

# Inaugural State of Trailblazer Nation Celebrates L&C's Successes; Sets Benchmarks for Ongoing Progress

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**GODFREY** – Lewis and Clark Community College held its inaugural State of Trailblazer Nation event Monday, May 15, closing the 2022-2023 academic year on a high note.

Sessions were held at 11:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. – the former being an internal event for L&C team members, and the latter for the general community. Both comprised comments from President Ken Trzaska, and leaders from mover teams representing the four key directions (KD) of the college's strategic plan.

"The college first started this journey in early Spring 2021 with an internal survey to team members about what efforts we should start, stop and continue as an institution," he said. "The outcomes of that initial feedback eventually became these four key directions."

- KD1: Expect Enrollment and Retention Improvements
- KD2: Invest in Program and Curriculum Development
- KD3: Build a Transparent and Inclusive Campus Culture
- KD4: Broaden Community and Educational Collaboration

The plan's first iteration was approved in 2021, but a string of unexpected crises – the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden closure of two floors of the Main Complex, and the cybersecurity incident – kept the college from making any real progress toward those goals, Trzaska said. The following year, the Board and college recommitted to the plan and went to work.

This year's State of Trailblazer Nation looked back at the gains made over the past academic year, and celebrated the team members who were integral in making them happen.

Trzaska said the college has done a commendable job remaining agile in response to the changing needs of its students and is already increasing access through Blendflex and Hyflex course modes, and through an ongoing, deep investment in competency-based education (CBE).

The college's 3,992 students in Spring 2023 represented a 9.2 percent increase over the previous spring, which Trzaska said is something to be proud of. Even though it's a long way from 7,612 in Spring 2015, he encouraged the team to focus on the present and look to the future.

“We’re just getting started,” he said. “I believe we are going to continue to see growth, and it’s going to be due to our willingness to sustain that growth through agility and a strong focus on our students.”

The college has decreased its debt service from \$114,290,511 in FY2019, to \$81,663,479 in FY2022, while at the same time almost doubling its operating budget – from \$15,475,041 in FY2019 to \$27,297,218 in FY2022.

“We’ve had to make organizational changes, some difficult, and think harder about how we’re leveraging our resources to advance the institution,” Trzaska said. “But now, we’re going to be able to strategically reinvest those dollars back into the important work we’re doing.”

Trzaska also noted the Pharmacy Technician program’s recent accreditation and a successful reaccreditation for Occupational Therapy Assistant as wins for the college, as well as positive feedback coming out of a benchmark culture survey conducted with the team this past spring.

Investments in the college’s team – by way of providing more outlets for feedback and opportunities for participation in mover teams and interdepartmental projects, monitoring the team’s collective attitude, and supporting continuous team-building and professional development activities – is an important first step in developing and nurturing an inclusive and transparent culture campuswide.

Lastly, Trzaska noted that construction on the long-awaited Main Complex Renovation Project could begin within 13 months, as it is in the final stages of budget and resource planning right now.

### **Key Direction 1: Expect Enrollment and Retention Improvements**

Vice President of Student Affairs Cherise Jackson, who co-chairs KD1 with Vice President of Administration Lori Artis, gave the team’s highlights for the year. Jackson said her team is focused on two main aspirations – one being enrollment growth, and the other, increased retention. Highlights from this year include:

- The addition of a new full-time advisor to help students through enrollment processes.
- The posting of a new Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management position to help move the college’s Enrollment Management Plan forward.
- A bigger investment in the new high school liaison program, which puts L&C advisors into the high schools, at least part time. “Participating schools are seeing

the value of having that presence, and some are even interested in sharing a paid position to continue supporting that work,” she said.

- Interdepartmental training on the college’s CRM, Ellucian Recruit, to better communicate with onboarding and continuing students.
- Progress toward the launch of the college’s new website, designed to streamline the digital experience for students, due later this summer.
- The reimagining of New Student Orientation and Welcome Week into interactive opportunities for incoming students to mingle with current students and see what Lewis and Clark has to offer inside and outside the classroom.
- The addition of open house events, outside of existing Discover Days, to cater more toward adult and non-traditional potential students.
- Continuing support for Career and Veteran Services, following the retirement of Director Terry Lane.

Jackson said the college is in its 11<sup>th</sup> straight year of outperforming its IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) cohort in full-time student retention. She attributes that success to continued efforts in intrusive advising and tutoring services, and said the college is really working now to identify those populations that don’t retain as well to work on solutions to better accommodate them.

## **KD2: Invest in Program and Curriculum Development**

Vice President of Academic Affairs Sue Czerwinski spoke on the successes of KD2, which she leads with Dean of Liberal Arts, Business and Information Technology Randy Gallaher. “We’ve gone back and forth with different ideas to reach students,” she said. “We tend to make things complicated, so we’re focusing on simplifying processes.” KD2’s highlights include:

- Work toward creating a new rubric to determine if a new program, credit or non-credit, is a good fit for the college/district community.
- Work toward creating a process for determining the health of an existing academic program – whether it needs more of an investment, either financial or otherwise, to become more successful. “One example was changing the name of our Instrumentation and Control Systems program,” Czerwinski said. “People would go to school elsewhere because they didn’t know we offered an electricity program. We doubled the program in size when the name changed to Industrial Electricity.”
- Continued investments in efforts to increase access for students, including offering more courses and programs in Blendflex/Hyflex course modes, and a continuing investment in competency-based education. Czerwinski said it’s also important to note that CBE might not look the same program to program.

- The creation of the TEM (Teaching and Engagement Model) model to encourage faculty members to take time out of their course schedules to innovate and try new things.
- An investment in more instructional design help to support faculty.

### **KD3: Build a Transparent and Inclusive Campus Culture**

Campus Logistics Supervisor Cody Zippmann, who leads KD3 alongside OTA Coordinator Debbie Witsken, presented on the highlights from their team, along with Mya Lawrence, director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusive Excellence. Zippmann hyped the crowd and expressed the importance of building a strong campus and team culture.

“KD3 is you, across the entire campus,” he said. “If we make this place a home, we’ll never work a day in our lives.”

This key direction has been focused improving communication, building a strong campus culture, including a sense of belonging for everyone at L&C, and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across campus. This year’s highlights include:

- Kick-or-treat, a faculty v. staff v. students kickball tournament, sponsored by Human Resources in the fall.
- The annual Summer Garden Show, sponsored by the horticulture team and L&C Foundation.
- Hiking through the Holidays, a lighted holiday trail made possible by a volunteer interdepartmental team from across campus.
- Trailblazers Day at the Docks, an outing for team members and their families with ice skating at the Loading Dock in Grafton.
- The establishment of the college’s monthly team member Recognition Report at each Board meeting, which highlights team members who have gone above and beyond their duties at the college.
- The Pantone 286 Award, the highest achievement for one team member who lives and breathes Trailblazer Blue and supports the culture, above and beyond their duties.
- The creation of more opportunities for team members and others to give feedback; i. e. suggestion boxes, focus groups, annual climate survey, and pulse surveys.
- “Catch Up with Dr. T” meet and greet events with the president.
- Board, student and faculty receptions to encourage more communication and collaboration between those groups.
- Increased all-team meetings and more academic affairs town halls for team members to share their successes, concerns and ideas.

“We’re open to more ideas,” Witsken said. “One recent effort is the creation of a campus Discord server as a space to communicate with students and team members. Students already use it, so it’s another way for us to connect.”

Lawrence said her work in DEI is integrated throughout the strategic plan, but she has been working closely with KD3 to really bring DEI into the campus culture.

The college’s DEI work is spelled out in a DEI Blueprint, which is slated to go to the Board of Trustees in June for approval. It has five objectives – to implement shared definitions of DEI across campus; increase DEI communications, all team trainings and professional development opportunities; strengthen DEI in both student and team member recruitment, hiring, and retention practices; work toward eliminating student equity gaps; and allow team members to prioritize DEI in their everyday work.

Upon approval of the blueprint, a DEI team will come together to put the work into action. Anyone interested in participating should contact Lawrence directly.

#### **KD4: Broaden Community and Educational Collaboration**

Associate Dean of Adult Education Val Harris and Professor of Communications Elizabeth Grant lead KD4, which works closely with KD3 in culture building, but with more of a focus on collaborating with the external community. Harris framed her update in gratitude toward the team members who contribute to KD4’s work every day, including Alice Bunjan, who leads the college’s Trailblazers Give Back team. Their highlights include:

- Donations through Trailblazers Give Back to the Trailblazer Snack Pantry and holiday food giveaway for hungry students. “The snack pantry and SGA Hygiene Closet are going to be strong priorities moving forward,” Harris said.
- Team member volunteer work with the Edwardsville Habitat for Humanity, Alton Tax Project and more, throughout the year.
- Donations to other community organizations, such as Oasis Women’s Shelter (collected at Trailblazers Day at the Dock, for example).
- The creation of a template for team members to request funds or volunteer help for other organizations through Trailblazers Give Back.
- Support for collaborations like Coffee for Life, the Criminal Justice Open House event, a bench dedication for former Monticello College students, Lizzie Project inspirational posters by graphic design students, Water Festival, Building Futures YouthBuild home renovations, and more.

Harris said alumni is one group in the community her team really wants to engage with and that the college is working on getting a coordinator to guide that effort. In the meantime, her team has held a few alumni focused events, and plan to hold more in the future.

In his morning address, Trzaska shone a spotlight on the college's core values – student focus, integrity, responsibility, valuing people, inclusion and diversity, and building community relationships – and urged them to consider how they are living those core values at work, challenging them to think of ways to continue their personal growth journey.

“We all have room and capacity to grow and improve,” Trzaska said. “We have the capacity to see each other through a new lens in terms of contribution to the college's efforts.”

Trzaska closed the session with a word of advice.

“Our success is reflected by the relationship we have with our work,” he said. “It's going to take all of us to move Trailblazer Nation forward, one student at a time.”

Last week, key direction team leads met with Trzaska at the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center's Jerry F. Costello Confluence Field Station to refresh the plan for the next three years. As it continues to be a living document, it will be refreshed and reaffirmed annually.

Learn more at [www.lc.edu/Strategic\\_Plan](http://www.lc.edu/Strategic_Plan).