Benedictine ranked among top schools in Illinois and country for ROI

The benefits of an education from Benedictine University have been recognized nationally. According to the 2016 PayScale College Return on Investment (ROI) Report: Best Value Colleges, Benedictine is ranked among the top 10 schools in Illinois and the top 20 percent nationally for ROI.

PayScale Inc. is a provider of on-demand compensation and data software that releases an ROI report on colleges and universities annually. Data was collected from about 1.4 million college-educated workers and the 20-year ROI on their degrees based on the current four-year cost of each school.

“We created the College ROI Report to help students and their families understand the long-term implications of their decisions about schools and majors,” said Aubrey Bach, PayScale’s head of Alumni Analytics. “We hope that with this kind of data, students can make smarter educational choices and avoid crippling debt.”

Benedictine administrators were not surprised by the report’s results.

“We know that a Benedictine education is one of the best investments parents can make in their student,” said Michael S. Brophy, Ph.D., M.F.A., president of Benedictine. “A liberal arts, values-based Benedictine education prepares them to be successful in any number of careers.”

A liberal arts background offers students the opportunity to explore several areas of study as well as strengthen their overall skill base. This helps them maneuver into the job market easier than students who study exclusively in one area. In addition, the Catholic and Benedictine tenets of education provide students an additional edge. They learn to become principled leaders with a strong work ethic. They learn to live their lives in balance and give back to their communities and local businesses. This makes them desirable in the career world.

The University also partners with students and their families to find as much financial aid as possible to keep costs and loan debt low. The average student loan debt for Benedictine undergraduates was $21,500 in 2014, compared to the national average of $35,000 that year. According to a 2013 post-graduate survey, the average salary within 10 years of attending Benedictine was $51,000—much higher than the national average of $34,343.

Benedictine has received similar accolades in the past touting overall cost and salaries earned by graduates. According to Affordablecollegesonline.org, Benedictine ranks among the Best Online Colleges in Illinois for 2015-2016 and among the top 15 most affordable Catholic colleges and universities in the country, with the highest starting salaries earned by graduates.

The University has also been named one of the best colleges in the Midwest and the nation for cost and quality by Washingtonmonthly.com, and has been ranked as one of “America’s Top Colleges” for five consecutive years by Forbes magazine.

The full PayScale report can be found at payscale.com/college-roi.
The opportunities for students to get involved at Benedictine increased significantly this past academic year with the addition of many new cultural, spiritual, service-oriented, social and pre-professional student organizations.

The University’s Student Senate approved 15 new clubs since the end of the Spring 2015 Semester, increasing the number of student organizations on the Lisle campus from 47 to 62.

They included such new clubs as Helping Hands, Healing Hearts, which supports the Ronald McDonald House Charities; GK (Gawad Kalinga) Benedictine, which supports efforts to fight poverty in the Philippines; and FemPower, which aims to empower women and promote gender equality.

“The best thing about our club is knowing that we are helping families that need the most help,” said Dionna Mantucca, president of Helping Hands, Healing Hearts. “Some families feel comfortable enough to share their stories with us, and knowing that reassures me and other club members that we are making a difference in their lives, even if it is just making them food.”

Students formed the Theater Club, which performs plays in the Goodwin Hall Auditorium; the Astronomical Society; and the Podiatry, Anatomy, Computer Science and Graphic Design clubs to provide students who have interests in those particular majors and fields with opportunities to further develop and explore careers.

“We want to help students learn anatomy at a deeper level so they can excel in their undergraduate courses,” said Sally Jo Detloff, president of the Anatomy Club. “The best part about this club is the ability to work on a dissection at your own pace and on your own time. It alleviates the pressure to perform and makes the experience more enjoyable and self-driven.”

The GLOW (Gay, Lesbian or Whatever) Club was created to provide education, support and awareness of people with different sexual orientations. Super Fans was established to cheer on Benedictine student-athletes. Students can also become members of the Film Appreciation Club, the Association of Latino American Students, the Protestant Board and the Indian Student Association.

“It’s been busy, but I wouldn’t have it any other way,” said Daniel Turano, BenU’s coordinator of Student Involvement.

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“As long as there is a student idea and student buy-in, almost any group can get started,” he added. “I usually push anything that comes across my desk through (to the Student Senate) because I want to hear from the students. I put the emphasis and focus on them taking the lead and I provide a support system.”

Before applying to become a student organization, new clubs must have a minimum of 15 members including a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary, 10 active members and one faculty or staff advisor who sponsors the club.

Once approved, it’s up to club members to plan events and decide how to finance them. While money is set aside in the Office of Student Activities and Leadership Development for club activities, club members must first make an appeal for it.

“We have a funding review board, and club leaders can come and plead their case as to why they need funding,” Turano said. “The board then decides to approve, modify or deny the appeal.”

Many clubs fundraise for themselves. Some have held bake sales and athletic tournaments. Others have partnered with local restaurant owners who agree to donate a portion of their profits to a Benedictine student organization.

And just within the past two years, student club members have met some ambitious goals.

Last year, all BenU student organizations contributed to help reach a $25,000 fundraising target. This year, students were challenged to raise a combined $40,000. By the end of spring, they had raised more than $50,000.

“We encourage students to fundraise, and they expect that of themselves as well because it’s not just for their own use, it’s to give back to charities, to Benedictine and other nonprofit organizations,” said Turano, who added that fundraising isn’t necessarily the end goal.

“It’s about making sure students feel they are empowered to do what they think is necessary and what they think will benefit the entire campus community,” Turano said. “We continue to work on increasing student involvement on campus, whether that means creating more clubs, or getting more students out to club events or club meetings.”

Building the student experience and increasing the close-knit community feeling on campus is key.
Josie McCarthy was living among the homeless when she came up with an idea for a restaurant that would welcome everyone with open arms and a side of respect.

McCarthy was living at the St. Francis Catholic Worker House in Chicago as part of a social service project. While there, she befriended two older prostitutes and walked around the neighborhood with them.

“I had never seen such poverty,” recalled McCarthy, who attended Benedictine from 1972-74. “One day we were walking past a Thai food restaurant and I said ‘Oh, I love Thai food,’ and one of the ladies told me that she hadn’t been inside a restaurant in 12 years. I said, ‘Really? Why?’ and she said, ‘Just look at me, who would ever serve me?’”

The woman’s response struck a chord with McCarthy. On New Year’s Day that year, she prepared an entire meal, packed up her wedding china, put on a waitress apron and headed to the Catholic worker house.

“The same lady said to me, ‘When you go back to your fancy life, tell people about us. Get them to like us, then maybe they will help us.’”

Back at home, McCarthy would think about the shelter and the woman she served. She even tried to track her down, but learned she had frozen to death on the streets.

It wasn’t until after working as a group specialist at a psychiatric hospital in Indiana and working in group homes in Ireland that she was finally able to put her plan for the restaurant into action.

**From soup kitchen to restaurant**

She found a job as family dinner program manager with FOOD For Lane County in Eugene, Ore., in 2006.

The position allowed her to be closer to her family on the West Coast, while overseeing a program that was serving meals to the homeless out of a former downtown Eugene restaurant. The only problem at the time was that it wasn’t being run like a restaurant.

“It felt like an outdated slop line from the Depression,” McCarthy said. “I kept thinking about that lady from the streets, and my goal was to have a place where people could sit down. They really didn’t have a restaurant they could go to and that’s what I wanted for them.”

Before she could transform it into a restaurant, she had to teach volunteers how to interact with the clientele, and get buy-in from area businesses and city officials. While volunteers were supportive of her efforts, many had grown accustomed to the counter separating them from the homeless they served. To help break down that barrier, McCarthy encouraged volunteers to get to know patrons by name and learn one thing about them they could like.

Today, the restaurant, known as “The Dining Room,” operates with a commercial kitchen, professional chef, floor manager and volunteers who take customers’ orders. The only difference is guests don’t have to pay before leaving. The restaurant is open four days a week and seats up to 40 patrons at a time.
There's usually a line out the door before opening. The first group will be seated, while others will be given a reservation ticket. A maximum of 300 can be served each day. Inside the restaurant, flowers are set on tablecloths. A variety of local musicians perform live sets. Entrées include items such as pork chops, vegetarian options, salads, beverages and desserts.

Running the restaurant requires a daily volunteer staff of 25, but there is no shortage of workers. There is currently an active pool of 270 people McCarthy can call on for a shift.

“It took a while, but it was really about getting the city on board with what I was doing,” McCarthy said. “Food distribution is not just handing someone a box of food—especially when they do not have a kitchen.”

Life of service

McCarthy’s philosophy—to be kind and treat everyone with dignity and respect—is something she learned as one of the youngest in a large Catholic family and while growing into adulthood at Benedictine University.

“When I was young, I saw from my parents that it was the right thing to do, to help people,” McCarthy said.

Benedictine helped continue this philosophy.

“Benedictine was great. It was a small-town type of college,” McCarthy added. “You knew the teachers and you had a sense of community. I had some great teachers. You felt that people cared and there was a true sense of social justice that we were encouraged to get involved with.”

McCarthy’s unconventional approach and wide range of experiences meshed with her vision for The Dining Room, where she manages all aspects of the restaurant and greets more than 1,000 people a week.

Those who arrive at the restaurant may live in cars or various camps and have gone months without a change of clothes or a shower. Some of them are veterans, others have serious mental disorders or have served time in prison.

“Poverty does not discriminate, all are weary,” McCarthy said. “I knew I had to raise the bar as far as the environment so that the guests could transition into The Dining Room in a respectful manner, and it’s worked out exactly how I wanted. My job really was to tell people about the homeless and get them to like them so that they could help people as that woman had asked me to do many years ago.”

Word about The Dining Room has attracted media attention and food service workers from across the country who want to visit to learn how they can transform their soup kitchens into similar restaurants.

“We serve some of the most dangerous folks with poor impulse control, yet we remain a peaceful and safe program,” McCarthy said. “It is a success that others want to apply in their own communities.

“Our homeless depend on us,” she added. “How can I be comfortable with myself if my neighbor is hungry? Here, they can depend on a good meal and a guarantee that they will be welcomed just like anyone else.”
Graduates get set for next stage of life

More than 1,300 students were honored at Commencement ceremonies for Benedictine University’s Lisle main campus, branch campuses in Springfield, Ill., and Mesa, Ariz., and Asian partnership universities this past spring.

These graduates will now go out into the world with a values-based, comprehensive liberal arts education that will enable them to make contributions in an extensive variety of fields. Benedictine alumni can be found in 89 percent of Fortune 100 companies and in leadership positions in hospitals, banks, national and international corporations, research institutions, government, K-12 schools and universities, and so much more. We see them set themselves apart as ethical employees, community contributors, volunteers and mentors.

Lisle

One of our successful alumni, Carrie Johnson, C94, an award-winning correspondent for National Public Radio’s (NPR’s) Washington desk, spoke on May 14 at the Village of Lisle-Benedictine University Sports Complex on the University’s main campus where 1,097 graduates were honored. Johnson, who earned a bachelor’s degree in Literature and Communication from Benedictine, covers a variety of legal affairs and justice and law enforcement issues for NPR’s flagship programs “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered,” as well as regular newscasts and on NPR.org.

Mesa

John O. Whiteman—the namesake of the campus’ Student Success Center, one of Mesa’s most devoted philanthropists, an advocate of early childhood learning and former CEO of the Caterpillar dealership Empire Southwest—addressed 64 graduates at Benedictine University at Mesa’s Second Commencement Convocation on May 21 at the East Valley Institute of Technology.

Springfield

Jim Langfelder, who recently completed his first year as mayor of Springfield, gave the Commencement speech acknowledging 135 graduates from the Springfield branch campus on May 15. The University looks forward to his continued support as it completes its transition to a one-stop-shop for adult education needs in central Illinois.

Asia

Continuing to build on our international presence, the University held Commencement ceremonies in Asia at Shenyang Jianzhu University and Shenyang University of Technology for 109 graduates on June 11, and for 45 graduates at Dalian Medical University on June 12.

Our graduates set out on the right foot in style.

Picking the ultimate shoe to wear at Commencement is an unofficial Benedictine tradition. See more at ben.edu/commencementshoes.
The Benedictine University Police Department is celebrating 10 years of keeping the Lisle campus safe during a time of rapid growth and change locally and throughout the higher education landscape.

It started when Benedictine officials decided to transition from a contracted security agency to a state-commissioned police force under the Illinois Private College Campus Police Act.

The change gave sworn police officers full authority to make arrests on campus and included new squad cars, policies, technology and procedures. Previously, contracted security officers patrolled campus, but could not make arrests without calling 911. They also did not have access to law enforcement databases and other sources of criminal intelligence.

"Today, we can provide the same level of service that you would get from your hometown community police," said Michael Salatino, chief of the Benedictine University Police.

Salatino oversaw the transition to the private campus police department and was responsible for recruiting the first team of officers at Benedictine.

"We wanted people who had law enforcement experience and also knew how to apply their skill set in a campus environment," Salatino said.

Initially, the department operated out of a three-room office in the basement of the Krasa Student Center with nine sworn officers. Today, it includes 14 sworn officers, two unarmed community service officers and one dispatch/records manager who work out of an office specifically designed for police in the lower level of the University’s parking garage.

“We have interview rooms that are private, offices for the patrol officers, a holding area, an evidence locker, a training room and an operation center, and an emergency dispatch center with advanced computer technology,” Salatino said.

In 2010, Benedictine Police helped write a statewide amendment to expand the powers of private campus police beyond the property limits of their home institutions. The amendment allows officers to pursue calls or cases off campus and wherever the University has property or interest, such as DuPage and Cook counties, Springfield, Ill., and Mesa, Ariz.

In 2013, they were named the first private university law enforcement agency in Illinois to be accredited by the Illinois Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

“We are also recognized regionally as a leader in the industry,” Salatino said.

BenU Police officers also regularly review plans for campus emergencies in conjunction with the University’s emergency preparedness manager and safety specialist.

While the University hasn’t been directly involved in a severe emergency since the establishment of the Benedictine University Police, it has served as an American Red Cross shelter for DuPage County residents displaced by flooding, fire, power outages and severe snowstorms.

They have also increased crime prevention awareness and police-community partnerships with the “National Night Out” event, for which they won an award in 2015 for outstanding participation from the National Association of Town Watch.

As a result of the organization’s multiple preventative crime and safety measures, Benedictine continues to be recognized as one of the safest campuses in Illinois and the nation.

BenU was recently named the safest four-year university in Illinois according to a 2015 listing by StateUniversity.com for campus crime reported in 2014. *
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