

A DECADE OF DETERMINATION

BY EUGENE CURTIN

The president of Creighton University offices in the oldest building on campus, the venerable Creighton Hall, its hallways, woodwork and winding staircases reflecting the architectural mores of the University's 147-year-old history. St. John's Church, the second oldest building on campus, is visible from his desk.

There was, then, much to remind the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD, of Creighton's remarkable past when, in 2015, he took the presidential reins at the age of 44. Ten years later, nonetheless, his tenure has birthed perhaps the greatest explosion of newness since the campus building boom of the 1960s.

Cuming Street, itself one of the oldest streets in Omaha, tells part of the story. The \$75 million CL and Rachel Werner Center for Health Sciences Education — which brings together medical, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant and other students — opened there in 2023, joining the new \$84 million School of Dentistry building opened in 2018. The \$24 million Jérôme Nadal, SJ, Jesuit Residence, located along 24th Street just northeast of Creighton Hall, opened in 2024 and was built entirely from private donations.

A quick glance one block east, at 23rd and Burt streets, reveals Graves Hall and its Simpson Family Courtyard, the \$37 million student residence complex made possible in 2023 by donors Lee Graves, BSBA'80, JD'83, his wife, Judy, and Kathy and Jim Simpson, BA'80.

Omaha motorists traveling 24th Street from Dodge Street will encounter Creighton's elegant \$767 million reconstruction of the campus intersection at Cass Street, jointly conducted with the city of Omaha and providing since 2022 a new and attractive doorway to North Omaha.

In addition to all this hometown development, Creighton reached nearly 1,300 miles to the southwest, in 2021 opening a \$100 million health sciences campus in Phoenix, dramatically establishing a national footprint. Nearly 1,000 medical, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy and physician assistant students already study there.

"When I first arrived, I used the image that Creighton was a racehorse, ready to burst out of the starting gate," Fr. Hendrickson says. "Right now, I feel as though we are in full sprint. We gained momentum, and we are now moving at high speed and maybe ready to go even faster."

Creighton's 25th president certainly knows the course. A native of Fremont, Nebraska, less than an hour from Omaha, he grew up surrounded by what he describes as "the smells, the patterns, the people and the seasons" while developing an appreciation of the gritty characteristic of Nebraskans and of the importance of Creighton University as an institution of higher learning. As president, he says, the familial relationship with Omaha has become ever more apparent.

"Creighton makes Omaha and Nebraska better, and Nebraska and Omaha make us better," he says. "We are a distinctive institution in Omaha's downtown urban core, where we

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REV. DANIEL S. HENDRICKSON, SJ, PHD



COLIN CONCES

The Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD, was announced as Creighton's 25th president in December of 2014, and officially began his role on July 1, 2015 — beginning a decade that has included tremendous growth, notable academic achievements, exciting new programs, and an unwavering focus on mission and community, even in the face of an unparalleled pandemic.

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That contribution has not gone unnoticed by the city.

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert recalls commenting during Fr. Hendrickson’s inauguration ceremony in 2015 that the neighborhoods around Creighton’s campus were growing into places of innovation, entrepreneurship and urban living. Fr. Hendrickson, she says, saw the same potential.

“Progress requires initiative, experience and commitment,” she says. “With a focus on faith, academics, student-centered campus development and building civic partnerships, Fr. Hendrickson excels as a university and community leader.

“I hope he remains in this important leadership role for many years to come, and that Creighton University graduates remain engaged in our community and make Omaha their home.”

The litany of good news for Creighton over the past 10 years has been long and loud. Since 2015 the University has seen:

- a nearly 10% increase in full-time undergraduate students
- a 47% increase in extramural research funds to \$31.4 million
- a 38% increase of faculty endowed chairs, totaling \$33.6 million
- a 74% increase in Creighton’s endowment to \$782.5 million

In addition, the University has raised nearly \$231 million in scholarship support — and invested \$78.5 million in academic, student life and mission programming; approximately \$305 million in academic facilities; and \$177 million in campus infrastructure — with the help of the ongoing Forward Blue campaign that launched in 2021.

And this discernible momentum continues. The University is poised to announce plans for a recreation and athletic corridor expansion later this year, to coincide with significant enhancements to Creighton’s campus green space. (More information on these exciting developments will be shared in the fall issue of *Creighton* magazine.)

Beyond money and infrastructure, the University’s sense of mission has been enhanced by the creation of the Creighton Global Initiative, the Institute for Population

THE STORY IN NUMBERS

Creighton University’s embrace of the 21st century accelerated dramatically during the past 10 years. In the fields of academics, global education, campus growth and expansion, student success and retention, philanthropy, public-private partnerships and capital investment, the University experienced a boom not seen since the 1960s.



ACADEMICS

47% increase of extramural research funds to \$31.4 million

38% increase of faculty endowed chairs, totaling \$33.6 million

Awarded coveted **Carnegie Foundation** classifications:

- > 2015 Master’s Colleges and Universities
- > 2018 Doctoral/Professional Universities
- > 2021 Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity
- > 2024 Leadership for Public Purpose Elective Classification (one of just 25 higher education institutions in the inaugural cohort)

NEW INSTITUTES

Kingfisher Institute for the Liberal Arts and Professions (2019)

Institute for Population Health (2023)

GLOBAL REACH

Launch of **Creighton Global Initiative** (2015)

- > Awarded 117 grants, totaling over \$4.5 million, for globally related initiatives, from campus-based workshops to lectures, course development, and immersion and research activities

28% increase in undergraduates studying abroad (50% now spend meaningful time abroad before graduating)

Integration and expansion of programs and facilities at the **Institute for Latin American Concern (ILAC)**, Dominican Republic

Creation of new global programs for students:

- > **Global Scholars** program, a unique four-year educational and professional development program for selected undergraduates
- > **Arrupe Global Scholars and Partnerships** program, for medical students to work alongside community partners and healthcare providers worldwide
- > **Soto Nursing Scholars** program, for nursing students to work for and with communities at several partner sites around the world



STUDENT SUCCESS

9.6% increase of full-time undergraduate students, from 3,909 to 4,284

5.6% increase of ACT scores (to 28.28 average)

5.5% increase in undergraduate graduation rate

5% increase in first-to-second-year undergraduate retention rate to more than 94%

19 Goldwater Scholars

13 Fulbright Awards



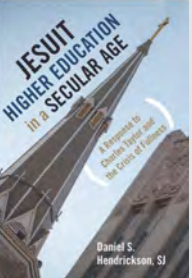
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

\$11.9 million (Arizona) — Accelerated Nursing Education and Workforce (*Fiscal Year 2022*)

\$30 million (Nebraska) — Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery and Investment Act (*Fiscal Year 2023*)

\$7 million (Nebraska) — Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Appropriations; Highways Infrastructure Program (*Fiscal Year 2024*)

\$10 million (Nebraska) — Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Appropriations; Highways Infrastructure Program (*Fiscal Year 2025, pending*)



Fr. Hendrickson is the author of the 2022 book *Jesuit Higher Education in a Secular Age: A Response to Charles Taylor and the Crisis of Fullness* (Georgetown University Press) and has served on the following national committees:

Lilly Foundation Consultation and Indiana Wesleyan Lumen Research Institute, Future of the Church-Related University, Funding the Future (August 2023 through June 2024) and Higher Learning Commission Differential Accreditation Advisory Committee (January through May 2022).

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

9 completed facilities and projects supporting academics, student housing, athletics, campus beautification and transportation, totaling over \$365 million

7 facilities and projects in progress, totaling over \$230 million



ENDOWMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Endowment grew by 74% to \$782.5 million (*Fiscal Year 2024*)

Launch of **Forward Blue** campaign in 2021 with goal of \$650 million

- > **470** new scholarship programs
- > Over **24,845** new donors
- > **897** first-time donors with gifts more than \$50,000



ATHLETICS

Fr. Hendrickson has served as chair of the **BIG EAST Conference Board of Directors** since 2022.



PHOENIX CAMPUS

Opening of Creighton University Health Sciences Campus – Phoenix (2021)

- > **\$100 million** campus in new Phoenix Medical Quarter in midtown Phoenix
- > Accommodates nearly **1,000** students
- > Offers **6** programs: medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy and physician assistant
- > More than **70%** of graduates remain in Arizona, meeting the needs of a booming population and the growing needs of aging and diverse demographics

Health and the Kingfisher Institute. The Creighton Global Initiative reflects the well-traveled Fr. Hendrickson’s desire that students develop a global consciousness by studying and serving in various parts of the world. The Institute for Population Health, launched in 2023, seeks to address disparities in health services and health outcomes in minority and rural areas, while the Kingfisher Institute, inaugurated in 2019, seeks to create meaningful intersections between the professions and the humanities.

“These all lean into who we are as Catholic and Jesuit and reflect some of our most important commitments of mission and identity,” Fr. Hendrickson says. “In their own way, they have been entrepreneurial and innovative and responded in new ways to the current context around us.”

Creighton’s Jesuit and Catholic identity, of course, is essential to its mission, having been governed by members of the Society of Jesus, a religious order started in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, since the University’s founding in 1878. Fr. Hendrickson says it has been his hope and his aim during his first decade at the helm that Creighton students should gain a sense of purpose rooted in the love of God.

“Creighton feels different,” he says. “There is an extra sense of meaningfulness here. We are so steeped in worthy ideals. It’s hard to evade that here. It’s everywhere. It’s in people, it’s in

architecture, it’s in programs, it’s in curricula, that sense of being thoughtful and discerning and putting one’s gifts and talents in the service of trying to make the world a better place.

“The hope is that our students — through our Jesuits on campus, our faculty and staff who are so invested in our mission, and our sense of community — leave here more thoughtful, more discerning, more grounded and more confident of who they are. We want them to recognize that so much of that is rooted in the love of God for them and that the response they can offer is to make the world a better place.”

Despite all the trauma it created, the COVID-19 crisis provided Creighton an opportunity to put those ideals into practice.

Not since the close of World War I, with the outbreak of the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918, had a Creighton president been faced with a public health crisis so serious, causing more than 7 million deaths worldwide, 1.2 million of which occurred in the United States. Guided significantly by Creighton’s medical experts, the University closed the campus, transitioned to online learning, instituted testing procedures and coordinated food delivery services to students in campus housing. It was a comprehensive approach, but it was not insular. In a demonstration of the University’s historic relationship with Omaha, the doors to Creighton’s Rasmussen Center were thrown open for an extensive program of public vaccination.

In an address to students, Fr. Hendrickson said of the COVID-19 pandemic, “What is happening these days will be chronicled as historic. The storytelling will go on for generations.”

That story will be a proud one.

“Thousands of people poured through the Rasmussen Center in a very hopeful, very efficient process, even through snowstorms,” Fr. Hendrickson recalls. “Hundreds of Creighton faculty, staff and students worked at the clinic. It was a point of pride that we made the vaccine available to people who otherwise might not have received it.”

Fr. Hendrickson remembers calling some 200 students during the crisis, just to see how they were doing.

“Even though the circumstances of COVID were difficult, I enjoyed reaching out to students

© From left, Robert “Bo” Dunlay, MD’81, dean of the School of Medicine, Oliver Harper, MD’70, Fr. Hendrickson and Sharon Culhane Harper, BA’69, at the ceremonial groundbreaking for the Creighton University Health Sciences Campus – Phoenix in 2019.



© Fr. Hendrickson celebrates the Mass of the Holy Spirit in August 2024.

during that time of uncertainty,” he says. “I would sit here in this office, in the evenings, after a day of intense meetings about COVID, with a binder four inches thick calling undergraduate students.”

Through all the trials and triumphs of his first decade at Creighton’s helm, Fr. Hendrickson found time to chair the BIG EAST Conference, where Creighton Athletics has enjoyed great success; write a book titled *Jesuit Higher Education in a Secular Age: A Response to Charles Taylor and the Crisis of Fullness*; create a donor fund for refugee camps in Kenya and Malawi; and, when not specifically making the world a better place, bicycling, snow skiing and reading.

Creighton’s success in the BIG EAST Conference, in men’s and women’s basketball, volleyball and soccer, has brought national name recognition and major television contracts. Fr. Hendrickson’s role in building up the BIG EAST is noted by BIG EAST Commissioner Val Ackerman.

“Over the past 10 years, the BIG EAST Conference has been the grateful beneficiary of Fr. Hendrickson’s sage counsel, steady leadership and acute understanding of the power of athletics to develop young people into leaders

and to inspire community engagement and pride,” she says.

“Bluejays Athletics programs have thrived under his stewardship, and he has deftly parlayed the University’s many successes into national visibility and prestige for Creighton and the city of Omaha.”

The future, Fr. Hendrickson says, promises to be no less active. New facilities for baseball and softball are planned; a new sophomore residence hall is taking shape east of the dental school; and there will be new investments in campus club and intramural sports, more faculty-endowed chairs and continued expansion of the Phoenix campus.

“We are in a moment of which there have been just a few in the history of the institution whereby a lot of change and momentum occurs at once,” Fr. Hendrickson says. “There was, of course, the actual founding of the University and the philanthropy of the Creighton family. There were real turning points, beginning in the mid-1960s with Fr. Carl Reinert and continuing with subsequent presidents, where we have experienced tremendous growth and excitement.

“I think these years are a similar time, a historical moment.”

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