



# **Opinion: Investing in Our Future: Reimagining and Reenergizing Lewis and Clark**

by Dr. Ken Trzaska, L&C President  
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GODFREY - In 2020, Lewis and Clark Community College commenced an important period in our 50-year journey: to recommit, reimagine and refocus what it means to be a high-performing college, with an invariable focus on each student having a meaningful and powerful experience. As a campus, our re-evaluation of affordability, equity in access and flexibility is our lens, and collaboration and openness to new ideas and thinking about Lewis and Clark's position in higher education remains our steadfast strategy.



Our teamwork resulted in a renewed and balanced focus on access, enrollment growth, building a transparent campus culture, and strengthening community partnerships. With our collective energy and a strong commitment to students, we are taking new and calculated risks to encourage growth and continued financial stability during what I consider the most exciting moment in higher education history.

Even with the challenges brought on by the pandemic, the economy, and the internal changes at Lewis and Clark, it brings us great joy to look back at the last two years and reflect on how far we have advanced as an institution.

One of the most notable changes the community will see this month is a new and improved iteration of Lewis and Clark's brand, which we unveiled to a crowd of around 300 on campus this week. The refreshed brand, more than a year in the making, includes a set of modernized logos, a new brandmark, a clean, sans-serif typeface, and the addition of black, gray and sunglow (yellow-orange) as secondary colors to its traditional, classic blue and white palette.

Our modern new look and the addition of sunglow to our color palette reflect the hope, excitement and energy we're putting into new efforts to increase student access and success, while continuing to honor the traditions of our historic campus.

L&C worked with the two-year higher education experts at Interact Communications on the research-based effort and is also planning to launch a new website in the spring. The community will notice the college's new logos throughout the district in the coming months as work continues to update campus signage and other marketing materials.

One achievement that doesn't get as much attention as it deserves is our strong financial position. We have worked diligently to refocus our strategic priorities around supporting students and their success – after all, this is why we exist. This mission has, in turn, helped build a model for investments and spending that are student- and access-focused.

The college's operating financial position has strengthened over the recent year due to unrestricted accumulated interest earnings, as well as federal revenue replacement funds resulting from the pandemic. Close attention to revenues and expenses has kept college expenses within budget and fund balances moving in the right direction to support new initiatives in the FY23 budget surrounding recruitment, academic transformation, strengthening student services, and focused work on a strategic plan that expands value and invests in its many constituents.

Financial responsibility is evident in our careful management of debt. Coming into 2022, the opportunity presented itself to refinance a bond issue that originally took place in 2015. Eligibility to refinance, combined with a lower interest rate environment, provided more than \$1.8 million in net present value savings with this reissue completed in February 2022. At about the same time, with support and advocacy by our leadership team, members of our Board of Trustees, U.S. Attorney Rachelle Crowe, and Representative Amy Elik, L&C earned a \$37.5 million state award for a much-needed renovation of our Main Complex, for which the college needed a sizeable local match. Debt certificates were issued for approximately 65 percent of the match dollars needed,

with the remainder coming from capital funds on hand. During calendar year 2022, excluding aforementioned refinancing, more than \$12.5 million in debt was retired. The average true interest cost of the college's remaining outstanding debt is 2.43 percent.

In September, the college was notified of our eligibility for the special tax levy for levy year 2022, in the amount of 3.33 cents. The state average combined educational and operations and maintenance purposes tax rate is 28.33 cents compared to L&C's rate of 25 cents. Because our rate is lower, the district is authorized to levy the difference, pending Board of Trustee approval. However, following a discussion and evaluation of Lewis and Clark's financial health, campus leadership decided against bringing the option forward as part of our 2022 levy recommendation.

We are confident about our fund balances coming out of these unique years, in addition to our strong management of college resources. We, as a campus team, continue to practice diligence and make responsible strategic investments in work focused on Lewis and Clark's student experience and in our vision to strengthen access through innovative academic models and team member support. We are excited that the college retains the necessary resources to advance our vision and support future growth.

Our strategy to broaden access and flexibility for students involves a serious and strategic investment in innovative platforms like competency-based education (CBE) and BlendFlex – both lend an additional layer of flexibility and agility for students.

The CBE format is currently available within the college's Welding Technology program and will soon be available in other programs, including Information Technology. Within CBE, students navigate courses at a pace of learning and engagement that is best for them, and completion and success are measured by their mastery of course competencies rather than traditional seat time. Not only is L&C's program the first full CBE program in the state, but also, I am currently leading a presidential committee to standardize guidelines for CBE education across the state. Another item the team is exploring is a subscription pay model for students – again adding another point of financial flexibility at Lewis and Clark.

The last two years have reflected a constant state of realignment of our team members in support of student success. Numerous changes have taken place to streamline the leadership within the Student Affairs division, while also continuously evaluating necessary support staff needed to provide students with resources for success. We continue to evaluate every open position and are always re-envisioning and planning for the future.

Work has now started on our reimagining of our Main Complex, which serves as the major student hub and classroom building on campus. Members of our campus team

met in early December with our architect team, Hastings and Chivetta. It was clear from our initial meeting that the campus community's vision for this project is a complete investment in the student experience. We are excited about this project and look forward to sharing our plans with the community as we transition into the design process.

Our key directions ([www.lc.edu/Strategic\\_Plan](http://www.lc.edu/Strategic_Plan)) have us not only focused on improving access for students, but also envisioning ways to build a transparent and inclusive culture on campus. Our first annual Hiking Through the Holidays event reflects the essence of this culture building work. More than 30 team members, from various departments, created a special attraction this holiday season to welcome our students, team members and community to experience a lighted hiking trail behind our Godfrey Campus. The event has truly been a team effort, drawing 250-300 visitors to campus each night.

The new year will bring not only a new brand, new technology and new resources to our students, but also a stronger Lewis and Clark through the work of each of our employee team members and the Board of Trustees. Our laser-focus on the student experience is helping us assure that the work we do strengthens Lewis and Clark's place and impact in our region.

It is without a doubt that Lewis and Clark will remain focused on an innovation agenda that will never waver to improve and enhance the comprehensive student, employee /team member, and community engagement experience.

Please stay tuned to our continued transformation and the impact being made by our amazing team of Trailblazers. In Spring 2023, we will host our first annual State of Trailblazer Nation event to keep you updated on not only our progress, but also our vulnerabilities. We are planning the launch of a new website in the spring.

And this goes without saying: Thank you to each of you in our community for your unwavering support and advocacy for Lewis and Clark. You are making a difference each and every day.

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