while adapting to changing circumstances.

"Opportunity College"

Aligns with Strategic Priority 6

Bellarmino University has been designated an “Opportunity College and University, offering Higher Access and Higher Earnings” by the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education, placing it among just 16% of institutions nationally to be recognized for fostering student success and creating upward economic mobility. This classification recognizes institutions that provide both high levels of college access for underserved student populations and strong earnings outcomes for graduates. The Carnegie Classification report notes that universities like Bellarmine receiving this designation “can serve as a model for studying how campuses can foster student success.” The new classification evaluates institutions on two critical measures, with scores of lower, medium, or higher assigned to each:

- **Access:** whether colleges and universities enroll student populations reflective of the communities they serve, based on federal Pell Grant eligibility and student demographics. Pell eligibility is a measure of students who demonstrate high financial need to attend college. Bellarmine’s designation is “higher.”
- **Earnings:** whether their graduates earn competitive wages compared to peers in the local labor market, eight years after entry. Bellarmine’s designation is “higher.”

Bellarmino Direct – Our Commitment to Louisville

Aligns with Strategic Priority 3

A Bellarmine degree is a path to unrivaled outcomes, and the university's commitment to Louisville is to help more qualified local students see how this path to success through Bellarmine is viable for them.

Qualified students graduating from Louisville high schools can receive automatic admission to Bellarmine University through a new initiative that provides these students with more options for an affordable education in their hometown. [Bellarmino Direct](#), which launched in 2024, allows Louisville students from public and private high schools who have earned at least a 2.75 grade point average to use a streamlined admission process through an online form that takes less than five minutes to complete. Bellarmine is the only Louisville university offering this locally focused commitment to “brain gain.”

Once Bellarmine receives a Bellarmine Direct applicant’s high school transcript, that student will be automatically admitted with a minimum scholarship of \$19,000 and a personalized financial aid package to demonstrate that a Bellarmine education is priced competitively and can even be free.

Commitment to Access & Affordability

Aligns with Strategic Priorities 4 & 6

A Bellarmine education is more affordable than many might expect. Never judge affordability by a university's published tuition price. Bellarmine offers generous scholarships and many financial-aid options not found elsewhere. Actual out-of-pocket expenses will often compete with the other schools students are considering – and a Bellarmine education could even be free. At Bellarmine, 100% of first-year students receive institutional scholarships and the average amount is more than \$33,000. The average amount of free aid – including institutional, state, and federal – is \$37,600.

When students and families can clearly understand what college will cost, enrollment decisions become about fit and aspiration rather than about their financial anxiety, and this approach is reflected in our signature access and affordability options:

- **Public Price Promise** – For qualifying students, Bellarmine matches the current direct cost of a state’s flagship university – often a state’s largest, oldest university. The amount students pay to attend Bellarmine will not exceed tuition, fees, room, and board at their state's flagship university.
- **Hope Kentucky Scholars Program** – This initiative provides full tuition to Pell-eligible students who are Kentucky residents and graduate from a Kentucky high school. It covers 100% of tuition and comprehensive fees – including textbooks – for traditional first-year and transfer students in Kentucky.
- **Transfer pathways** – Students who complete two years at partner community colleges are offered a streamlined transfer experience and competitive tuition rates.
- **Summer Bridge program** – Students who don’t quite meet Bellarmine’s admission standards but show promise can apply to be conditionally admitted based on successful completion of a free, monthlong summer program that offers three credit-bearing college-readiness courses focused on writing, math, and academic success strategies. In Summer 2024, 94% of participants successfully completed the program and were invited to enroll for the fall semester.

Academic Excellence & Innovation

Aligns with Strategic Priority 2

Academics are the heart and soul of Bellarmine. Grounded in the Catholic tradition of higher education and in the liberal arts and sciences, Bellarmine offers more than 50 undergraduate majors, along with graduate and doctoral programs. Its distinguished faculty members are experts in their fields and teachers whom students remember for the rest of their lives, thanks to a 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

A new core curriculum, designed by faculty across all schools and departments, expands Bellarmine’s commitment to educating students in mind, body, and spirit. Building on Bellarmine’s liberal arts foundation, the new curriculum – launched in the 2024-25 academic year – increases the university’s emphasis on experiential learning and community engagement; highlights the eight dimensions of wellness (emotional, intellectual, occupational, financial, physical, environmental, social, and spiritual); and updates some foundational courses to make them more relevant to today’s learners. Students will graduate with a portfolio showcasing the work they completed in the core, documenting their intellectual and academic journey at Bellarmine.

Employer Partnerships & Career Connections

Aligns with Strategic Priority 5

Bellarmino has built robust partnerships with some of the region’s largest employers to offer real-world internship experience and build career pipelines for graduates. As examples, this list includes Norton Healthcare; Jefferson County Public Schools; the Archdiocese of Louisville; Baptist Health; CHI; metro, state, and federal government; 21st Century Parks; the Louisville Orchestra; and many regional accounting firms and banks. Bellarmine is working with these employers to identify certificate and degree programs that will help them build stronger talent pools.

Bellarmino graduates have access to a lifelong career network of fellow alums as well as a dedicated career success advocate ready to help with job searches and career transitions. The university offers its graduates free career services for life.

Service & Internships

Aligns with Strategic Priorities 1 & 5

Experiential learning is a critical part of the Bellarmine experience. The university guarantees that every student has the opportunity to land an internship, develop a career plan, and build a professional network. 88% of Bellarmine students participate in more than 90 hours of internships, clinicals, student teaching, and other professional experiences.

The university has received national recognition for its work to build collaborative partnerships throughout Louisville and the surrounding region by achieving the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement. Bellarmine is one of only 368 universities in the nation to receive this distinction, and only the second private university in Kentucky to do so. Participating institutions must show that they provide robust support for high-quality community engagement experiences that connect with classroom learning and deliver measurable outcomes for both students and the community.

In August 2025, Washington Monthly recognized Bellarmine as one of the top 75 universities in the nation for embedding a commitment to service into its college experience.

Excellence in Athletics

Aligns with Strategic Priority 3

In 2020, Bellarmine moved its athletics programs to NCAA Division I, offering student-athletes the opportunity to compete at the highest levels and expanding the university's brand regionally and nationally. After a four-year reclassification process, Bellarmine is now eligible to compete in NCAA championship events. After four seasons playing at Freedom Hall, the women's and men's basketball teams have returned home to the Highlands, playing in Knights Hall for a better game-day experience. Bellarmine fans have responded positively to this move through increased season ticket sales and donations. The Knights are successful both on the field of play and in the classroom, with 100% of student-athletes employed or pursuing graduate degrees within six months of graduating.