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Mission Statement

Guided by Franciscan values and the ideal of “knowledge joined with love,” and rooted in the Catholic and liberal arts traditions, Alvernia is a rigorous, caring, and inclusive learning community committed to academic excellence and to being and fostering:

- **broadly educated, life-long learners**
- **reflective professionals and engaged citizens**
- **ethical leaders with moral courage**

To Learn, To Love, To Serve

Vision Statement

To Be A Distinctive Franciscan University, Committed to Personal and Social Transformation, Through Integrated, Community-Based, Inclusive, and Ethical Learning:

Integrated Learning — combining liberal arts and professional education, and blending rigorous inquiry, practical experience and personal reflection in the classroom, on campus, and in society;

Community-Based Learning — engaging the local, regional and global communities as partners in education and service;

Inclusive Learning — welcoming people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds; responsive to the educational needs of recent high school graduates, working adults and established professionals, and senior citizens; respectful and self-critical in our dialogue about differences in values and perspectives;

Ethical Learning — challenging individuals to be values-based leaders by developing habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the soul.

Institutional Heritage

The heritage of ALVERNIA UNIVERSITY and its foundational Franciscan values can be traced to the growth of three religious orders who owe their origin to the preaching of St. Francis of Assisi — the Friars Minor, the Poor Clares, and the “Third Order” which has two distinct branches: a secular order for the laity, and a regular order for women and men living an evangelical life with religious vows. The Bernardine Franciscan sisters, founders and sponsors of Alvernia University, are members of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis.

In the thirteenth century, the growth of the Franciscan Order was enriched by a desire for learning among the first friars and early Franciscan scholars, including the earliest Franciscan theologian, St. Anthony of Padua, followed by St. Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus, long associated with the great medieval universities of Paris and Oxford. The early Franciscans easily recognized the need to provide sound training in philosophy and theology for the growing members of the rapidly expanding Order; from this awareness developed the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, founded on the spirituality and vision of Francis and Clare of Assisi. A distinguishing trait of this tradition, making it singularly different from other great western religious traditions, is the intellectual view described by Saint and scholar Bonaventure as “knowledge joined with love.” Franciscan education recognizes the importance of love complementing understanding and learning, and the primacy of works-oriented active love that gives the intellectual life a practical context for implementation.

Alvernia University reflects the visionary leadership and uncommon perseverance of its founding president, Sister Mary Zygmunta Froncek, and the dedicated religious and lay faculty who laid the groundwork for academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and learning linked with charity, service and social justice. As pioneers in the field of Catholic education, the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters were part of the 20th century movement in the Catholic Church to serve the poor and immigrant populations in America by founding and staffing schools and hospitals throughout the U.S. Their inclusive embrace positioned the congregation to serve beyond the needs of the Polish settlements, anticipating Alvernia’s present-day outreach to the growing Latino community in Reading. On the campus of Mt. Alvernia, the sisters opened an orphanage and a high school housed in Francis Hall. As the Order grew and the education of its members became a priority, the congregation founded a liberal arts college for women religious in 1958, graduating its first class of four sisters in 1961. With the increase in lay enrollment and expansion of academic offerings, it received final accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in November, 1967.

Within a few decades, paralleling the history of the early Franciscan movement in Italy, the college grew beyond the original three educational buildings to an

expanding campus with additional professional programs to complement a strong liberal arts core. Alvernia's founding mission provided the opportunity to develop new programs such as nursing, business, allied health, criminal justice and social work. This distinctive service niche afforded the college regional recognition for liberal learning and practical application, and has provided the impetus for continued dynamic growth. Since 1990, a library, physical education center, student center, science center and additional residence halls have been added to the main campus facilities to support the long-range commitment to building a strong residential learning community. At the same time, educational outreach to adult learners has expanded, including the launch of off-campus centers in Philadelphia and Pottsville, and a Seniors College, which provides life-long learning opportunities to retired citizens in Berks County.

Today, Alvernia brings together students diverse in age, background, belief, and educational interests to pursue academic excellence in a range of undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree programs, including an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program with concentrations in corporate, community and educational leadership. Across all programs, the hallmark of an Alvernia education is a conception of learning as grounded in values, connecting classroom and community, and linked to leadership and service. With the purchase of the Upland Center in 2006, Alvernia strengthened its commitment to lifelong learning and community outreach by creating a new home for graduate and adult education, and launched two new initiatives: a Center for Ethics and a Center for Community Engagement, helping to incorporate the broader community into the curriculum of higher education. Rooted in the liberal arts tradition of rigorous, open inquiry, Alvernia is faithful to its Catholic identity and the vision of Pope John Paul II as expressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. The university "possesses [necessary] institutional autonomy . . . and guarantees its members academic freedom," while the mission of Catholic higher education privileges "(a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, and (d) a theological perspective" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, I, A, 12 and 15). Alvernia is also proud of its role as an educational resource for members of the Allentown Diocese and its active involvement in the national associations of both Catholic and Franciscan colleges and universities.

True to its Franciscan heritage and mission motto "**To Learn, To Love, To Serve**," Alvernia's Franciscan values have shaped its character and history since its founding. Service, humility, collegiality, contemplation, and peacemaking are institutional core values woven through the academic, co-curricular, and spiritual culture of Alvernia. Francis of Assisi, an agent of spiritual change in the Middle Ages, gave to the Franciscan Movement and all humanity a legacy that is timeless and universal. To be Franciscan is to respect the dignity of each human person and all creation; to be open to the world and its diversity of cultures, faiths, traditions, races, and peoples; to honor right relationships; and to seek peace through action for justice.

Core Franciscan Values

Alvernia's mission and Franciscan identity are the source of the five Core Values: *service, humility, peacemaking, contemplation, and collegiality*. They are rooted in the traditional values of the Gospel even as they speak to our culture and time. They have continued throughout the centuries to inform a way of life, a view of the world, and a definition of our relationship with God and others that is perhaps more relevant in our society than ever before. At Alvernia, these values build a foundation for ethical decision-making, for curriculum development, for thoughtful reflection, and for mutually respectful personal relationships as we pursue our goals in higher education. As members of the Alvernia community, each of us can live these values and be transformed — discovering a life of meaning, purpose, and eternal promise.

The University Shield



The University Shield, rich in the symbolism of Franciscan heritage, projects the ideals and traditions of Alvernia. The apex on the lower portion of the shield represents LaVerna, the mountain where Saint Francis of Assisi received the Stigmata, or Sacred Wounds, of Christ. This mystical favor is indicated by five drops of blood arranged in the form of a cross.

The circular plate in the upper left of the shield bears the monogram of the name of Jesus, IHS. This is the symbol popularized by Saint Bernardine of Siena, the titular patron of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters who sponsor the university.

In the upper right, the monogram of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, IHM, serves as a reminder of the Blessed Virgin, patroness of the Franciscan Order. The crown used as the crest of the shield is taken from the coat of arms of Reading, Berkshire County, England, after which the city of Reading, Pa., was named.

The torches at either side of the shield represent the ideal of service in education to which the faculty of Alvernia University is dedicated. The university colors

are maroon and gold. Maroon, a deep red color, represents charity to all. Gold, the ancient symbol of royalty and strength, represents courage to uphold truth, beauty, goodness, and faith in God and country.

Finally, the banner beneath the shield proclaims, in Latin, “***May Christ teach you what is yours to do.***” These are the final words attributed to Francis of Assisi, spoken to his brothers shortly before he died. May they inspire all at Alvernia to fulfill this worthy mission.

Accreditations

Since 1967, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools has granted Alvernia University full accreditation. The most recent reaffirmation of accreditation was granted in November 2010.

The Education program for elementary, middle, special education and secondary teachers is approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The entry-level Occupational Therapy program is fully accredited by the Accreditation Council For Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

The Bachelor of Science in Nursing program is approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing and is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.

The Athletic Training program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education.

The Social Work program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.

The Behavioral Health Program courses may be utilized for professional certification by the Pennsylvania Certification Board.

The Business Department is accredited by the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs.

The Medical Imaging Program (in partnership with the Reading Hospital School of Health Sciences) is accredited by The Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology.

The Physical Therapy Program has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status from the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).

The Surgery Technology Program (in partnership with the Reading Hospital School of Health Sciences) is accredited by The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP).