



# Associated Colleges of Illinois

## Lewis University Aims to Educate Students for Careers, While Teaching Curiosity and Broader Thinking

### Creating 'Master Learners'



What do students want when they go to college? Many go to learn a particular skill and qualify for high-paying careers. At Lewis University, students are taught to think bigger and beyond earning a degree and getting a job, says Dr. David J. Livingston, president of Lewis since 2016. They are taught to think about participating in broader society and

about human and technological changes in the contemporary workforce, so they become "master learners" -- people aware of their surroundings, curious about the world and interested in learning. "That is what companies want," Livingston says. "They want somebody who adds value to their organization now and in the future."

Lewis University, whose main campus is in Romeoville, is a Catholic university affiliated with the De La Salle Christian Brothers. It offers more than 80 undergraduate majors, 22 graduate programs and 19 academic programs which are fully online. More than 6,500 students from at least 39 countries are enrolled, including some 2,000 graduate students. It also operates satellite campuses in Albuquerque, New Mexico, plus Oak Brook and Tinley Park in Illinois. Lewis enjoys top rankings. *U.S. News & World Report* says it is a top tier Midwest university, *Princeton Review* rates Lewis a "Best in the Midwest" university, and it is an Illinois College of Distinction and a Catholic College of Distinction, among other honors.

Lewis University's history is different than most colleges and universities. Founded in 1932 by the Archdiocese of Chicago, the school opened as Holy Name Technical School, a school for boys. Among its first offerings were courses in aviation, and an early supporter was Frank J. Lewis, a Chicago industrialist and philanthropist. His name was added to the school, which later became Lewis School of Aeronautics. Because it had an airfield, the



*President David J. Livingston  
(Lewis University photo)*

school trained U.S. Navy pilots in the early days of World War II. In 1942, the Lewis school was closed, and its facilities were turned over to the Navy, which used the airfield to train hundreds of pilots. The school reopened in 1944 as a junior college.



*The Department of Aviation and Transportation offers courses unique to Lewis University, and aviation education has been a part of Lewis since its founding. (Lewis University photo)*

Still front and center today are Lewis' roots in aviation. The university's Department of Aviation and Transportation is a signature academic program. It became a catalyst for other technology-based academic programs at Lewis, Livingston says. "We have one of the few unmanned aviation systems, or drone, bachelor's degree programs in the country. We know that 10 years from now many people will

have their jobs in unmanned systems – whether drones, unmanned cars, unmanned taxis, trucks or even unmanned planes. All of that is part of our future as a society. It's also true of data analytics, cybersecurity and areas of computer science. That's how we use the aviation program to push ourselves." In fact, the university's computer science program, featuring concentrations such as cybersecurity, data science, digital forensics and software engineering, is one of its fastest-growing programs.

Lewis' airport is still used for instructional purposes, plus small, private corporate jets land and take off there every day. "One of the busiest weekends of the year is the weekend of the annual NASCAR race at Chicago Speedway (early July). Drivers fly in private jets, land here and go to the Chicago Speedway," Livingston says.

### **Diverse student body important to Lewis' academic program**

Another key attribute of Lewis University is the diversity of the types of the students who attend. Beside traditional high school and transfer students, almost one third of enrolled students are graduate students, and large numbers are nontraditional students who have returned to college to work on degrees. "We have people who want to finish a degree after working 20 years, others started college at a community college and now want to finish at a quality four-year institution, plus we have graduate students coming back to school and traditional-age freshman. Diversity in the type of students we serve enhances the quality of our programs," Livingston says.

## Challenges and successes

Livingston, a native of Dundee, Illinois, came to Lewis after serving as president of Lourdes University in Ohio.

He earned an undergraduate degree in chemistry from Augustana College, an ACI-affiliated institution, plus a master's degree in theology from Loyola University Chicago and a doctorate in theology from Vanderbilt University. He worked in various roles at other Catholic institutions for most of his professional career. When Livingston became president, he followed Brother James Gaffney, FSC, who had served 28 years as president, and



*More than 6,500 students from at least 39 countries are enrolled at Lewis. The diversity of student types enhances the quality of the university's programs, says President Livingston. (Lewis University photo).*

Livingston started in the midst of the Illinois budget crisis, which directly affected MAP funds for students. Despite those challenges, Livingston believes the biggest challenge is whether higher education will be able to meet the desires and needs of students. "Higher education overall is a very conservative institution," he says. "It's big, and it doesn't change quickly." He argues colleges and universities need to be "nimble" to adapt to rapid changes in the global economy for the good of its students.

This fall, the university will open a new occupational therapy program, and it just hired its first director for a speech pathology program, part of a strategy of expansion into health care beyond its well-respected nursing program. It also reorganized its academic structure, adding a college of aviation science and technology, while moving other traditional academic offerings between the other existing colleges, and adding a new general education core, Livingston says. The new academic arrangement goes into effect in one year. "This will allow us to lead with our strengths in different areas. We're strong in health care, strong in aviation and STEM. And, the new structure will allow the university to continue our high-quality programs in the humanities, the social sciences, education and business. I think it's going to help us in terms of recruiting students," he says. This fall the university will open a new student center named for Brother Gaffney, and it is likely to expand its health-science facilities soon, Livingston says.

## **Lewis committed to Catholic Church, social justice issues**



*Sancta Alberta Chapel is a key component of Lewis University's Catholic connection. (Lewis University photo)*

Students who attend Lewis experience the university's Catholic influences, including regular mass, Christian artwork on campus, required courses in theology and philosophy, and the presence of several De La Salle Brothers who hold administrative jobs and teach.

Livingston and the university community are both deeply committed to issues of social

justice. For example, this spring, he wrote in support of students in the DACA program. "They made a commitment to our society, work in our society, and we believe in educational opportunity for everyone," he says, pointing out that Lewis is one of 65 universities in the global Lasallian network. "We have exchange programs where students can come from those universities to our campus. We really believe in a global world perspective because that is a part of what it means to be Lasallian. DACA is an extension of that."

### **ACI extends fundraising and provides continuing education for staff**

As one of 25 colleges and universities of ACI, Livingston believes the organization helps extend the university's ongoing advancement work. "We have a good advancement team, but we can't reach out to corporations throughout Illinois. What ACI allows us to do is make an argument for support to corporations that need graduates from these strong liberal arts, private institutions," Livingston says. ACI's scholarships help make college more affordable for some students, especially first-generation college students, and its professional development conferences for staff are a "real value," he adds.

Like many ACI colleges and universities, Lewis University serves many first-generation college students who want good careers. Livingston says it's important for the university to address those needs while focusing attention on other higher education aims. "There's a lot at stake," he says. "Many families know there is real value in higher education, but they see it as very expensive. So, they want to get it right, and they want to make sure there's a job when they're done. I want to make sure they feel comfortable. I also want to say life is bigger than just a job. Some of the biggest questions are around birth, death, tragedy and joy. We can help people to struggle with those questions and learn about the great wisdom traditions. I think that is a powerful thing for our students."