

# History: Background, Mission, Enduring Commitments

## Background

For a century and a half, Villanova has been directed by the Order of St. Augustine, known as the Augustinians (<https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/mission/heritage.html>), one of the oldest religious teaching orders of the Catholic Church. The first American foundation of the order within the present limits of the United States was established in 1796 at old St. Augustine's Church in Philadelphia. Villanova University traces its lineage from this foundation and from St. Augustine's Academy, which was opened there in 1811.

In January 1842, the Augustinians at old St. Augustine's took possession of Belle Air, the country estate of the Revolutionary officer and merchant John Rudolph. In accordance with the old Catholic custom, the new foundation was placed under the patronage of a saintly hero of the past. For their patron the Augustinians chose St. Thomas of Villanova, a 16th century Spanish Bishop who was a distinguished Augustinian writer and educator. The school soon became known as Villanova and gave its name to the surrounding countryside.

Classes were opened in the old mansion house at Belle Air during the fall of 1843. On March 10, 1848, the Governor of Pennsylvania, Francis R. Shunk, signed the Act of the Legislature incorporating The Augustinian College of Villanova in the State of Pennsylvania and conferring on Villanova College the right to grant degrees in the Arts and Sciences.

The Liberal Arts College took its first step toward university status in 1905 with the establishment of what is now called the College of Engineering. The Science unit, inaugurated in 1915, is now an integral part of the present College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. In 1918, what was known as the Part-Time Studies Division of the College of Professional Studies came into being. The College of Commerce and Finance was founded in 1922 and became the Villanova School of Business in 2006. The College of Nursing and the School of Law were founded in 1953. The College of Professional Studies was founded in 2014.

Villanova's development over the years into a complex institution of higher education received official sanction when, on November 10, 1953, pursuant to an act of the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, its charter was amended to permit its being designated Villanova University.

## Mission Statement

Villanova University is a Catholic Augustinian community of higher education, committed to excellence and distinction in the discovery, dissemination and application of knowledge. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the University is grounded in the wisdom of the Catholic intellectual tradition and advances a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. Villanova emphasizes and celebrates the liberal arts and sciences as foundational to all academic programs. The University community welcomes and respects members of all faiths who seek to nurture a concern for the common good and who share an enthusiasm for the challenge of responsible and productive citizenship in order to build a just and peaceful world.

# Enduring Commitments

In pursuit of this mission, we commit ourselves to academic excellence, to our values and traditions, and to our students, alumni and the global community.

To foster academic excellence, we as a University:

- Create a diverse community of scholars, united and dedicated to the highest academic standards.
- Emphasize the liberal arts and sciences as our foundation and foster in our students, active engagement, critical thinking, life-long learning and moral reflection.
- Concern ourselves with developing and nurturing the whole person, allowing students, faculty and staff to grow intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, socially and physically in an environment that supports individual differences and insists that mutual love and respect should animate every aspect of university life.
- Encourage interdisciplinary research, teaching and scholarship.
- Affirm the intrinsic good of learning, contemplation and the search for truth in undergraduate and graduate education.
- Support a curriculum that encourages both a global perspective and an informed respect for the differences among peoples and cultures.

To honor our values and tradition, we as a Catholic University:

- Believe that the dialogue between faith and reason drives the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, and fosters St. Augustine's vision of learning as a community ethos governed by love;
- Seek to understand, enrich and teach the Catholic intellectual tradition through our curricula, scholarship and activities in ways that engage diverse religious, intellectual and cultural traditions in a vigorous and respectful pursuit of truth and wisdom in every area of humanity.
- Provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff to seek guidance from Catholic intellectual and moral traditions, while always welcoming people from all faiths, cultures and traditions to contribute their gifts and talents to our mission.
- Respect and encourage the freedom proposed by St Augustine, which makes civil discussion and inquiry possible and productive.
- Look to the Order of St. Augustine to preserve our Augustinian character, by showing appropriate preference to Augustinians in faculty and staff appointments, and by welcoming their presence and influence in our university community.

To serve our students, alumni and global community, we as an Augustinian University:

- Encourage students, faculty and staff to engage in service experiences and research, both locally and globally, so they learn from others, provide public service to the community and help create a more sustainable world.
- Commit to the common good, and apply the knowledge and skills of our students and faculty to better the human condition.
- Encourage our students and faculty to pursue virtue by integrating love and knowledge, and by committing themselves to research and education for justice, with a special concern for the poor and compassion for the suffering.
- Respect a worldview that recognizes that all creation is sacred and that fosters responsible stewardship of the environment.
- Include our alumni as an integral part of the Villanova community.
- Value highly our relationship with neighboring communities.