



Deep Success and the University's Future
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In 1885, the first president of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White, made a speech praising the outstanding scholarship of his eventual successor at Cornell, Charles Kendall Adams. President White extolled a book written by Professor Adams as “not a noisy success, but a deep success.”

Today, I want to take up President White’s long-ago distinction. I want to talk about the special commitment we are now making at Quincy University, 160 years after our founding, to deep success.

At QU, we aren’t particularly noisy, but, thanks to the continuing and tireless efforts of our amazing faculty and staff, we always will be deep.

First, though, words of welcome and thanks are required.

On behalf of the entire Quincy University community, I welcome all here to our beautiful chapel, which for over 100 years has been the spiritual center of this great university. This chapel was beautifully redesigned in the 1950s by a revered faculty member and Franciscan friar, Fr. Tom Brown.

I thank those who are here today, including so many friars and religious, students, alumni, faculty, staff, college and university presidents and delegates, Mayor Kyle Moore and other community leaders, and Board Chairman Delmer Mitchell and members of the board of trustees. Today’s guests demonstrate the importance of Quincy University not only to its students, faculty, staff, and alumni, but also to the members of the larger Quincy, regional, and higher education communities. All here are warmly welcomed, in the spirit of Franciscan hospitality.

The Quincy University Board of Trustees and I are deeply honored to have with us today our Ordinary, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki, ninth Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Bishop Paprocki, we are delighted at QU to be the Catholic university of downstate Illinois and to be part of the people of God entrusted to your care, especially given your extensive experience as a distinguished faculty member at multiple universities. I am grateful for your pastoral leadership and your support of this beloved institution.

Bishop Fernand Cheri, Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, we are so pleased by your return this day to Quincy University, where you previously served so successfully as Campus Minister.

Thank you for your warm and inspiring words this morning, and for recently joining the Quincy University Board of Trustees. Today, I honor your contributions at QU and to our faith. Your presence today, with Fr. Nairn and two of his predecessor provincials, is also a reminder of the at least 15 bishops and five Franciscan provincials who were or are alumni of or otherwise directly connected to this university.

We also are grateful to have with us the Provincial for the Sacred Heart Province, Fr. Tom Nairn, a great scholar who has continued the 160-year tradition of deep love for and support of this university. For the commitment of all provincials, whether past and present, we at QU count ourselves as blessed.

I have begun my time at Quincy University with an overpowering sense of gratitude for the trust placed in me by the Board of Trustees and this community. I am grateful as well for the opportunity to come to Quincy and to join the university, whose faculty, staff, and students have welcomed me with a great kindness and generosity of spirit. More specifically, I am grateful to those whose very hard work has made a week of inauguration events possible.

The story of Quincy University can be told through the history of its lands, buildings, and architecture. But the QU story is much more the story of people, the people who have educated generations of young men and women, many of whom would have no educational opportunity without the university. Inspired by the message of Franciscan hospitality, friars and laypeople alike have overcome adversity and collaborated to sustain the university in good times and bad.

My own story, like QU's, is deeply rooted in Illinois. My parents, Jim and Carolyn, are here today, along with my aunt Patti, my cousin Shawn, and my children, Brandon and Emily. I thank them for loving and uplifting me for these past 52 years.

My immediate family story begins 100 miles from here in Galesburg, Illinois, with two people born during WWII and whose fathers didn't finish high school. Those two worked hard, found each other, went to college, married, had children, completed their degrees, and lived the middle-class life their own parents had wanted for them. Today, a generation later, their nerdy son is a debate coach and professor who became a university president. Thanks, mom and dad, for putting up with the choices of your academically inclined kid.

Since I arrived in Quincy in June, it's been a great joy to be a member of this community, where I have met so many inspiring faculty and staff. I also have been running, singing, playing and eating with our students on this park-like campus. In a nod to the 21st century, you can learn more about our daily journey on Twitter at @Quincy_UMcGee, where my next Tweet will be number 436.

If you have Twitter and aren't following me, now's your chance to pull out your phone and take care of that. Again, it's @Quincy_uMcGee.

Many of my favorite QU moments in these first seven-plus months have involved students, as when the men of Delta Tau Delta invited me over to eat hot wings, when the softball team indulged me in a few practice at-bats, when I have taken a late-night run through campus, or

when I've sat in with a chorus rehearsal or pep band performance. My thanks to the current generation of Hawks, with whom I spend so many wonderful days.

In becoming QU's 24th president, I have taken on the duty to protect and build on the heritage of this university, beginning with the Franciscan friars who started a college on the Illinois frontier, 160 years ago, with little more than faith in God and a healthy helping of audacity. I am mindful of the legacy of those amazing friars and our first 20 priest-presidents of QU. Heaven only knows what the founding friars, German Franciscans all, would think of a lay Catholic president with an Irish last name, or the countless women who have led at this university, beginning with Mary Josephine Padberg, who in 1935 became the first woman to join the faculty.

As one of the new generation of lay presidents, I want to acknowledge another lay president and my predecessor, who we now honor as Dr. Phil Conover. Phil has been a kind and generous presence, a firm and steady hand whose leadership and reputation in Quincy was well established before he took on the presidency of QU. I encourage everyone associated with QU to join me in thanking Phil for his distinguished service.

During my own career in higher education, media stories have not been particularly kind to most private universities and, especially, to those universities founded in a religious tradition, including Catholic universities.

Why this hostility?

Quincy University is, first of all, a small institution, at a time when smallness is perceived as a weakness. Second, Quincy University celebrates the liberal arts at a time when many perceive the liberal arts as an obsolete remnant of an unspecialized era. And, third, Quincy University continues, without apology, to be a Franciscan and Catholic university during an age of secularization, when religious conviction is often associated with intellectual mediocrity.

Not surprisingly, I reject these criticisms. Instead, our small size, commitments to the liberal arts, and Franciscan present are our shining strengths and are attributes that other universities should seek to emulate. Our experience with individual students and decades of survey data and social scientific research support the advantages of small universities over larger ones and the life-long benefits of very robust instruction in the liberal arts. Further, the simplicity, hospitality, humility, and care for the earth that are among the features of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition are a vital counterweight to the spiritually unsatisfying, unproductive, and decaying secular presentism whose logical consequence is dystopic misery. Illinois, the Midwest, and the world need very badly what Quincy University offers.

It is the full advantage of a Quincy University education for our students, the advantage of deep success, to which we are now even more fully dedicating ourselves.

It is no surprise that Americans have long pursued success, and a university education has often been considered a precondition of success. But there is a difference between a shallow, noisy success and deep success.

In American higher education, I submit to you there have been three different approaches to student success, only one of which qualifies as deep success.

The first approach is really no commitment to success at all. From this perspective, students lucky enough to be admitted to the university should either sink or swim on their own, with little or no help from faculty and staff. From this perspective, a student who fails, whatever the reason, has been tested and found wanting. This student is not what used to be called “college material.”

Happily, this first approach has very few adherents today. Most of us in higher education now believe our job is to help students succeed in their studies, rather than be indifferent to their failure.

The second approach to success also has its own drawbacks. From this second perspective, a student succeeds who gets passing grades and a respectable first job and, as a result, has been successful, especially if the student graduates within four years. This is shallow success, of the sort that many universities now noisily brag about. This is success as financial stability and as careerism.

There is nothing wrong with graduating on time and with landing a job. We at QU want that for our students. But it isn't enough.

The third approach to success in higher education is fundamentally Franciscan. It associates success with self-discovery, with service to others, with spiritual richness and personal well-being. Yes, a university degree should provide the conditions for financial security, but, in the words found in Proverbs, how much better to get wisdom than gold, to get understanding rather than silver.

At Quincy University, we believe student and alumni success must be the result of our intentional effort. Success should not be the result of luck or accident. Success should happen by design. And deep success for our students and alumni is the result not only of employability – what Catholic Social Teaching calls the dignity of work -- but also of a rich intellectual and spiritual life, complete with the enduring commitment to be of service to others.

Our small size, our care for the individual, our primary focus on teaching, our Franciscan heritage – for 160 years those features of life, initially at St. Francis Solanus College and Quincy College, and, today, at Quincy University, have encouraged deep success for our students and alumni.

Already, I have visited with scores of alumni around the country. Their lives attest to the power of deep success in education and in life to foster collaboration and cooperation in an age of narcissism and infighting.

Going forward, QU's approach to success by design, and to achieving deep success, will include a score of new initiatives to go along with our historic strengths. This is our university's future.

We at Quincy University will reject the sterile efficiency of the mega-university, where students too easily become cogs in the dehumanizing machinery and inherent shallowness of the education-industrial complex. We will reject any instructional model where ever larger numbers of undergraduates are recruited to subsidize graduate education and research by faculty who hope rarely or never to come into contact with those undergraduates. We will reject a worldview in which only the wealthy have the opportunity to learn in small classes taught by our exceptional faculty. We will reject the superficiality of vapid introductions to the liberal arts, dully delivered in large lecture halls or in recitation sections by the oversized university's least experienced and most poorly trained teachers. We at Quincy University will reject any model of higher education in which students can avoid the serious consideration of life's meaning, or the sense of the sacred, or the problem of evil, or the possibility of the divine.

What, instead, will we do to ensure the deep success of our students?

At QU, deep success requires that we treat each student as an individual. We will know our students by name and respect the beautiful diversity of humankind that is one of God's great gifts to us. We will continue to deliver a rigorous curriculum in the liberal arts, including required instruction in philosophy and religion, because anything else would be a betrayal of the idea of the university and of the Catholic church that has sustained light and reason and beauty and truth in the Western world for over two millennia. And the individualized success plan of each student will be calculated to produce experiences associated with deep success, including a lasting commitment to service.

At QU, we will pursue truth, beauty, and the good and challenge our students to make hard choices because doing so is right, and it is no less right that we do so when the work is difficult and daunting.

As Saint John Paul II, himself an academic, reminded us in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, university life teaches all to "think rigorously, so as to act rightly and serve humanity better." To that version of university life I can only say, amen.

So, in summary, constant planning for the deep success of every student, of every graduate, and for the care and cultivation of mind, body, and spirit, is the future of Quincy University. Noisy success, in the words of that first Cornell University president, is not enough.

Thank you, and I ask for your prayers and for the intercession of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, and St. Francis Solanus in the life of this institution. Our work, as St. Francis of Assisi would tell us, has only just begun.

May God bless the unending labor of love that is Quincy University.