

## Fostering Life Skills

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. He has served as past president of the Big South Conference and teaches a class to all freshmen titled, "The President's Seminar on Life Skills." In this course, Dr. Qubein shares with students the habits, skills, values, and the practical intelligence that one must apply to succeed in an ever-changing world. The author of 11 books, Dr. Qubein received an associate degree in business from Mount Olive College, a bachelor's degree in human relations from High Point University, and a master of science in business education degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Bryan School of Business & Economics. In 2009, he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters in Humanity degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.*



Dr. Nido R. Qubein

**UNIVERSITY BRIEF** *Founded in 1924, High Point University (highpoint.edu) is a 94-year-old liberal arts institution located in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina. At High Point University, every student receives an extraordinary education in an inspiring environment with caring people. "America's Best Colleges" 2019 Edition, published in the U.S. News & World Report, ranks HPU #1 among all regional colleges in the South (the seventh consecutive year at #1). It also ranks HPU for the fourth consecutive year as the #1 Most Innovative Regional College in the South for innovative improvements in terms of curriculum, faculty, students, campus life, technology or facilities. HPU was selected, for the eighth consecutive year, as a "Colleges of Distinction." HPU also earned Fields of Study distinctions for the Phillips School of Business and the Stout School of Education. High Point University has been named one of the nation's top institutions for undergraduate education by The Princeton Review. HPU is recognized in "The Best 384 Colleges: 2019 Edition" for its academic programming, as well as positive survey responses and feedback from students, parents, and higher education leaders across the country. In addition to including HPU in "The Best 384 Colleges," the new Princeton Review rankings also names HPU as one of the top 20 universities in the nation for Best-Run Colleges (#19) and Best College Dorm Rooms (#5) and Most Beautiful Campuses (#18).*

### Will you highlight the history and heritage of High Point University?

HPU was established in 1924 through a partnership with the United Methodist Church and the city of High Point. Since 2005, when I accepted the role as president, I've been privileged to lead an extraordinary team of faculty and staff. Together, we have transformed High Point University by increasing enrollment 259 percent, growing net assets from \$56 million to almost a billion dollars, creating six new academic schools and attracting \$375 million in philanthropic investments. This mega-transformation, which continues today, has attracted students and families from every state and more than 56 countries.

### What differentiates High Point University from other universities?

High Point University is the Premier Life Skills University. We understand the world needs graduates with capabilities that outlast and extend beyond technical skills. In a competitive atmosphere, employers seek new hires with more than technical competence because technology changes daily. The skills that outlast technological advances are what we call life skills – the ability to communicate, build relational capital, develop a growth mindset, embrace failure as a small price to pay for learning, solve complex problems and continuously adapt. Our faculty are excellent teacher/scholars who invest time mentoring HPU students. Faculty mentor students through formal programs like undergraduate research, but our campus has been intentionally built and our culture intentionally nurtured to encourage organic mentorship to take place all the time.

At HPU, our curriculum is grounded in life skills. It starts their freshman year with my Life Skills Seminar, where I share my experience in building a life of both success and significance. Our campus is collaborative in nature, and students are encouraged to work across academic disciplines and departments to engage with one another, build their companies, operate their agencies and beyond. In addition, every corner of our campus is designed to foster life skills. Consider the lobby of the Wilson School of Commerce, which resembles a Fortune 500 company, or 1924 Prime, our fine-dining learning lab where students practice how to conduct themselves during a job interview over dinner

and are exposed to international cuisine and etiquette. Building confidence and learning to thrive in these settings is celebrated everywhere at HPU.

Parents appreciate this highly-relevant and distinctive educational focus which, by the way, contributes to 97 percent of HPU graduates being employed or continuing their education within six months of graduation, which is 11 points above the national average.

But families value equally our commitment to values-based living. Parents spend their life modeling the values they want their children to inherit. When they send their student to a university, they want that institution to uphold and further those values, not tear them down. What educators must understand is that values cannot be taught. They must be modeled. It's not about what we say, but what we do. At HPU, every faculty and staff member is empowered to positively impact the students on our campus. Our culture promotes the values of generosity, gratitude, hard work, personal initiative and joy, among others. These are among the values that built our nation and we have the responsibility to ensure HPU students graduate having lived in an environment for four years that model those same values.

We aren't a perfect school, but perfection is not our goal. Excellence is our goal. HPU is an excellent institution that has attracted thousands of students and parents who appreciate our holistic approach to education, and they enthusiastically advocate on our behalf.

### How deeply engrained is an entrepreneurial spirit in High Point University's culture?

My background is in business leadership, executive coaching, consulting and public speaking. When I became president of HPU nearly 15 years ago, I set out to spark a transformation that infused the entrepreneurial spirit into the campus DNA.

Today, "Growth Mindset" is the theme of our faculty's Quality Enhancement Plan. HPU is home to the Belk Center for Entrepreneurship, a major and minor in entrepreneurship studies in the Phillips School of Business, an annual Business Plan Competition and many other academic initiatives that instill an entrepreneurial mindset in HPU students.

We have not only attracted learned faculty to HPU, we've added global leaders to a robust "In Residence" program to help mentor and



*The entrance to High Point University*

coach our students. Where else can students learn from Apple Co-Founder Steve Wozniak, who is HPU's Innovator in Residence. Where else can students enjoy mentorship from Netflix Co-Founder Marc Randolph, HPU's Entrepreneur in Residence. These are only a few examples.

Students at HPU are guided to understand that the entrepreneurial spirit can be applied to every aspect of their lives. You can be entrepreneurial in your way of thinking, such as a scientist who develops an innovative way to solve a problem. Or you can be an entrepreneur in any sector by creating a business, service or product that fills an unmet need. Teachers can apply entrepreneurial thinking to getting the best out of their students in the classroom. Starting a business is not the only endeavor that requires a growth mindset or entrepreneurial spirit.

You only need to walk around our campus for five minutes to feel this upbeat, can-do culture. There's a reason our call to action is: Choose to be extraordinary!

**What do you see as High Point University's role in the community and how critical is community engagement to the university?**

HPU is a values-based institution, so naturally we are committed to serving our community. HPU students, faculty and staff complete 110,000 hours of annual service through events such as the HPU Veterans Day Celebration, when 1,000 local military veterans come to campus for a complimentary breakfast and patriotic program. The entire event is operated by staff and student volunteers to express gratitude for the men and women who served this nation. In December, HPU welcomes more

than 30,000 visitors to campus for a two-night Community Christmas event complete with a life-size Nativity, falling snow, and Santa, who even offers a gift to each child. The entire event is complimentary.

These are just a few examples of HPU's commitment to its community and its values. I'm grateful to be in a position to have raised \$116 million in private philanthropy dollars to revitalize downtown High Point. Those funds are being used to build a professional baseball stadium, events center, children's museum, hotel and more as part of the city's downtown revitalization efforts.

My favorite scripture is Luke 12:48 "To whom much is given, much is required." I believe that. HPU believes that. And collectively, our HPU Family models that behavior.

**What attracted you to High Point University and has the experience been what you expected?**

I love people. I love to coach. I love mentoring. I love encouraging people. When you really look at my career, I've been an educator. While I didn't work in higher education prior to 2005, I've certainly been an educator throughout my career.

When I became president of HPU in 2005, we came to understand that what got us to this point might not get us to where we needed to go as an institution. The academic landscape was shifting. Today's college graduates face global, not merely continental, competition for their jobs and careers. It's no longer enough to simply acquire information during one's time at school – students must acquire knowledge and wisdom too.

That's the advantage of attending a premier life skill school like HPU, one that provides students with a holistic education and teaches them how to build relational capital while arming them with the tools of decision-making, problem-solving and critical thinking.

It was clear to me that HPU had to exit an ocean of sameness and enter a lake of differentiation and, ultimately, reside in a small pool of distinction. We are committed to helping students make the journey from success to significance.

We want our students to be not only effective, but transformative; not only productive, but truly generative. We are preparing our students not for the world as it is today, but for the world as it is going to be.

I am so grateful for the privilege of serving as the seventh president of High Point University. God's hand has been on this work from the beginning. He blessed me with a committed and equally talented team to achieve the extraordinary results we've seen on our campus. I am thankful for the trustees, students, faculty, deans, staff, parents, alumni, donors and the city of High Point for supporting our mission as a transformational university. What resourceful friends they all are.

**What are your key priorities in order to ensure that High Point University remains an education leader?**

We believe in the art of the possible and are living proof of it. We've invested \$2 billion in our campus, including facilities, academics, technology, and more. We've more than tripled enrollment from 1,450 undergraduate students to more than 5,200 today, and the world has noticed. Since the transformation began, HPU has received national recognition. For example, HPU was included in *The Princeton Review's* Best Colleges. In *U.S. News & World Report*, HPU is named #1 Best Regional College in the South for seven consecutive years and Most Innovative for four consecutive years.

Supporters of HPU have jokingly remarked, "HPU has nowhere else to grow." But I remind my team that how you change is how you succeed.

It's true that our academic programs have never been stronger, our facilities have never been better resourced and our vision to enhance the lives of the students entrusted to our care has never been more focused.

However, achieving your vision doesn't mean you've reached the end of the line. It simply means that you've come to a new starting place. While we are proud of the recognition, our goal is not to achieve high rankings. Our goal is to positively impact the hearts and minds of the students who choose to attend HPU. Our call to action, "Choose to be extraordinary!" by design, has no definitive conclusion. Excellence is to be pursued, not obtained. ●