

Choose To Be Extraordinary

An Interview with Dr. Nido R. Qubein, President, High Point University

EDITORS' NOTE *Dr. Nido Qubein became the seventh President of High Point University in January 2005. Since that time, enrollment has quadrupled, campus has expanded from 90 to 520 acres, and academic schools have grown from 3 to 13. Qubein came to the United States as a teenager with limited knowledge of English and only \$50 before going on to build business partnerships in banking, real estate, publishing, and retail businesses. Prior to his role as HPU president, Qubein rose to prominence as an internationally known author and consultant who has given more than 7,500 presentations worldwide. He has served on the corporate boards of several Fortune 500 companies including Truist, the sixth largest bank in the nation, La-Z-Boy, and FinThrive Healthcare. Qubein is also executive chairman of the Great Harvest Bread Company. Among numerous honors and recognitions he has received, Qubein is an inductee of the Horatio Alger Association for Distinguished Americans, along with Oprah Winfrey and Colin Powell.*



Dr. Nido R. Qubein

Will you provide an overview of the history of High Point University and how the university has evolved?

As a university president and a parent to four children, I believe that leadership should always be forward thinking. It must be realized fully through the prism of the long-term, future view. We're proud of our university's past, and we're preparing to celebrate our centennial anniversary in 2024. That, however, hasn't prevented us from continuing to look ahead. While HPU has enduring roots as a liberal arts

institution, we're constantly searching for new ways to offer more opportunities to our students.

The growth that has occurred at HPU since I started as HPU's president in 2005 has been nothing short of amazing. Enrollment has quadrupled, campus has expanded from 90 to 520 acres, and academic schools have grown from 3 to 13. The Workman School of Dental Medicine and Kenneth F. Kahn School of Law will welcome their first students in the fall of 2024. Dr. Catherine Heyman was named the founding dean of HPU's new School of Optometry, which

will be North Carolina's only optometry school. Today, we know that HPU has never been better positioned for sustainable success.

How do you define the HPU difference and what makes the University unique?

HPU's purpose is to prepare students to thrive in the world as it is going to be. That's why as the Premier Life Skills University, we focus on developing life skills and fostering the values of God, family, and country. In a word, our purpose is transformation. When you equip students with a growth mindset and ensure that decision-making is based on values, that's when students transform into leaders. I remain as passionate about our work today as I have ever been.

Will you discuss HPU's transformation under your leadership?

HPU has created a distinctive, intentional environment that inspires students to want to succeed. You can't just lecture young people and hope they learn something. Throughout our campus you see our call to action: Choose to be extraordinary. And more than merely seeing this declarative statement, you can feel it. It's what students and families remark on the most. We have a culture that must be experienced to be understood.

UNIVERSITY BRIEF *Founded in 1924, High Point University (highpoint.edu) is a liberal arts institution located in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina. "America's Best Colleges" 2024 Edition, published by U.S. News & World Report, ranks HPU #1 among all regional colleges in the South (the twelfth consecutive year at number one). It also ranked HPU for the ninth consecutive year as the number one Most Innovative Regional College in the South for innovation in curriculum, faculty, students, campus life, technology, and facilities. HPU was named for the thirteenth consecutive year to the national "Colleges of Distinction" list. HPU also earned Fields of Study distinctions for the Phillips School of Business and the Stout School of Education. The Princeton Review named High Point University as one of the nation's top institutions for undergraduate education. The Princeton Review also named HPU in the 2024 edition of "The Best 389 Colleges" and on the Best Southeastern Colleges "2024 Best Colleges: Region by Region" list. HPU was also recognized among the Top 20 in the nation for Best-Run Colleges, Best Career Services, Most Beautiful Campus, Most Active Student Government Association, Best College Dorms, and Best Campus Food, as well as a Great School for Business/Finance Majors and a Great School for Communication Majors.*



Students in front of the Waneck School of Natural Sciences at HPU



Study lounge in HPU's Congdon School of Health Sciences

HPU is a positive place. We don't harp on what's wrong with the world. Instead, we focus on the positives. We focus on the opportunities our nation provides, and we encourage our students to transform their lives and transform the world.

How is High Point University preparing its students for future success in today's global economy?

A college education should not only focus on the attainment of a diploma. An extraordinary, holistic education should be about professional development and personal transformation, too. In the First-Year Seminar on Life Skills that I teach for all freshmen, I share with our students that life is about both success and significance. Significance offers greater clarity and reflects the influence and impact you have on others. Yes, we must feed the minds of our students, but we must also feed their hearts.

A day rarely passes when global leaders aren't on our campus connecting with students. Nowhere else do college students regularly learn from so many like Apple Computer Co-Founder Steve Wozniak – HPU's Innovator in Residence; Netflix Co-Founder Marc Randolph – HPU's Entrepreneur in Residence; Dallas Mavericks' CEO Cynt Marshall, HPU's Sports Executive in Residence; Domino's CEO Russell Weiner – HPU's Corporate Executive in Residence; former U.S. Ambassador, FCC Chairman, and Chairman of AT&T's Board of Directors William Kennard – HPU's Global Leader in Residence, and many others who've led some of the most recognizable organizations in the world. This is part of our intentional Access to Innovators program – one of many educational hallmarks at HPU.

At the same time, our campus is filled with laboratories and real-world studios that are often referred to as Ivy League-level facilities. Inside, students work tirelessly to conduct research, produce creative works, master the latest

technology, invent new ways of doing things, and tirelessly practice scenarios that students will encounter in the workforce.

Has it been a focus to increase the number of international students attending HPU and will you discuss the makeup of HPU's student population?

I came to this country as an immigrant at the age of 17. I'm not shy about reminding our students that there are millions of people around the world who want to come to America. You don't see people wanting to leave. Sometimes it takes an immigrant to remind Americans about the

blessings that exist in this nation. It's not a perfect nation – there is no such thing. But oh my, how I appreciate the opportunity to encourage our students to take calculated risks, work hard, give back, and go out and make our world better.

At the start of the fall 2023 semester, HPU's campus welcomed its largest enrollment and the largest international student population in the university's history. Students come from all 50 states, and our Kester International Promenade is lined with flags of the 50 countries our international students represent from across the globe.

Each year, short-term study abroad programs allow HPU students to travel internationally with their professors to learn about different countries through real-world experiences. Last year, HPU students enrolled in 23 different classes explored 11 countries, including Australia, France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Scotland, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Will you highlight the strength of HPU's faculty and your focus on attracting top talent?

Our faculty are not only top-tier experts, but they're also stellar mentors to our students. Teacher assistants don't lead classes at HPU. Faculty are devoted to student teaching and student outcomes. They bring with them years of industry experience to share in and outside the classroom. They guide students through many experiential learning opportunities and hands-on research projects.

In fact, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked HPU #1 for Best Undergraduate Teaching in Regional Colleges South. And our faculty were awarded \$31 million in grants in the past year alone by some of the most prestigious research organizations, including National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF).



Collaborative study space inside the Waneck School of Natural Sciences



HPU's Nido and Mariana Qubein Arena

At HPU, we also attract global and entrepreneurial leaders to coach and inspire our students through our Access to Innovators program, which I mentioned earlier. Numerous industry titans serve in-residence at HPU through this program, including Apple Co-Founder Steve Wozniak – HPU's Innovator in Residence, and Netflix Co-Founder Marc Randolph – HPU's Entrepreneur in Residence. Imagine being a student and having the opportunity to have coffee with the co-founder of Netflix or lunch with the co-founder of Apple Computer. Our students have done these things, and the experiences are profoundly life-changing.

What do you see as HPU's responsibility to the community it serves and how is the university engaged in the community?

When I accepted this position as President in 2005, the first action I took was to declare to the city of High Point that HPU was High Point's University with an apostrophe "s." I held a press conference and luncheon and told community leaders that HPU would not survive if the city didn't support it, and I reminded the city leadership that HPU had the potential to lift the community up for a better tomorrow.

Now, some 20 years later, HPU has been a blessing for the city, and I'm grateful that HPU has played a critical role in revitalizing many aspects of High Point, North Carolina. We've led the downtown transformation by raising the funds to purchase a professional baseball team and securing naming rights for the new stadium, all of which has served as a catalyst for continued development in downtown High Point just blocks away from HPU. HPU also attracts more than 100,000 visitors a year from across the United States and from dozens of nations and generates \$765 million in annual economic impact. So, yes, it is important that HPU serves as a leader in our community in many ways, including through the 500,000 hours of

service the HPU family contributes each year. There's a scripture we have displayed in the grand lobby of the Hayworth Fine Arts Center. It's Luke 12:48 – "To whom much is given, much is required." That perfectly defines our values regarding HPU's leadership and participation in the city of High Point.

How do you define the role of a university president and what are the keys to being effective in the role?

A leader must define a clear vision, develop a solid strategy, execute consistently, and interpret value. These are the fundamentals of effective leadership. It's what I strive to focus on in all my work.

My management style is summed up very simply: Inspect what you expect. I'm a regular presence on campus and talk to students often to understand what they're thinking. I walk campus and inspect our facilities for cleanliness, order, and yes, even to assess the energy our campus creates to help propel our students forward. I asked our team to put an outdoor ice rink on campus during the pandemic. I wanted something safe and fun. That would have never happened if I stayed at my desk all day simply making calls and managing e-mails.

I meet with faculty and staff frequently to learn more about their areas of focus and to ensure the university is appropriately allocating resources. A leader can't allocate resources effectively without a vertical and diagonal understanding of each business unit.

Ultimately, I make myself available to students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni and the community. I answer my e-mails. It's not delegated.

If I'm going to make decisions about the future of the institution, then I have to believe I've assessed the risks and understand the potential benefits of those decisions.

What advice do you offer to young people going through the college selection process?

Be brave. Don't be afraid to take a calculated risk and go to a college that will provide you with maximized learning opportunities where you can prepare for lifelong success. Many families today sadly question the benefits of a college education. To young people, I would say the first disciplined action one can take toward becoming extraordinary is intentionally selecting how, where and with whom to invest their time.

While rankings are an important reflection of our academic and institutional reputation, the one ranking we care about the most is the achievements of our students and graduates. That's why families are flocking to HPU. They know that 99 percent of our recent graduates were employed or in graduate school within 180 days, and that's 14 points higher than the national average.

As a God, family, and country school, HPU is also committed to values-based living and learning. We welcome one and all with love and inclusivity. But we do not shy away from proclaiming our faith in God, our appreciation for this nation, and our respect for our students, their families, and all faculty and staff who serve this nearly 100-year-old institution. This may turn some away from HPU, but we attract thousands of families who seek a university atmosphere that continues to instill the values fostered in their own homes.

Our unique and highly relevant educational model is built on the development of premier life skills, values, experiential learning and academic innovation. Parents continually share stories with me about the transformation they've experienced in their HPU student. We love that.

With all that HPU has achieved under your leadership, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to reflect on what has been accomplished?

Early in my career, I occasionally measured my accomplishments through the awards and recognitions I'd receive. I'm grateful for many recognitions in my life, including induction in the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, The National Speakers Hall of Fame Cavett Award, and Philanthropist of the Year in my hometown of High Point, North Carolina. But today, I can tell you that what I find most rewarding is the opportunity to positively influence and impact the lives of others, particularly the students of High Point University and their families.

I live by the rule of thirds, which I also teach to all freshmen in my President's First-Year Seminar on Life Skills: Life is one-third learning, one-third earning, and one-third serving. This helps you achieve not only success, but also significance.

HPU is in a constant state of transformation, so every day is exciting. I'm focused on ensuring that HPU is prepared to serve students and their families for generations to come. I'm focused on ensuring the city of High Point is positioned to thrive as a vibrant and energetic city. I'm focused on planting seeds of greatness in the minds, hearts, and souls of all those I'm blessed to encounter. ●