

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

Administration Publications

Administration

9-24-2015

PR heaven

Michael Hemesath

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, mhemesath@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/admin_pubs



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hemesath M. 2015 Sept 24. PR heaven [blog]. Quad 136. [Accessed 2017 June 14].
<http://blogs.csbsju.edu/mhemesath/2015/09/24/pr-heaven/>.

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Administration Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

Quad 136

PR Heaven

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

PR Heaven



Above (from left to right) are the participants in the presentation the Apostles Edition of The Saint John's Bible to the Library of Congress, Abbot Klassen; Chairman of Joint Committee on the Library Sen. Roy Blunt; Librarian of Congress Dr. James H. Billington; Pope Francis; Speaker of the House John Boehner; Saint John's University President Dr. Michael Hemesath; and GHR Foundation CEO Amy Rauenhorst Goldman.
Photo: GHR Foundation

You can probably count on two hands the schools that do not have to worry about their brand and name recognition: Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Princeton—maybe it would only take one hand. Every other college or university in the country spends significant time and treasure promoting their brand and name recognition (and the aforementioned schools surely do as well).

Schools naturally care about their reputation with prospective students and parents. They also strive to maintain the goodwill and loyalty of their alumni. And finally, the general public's opinion of schools (and higher education in general) can matter for funding if it's a public university, but perceptions can also matter for public policy and legislative reasons for every institution.

Schools generally consider their media presence in three distinct, though often overlapping, markets.

The local market is actually the easiest to manage. The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University get very generous and helpful media coverage from St. Cloud area media, and *The St. Cloud Times* particular. I'm sure St. Mary's University gets similar support from the Winona press and the College of Saint Scholastica from the Duluth media. There is a natural and built-in constituency in the hometown area of any college or university.

At the state level, things get a little more complicated for smaller institutions. The University of Minnesota obviously attracts interest from all over the state, but smaller institutions with smaller student bodies and fewer alumni are not always an interest across the whole state. Given the geography of Minnesota, with much of the media focused in the Twin Cities, every institution of higher education except the U is competing with each other for limited media coverage. Saint John's has done reasonably well in the state market with our strong athletic brand, many loyal and successful alums and long history, but there is still a limit in the interest in Saint John's related stories. And, truth be told, we face challenges in competing with the much larger and Twin Cities-based University of St. Thomas. But with personalities like John Gagliardi, alumni like Sen. Dave Durenberger and Rep. Mark Kennedy, as well as faculty like Louis Johnston, Annette Atkins and Nick Hayes, I think it is safe to say we punch well above our weight in the state media market.

At the national level, it is virtually impossible for small institutions to influence their media opportunities. Even the very top-ranked liberal arts colleges that everyone in academia recognize as national have almost no national media presence. Outside of the rarified world of higher education, places like Williams, Amherst and Swarthmore are little known, despite having produced influential alumni for decades.

To get national media attention as a small educational institution usually requires luck. Saint John's has been lucky in recent years as our alumnus Denis McDonough has served as the Chief of Staff for President Obama, often putting him in the national eye. Though, interestingly, in this case, part of the attraction to Denis's story is that he played football for John Gagliardi. I suspect that many people, when asked about Denis's background, are more likely to remember he played for the winningest coach in college football history rather than the fact that he graduated from SJU. But we will take that!

All of these observations about media are simply to preface what an incredible week this is for Saint John's University in the national media—how the stars have aligned in a way that is unlikely to be duplicated anytime soon.

First, as any sentient American knows, Pope Francis is making his first visit to America this week. As of this posting, he is in Washington DC and will soon go on to Philadelphia and New York. Saint John's University has had the exceptional opportunity to be associated with this visit through [The Saint John's Bible project](#). Through the extraordinary generosity of the [GHR Foundation](#), Saint John's [presented an Apostles Edition of The Saint John's Bible to the Library of Congress](#), and therefore the American people, in honor of the Pope's historic visit. Abbot John Klassen and I were privileged to be part of the presentation ceremony in which the Pope, House Majority Leader John Boehner and the Head of the Library of Congress Dr. James Billington, among others, were present. This media exposure – and association with possibly the most popular man on the planet – should give Saint John's unprecedented national exposure.

Second, forty-eight hours later we will get to showcase another exceptional part of the Saint John's story. *ESPN Sports Center* will be [broadcasting live from Clemens Stadium](#) from 6:00 to 8:00 on Saturday morning prior to the Johnnie-Tommie football game. In another unprecedented national media opportunity, Saint John's will be representing not only itself but all of Division III athletics, as *ESPN Sports Center On the Road* has never visited a Division III institution before. This manna from media heaven was made possible in part through the hard work of a number of alumni, but a Gustavus alumnus and Augsburg alumnus also played a significant role in generously helping to bring this opportunity to Collegeville. Being Benedictine to our MIAC rivals should be its own reward, but in this case it has brought us national media exposure, too!

Yankees pitcher Lefty Gomez once said, "I'd rather be lucky than good." I certainly think SJU community members and our alums should strive to be good, as our Benedictine heritage teaches, but this is a week where we have been lucky as well. Very lucky. And we will take it.

Every day is a good day to be a Johnnie (or a friend of Johnnies), but I hope our many alumni and friends are enjoying this sweet week in Saint John's University's history as much as I am.

Michael Hemesath | September 24th, 2015 | Categories: [Alumni](#), [Higher Education](#), [History](#) | [0 Comments](#)

About the Author: [Michael Hemesath](#)



Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).