

A photograph of a Franciscan friar with a mustache and glasses, wearing a brown habit, and a young woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a green hoodie. They are both looking down at a laptop screen. The friar is holding a yellow pen. In the background, there are stacks of papers and a chalkboard with some writing on it.

# On Franciscan Education

A Statement by the Franciscan Friars of St. Bonaventure University





Forward



In 2016, the Franciscan Friars of St. Bonaventure University crafted a statement on “what we see as the implications of our Catholic-Franciscan mission for the University.” As the living bearers of the tradition that has animated our university since its founding in 1858, they contributed their voice to the conversations then unfolding about our university’s future, so that they might “assist in the task of forging a future in keeping with that mission.”

St. Francis of Assisi never tired of telling his Friars, “Let us begin anew!” In that same spirit, the Friars never intended theirs to be the “last word,” but rather an ever-new “first word” to the university. It was an invitation for us to strive anew to realize our patron, St. Bonaventure’s understanding of the heart of a Franciscan education: “There is no knowledge without love.” Welcome to the conversation and to the task that lies ever ahead of us all.







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# Preface





Over the past several decades at St. Bonaventure University, there have been various attempts to describe the “Franciscan values” that characterize our school. As the University enters the year 2016, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in our history, as we develop a new strategic plan, embark on a major curriculum revision, and face the common demographic and economic issues facing smaller private colleges in the United States. As we embark on this process, we, the Franciscan Friars engaged in the University, believe it is important to call to mind the sponsorship agreement drawn up several years ago by the University and the Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province, enunciating our mutual commitment to promote and advance the University’s mission to provide higher education “as a Catholic university in the Franciscan tradition.” (1) Building on this agreement, we, the Friars of Holy Peace Friary (Mount Irenaeus) and of St. Bonaventure Friary, the local units of the University’s sponsoring body, have met jointly over the past several months to flesh out what we see as the implications of our Catholic-Franciscan mission for the University. And so, we offer the following statement to the University community, in hopes that it might assist in the task of forging a future in keeping with that mission.

(1) *Continuing the Legacy Agreement*, March 23, 2012, citing the *Bylaws of the University*.





Statement



From the outset, it is important to recognize that the Catholic-Franciscan heritage of St. Bonaventure University is the expression of a religious faith tradition. This fact creates a certain paradox expressed well by Pope John Paul II: “A Catholic university unites existentially two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.” (2) Like all universities, our faculty and students are engaged in a process of learning about our world in all its dimensions, unencumbered by any dogmatic preconceptions. At the same time, the Franciscan Friars who founded this school believed they had come to know in faith the “fount of truth,” the God who created that same world out of love: “In the beginning was the Word. . . all things came into being through him. . . “Furthermore, they believed this “Word became flesh” in the person of Jesus Christ to reveal the deepest meaning of human life. (3)

(2) *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1994), Introduction.

(3) John 1:14.





As St. Bonaventure explains it, this Biblical passage contains a clue as to the structure and meaning of the entire universe: “the Word is the invisible principle of unity and meaning through which God reaches out to create the world. But this same Word becomes the visible center of the cosmos and its history in the form of the incarnate Word. Thus, it is the shape of Jesus’ history and ministry that embodies the divine clue as to the structure of all reality. It is essential, then, for us to pattern our own lives on the values of Jesus for, in this way, we are centered in the mystery of the Word that lies at the heart of God.” (Br. Zachary Hayes, OFM).







We Franciscan Friars, as heirs of this tradition, base our presence in today's diverse university setting on the conviction that we have humbly come to know in faith this "fount of truth," the self-communicating God incarnate in Christ. Although, like other Catholics, we certainly maintain specific beliefs, our focus as members of a university community is not on promoting these creedal statements in the form of an ideological system. Rather, we seek primarily to live out of their source, witnessing by our presence to that transcendent loving being who is mysteriously calling all people into deeper union. Thus, we believe and have indeed experienced that all people of good will, simply by discovering and living out their own truth as human beings, can come to know and share many of the life-giving attitudes and values expressed by the Catholic-Franciscan faith tradition.





In addition, we approach our work at the University with the conviction that education must be transformative of the whole person. Franciscan education has traditionally been concerned not only with the intellectual dimension, but with the will, the heart, and the body as well. Education must be eminently practical, not so much learning concrete “hands-on” skills, but gaining the wisdom of how to live truly humanly, deeply, and well in the world. Although the work of integrating these various dimensions can take place only within the individual person, as Franciscans we seek to provide an educational environment that promotes this integration.

Thus, over the centuries, Franciscans have come to prioritize certain elements of the broader Catholic tradition. In the university setting, we believe that certain key convictions of that Franciscan heritage should permeate all dimensions of University life:



# Key Convictions

1. A conviction that creation is good, flowing as it does from a good and loving God. Everything is an expression of God's love. Since all things reveal God in their own distinctive way, there should be a fascination to learn more about the various dimensions of our world. Further, since all of reality flows from the same creator God, we should come to recognize all things as brothers and sisters, called to be one in cosmic harmony.
2. A special reverence for the human person as image of God. "Our humanity does not separate us from God but connects us to God who chose to become human" (Br. William Short, OFM). This demands respect for each individual as fundamentally good, having a distinctive relation to the divine, with their own particular gifts, and expressing that reality in their own unique way. These gifts must be fostered and encouraged.





# Key Convictions

3. Because we value diversity, we emphasize the correlative conviction that human beings are created to live in relationship. No individual can become fully a person without others in freely-chosen bonds of interdependence. A prime goal is thus to create a community of diverse brothers and sisters, founded on mutual respect and openness.
4. The conviction that all creation is God's gift should call forth a response of self-giving love. Knowledge must lead to action. As images of a generous God, we human beings are called to reach out to share God's gifts with others, particularly those who find themselves on the margins of human society – the needy, the ignored, and the excluded.







# Implications for the University





# Community Life

- ❖ The university by its nature is a network of reciprocal relationships between faculty, students, administrators, support staff, trustees, and alumni. Our key Franciscan convictions demand that these relationships be characterized by courtesy, mutual respect, just practices, and care for one another. Those in leadership positions should be committed to the key Franciscan values enunciated above, have a collaborative and transparent management style, and committed to consensus building. The process of hiring new faculty and staff should include assessing individuals' commitment to the University mission; on its part, the University should provide ongoing formation in the Franciscan tradition.





# Academic Life

- ❖ Curriculum (content of education): A Catholic-Franciscan education aimed at the 'whole person' demands a broad foundation in the liberal arts. Students should develop powers of reflection and critical thought, gain an understanding of the human person, and raise questions of values, the meaning and purpose of life. Specifically, all students should become familiar with the basic elements of the Catholic-Franciscan religious heritage, including inter-faith dialogue and Catholic Social Teaching.





# Academic Life

- ❖ The educational approach (context) should witness to Franciscan core values, through individual attention and affirmation, cultivation of a desire to learn, atmosphere of free inquiry, encouragement of dialogue, service-learning projects, and mentoring relationships. These will assist in balancing intellectual elements and human values.
- ❖ A practical outcome: We should demonstrate how the Franciscan vision might enter a dialogue that addresses contemporary issues in society and culture. What difference does it make? Making connections in praxis; integrative dimension.





# Spiritual Life

- ❖ Provide for the nurturing of the religious life of Catholic members of the university community through a vibrant liturgical life and programs of faith formation.
- ❖ Support people of diverse or no religious backgrounds through interfaith programs, women's spirituality programs, and men's spirituality and initiation programs.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for university members to step back and get away from ordinary campus routine for times of deeper personal reflection.





# Student Life

- ❖ Develop means that encourage healthy, life-giving peer relationships through inclusive networks of belonging, mutual support and care, and by providing support services for personal and human needs.
- ❖ Cultivate a campus-wide environment that celebrates multiculturalism and diversity, fostering an appreciation for people of all backgrounds.
- ❖ Support an array of activities for students to develop fuller dimensions of themselves through the creative and performing arts, athletic activities, and leadership opportunities.
- ❖ Encourage involvement in organizations and projects that serve the larger community, particularly the poor and marginalized in society.





# Care for Creation

- ❖ Promote awareness of being citizens of our common home, the earth, through ecologically sound practices and conserving resources.





# Invitation to Dialogue