

State of Trailblazer Nation Highlights Growth, Innovation and Student Success at LC

by Submitted by LC
September 14 2026 4:06 PM





GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College leaders, team members, and community champions gathered in August for the college's third annual State of Trailblazer Nation event, kicking off the 2026-2027 academic year.

The event celebrated the college's successes, put a spotlight on strategic priorities, and outlined an ambitious vision for the future.

LC President Ken Trzaska opened the event by emphasizing a central theme that will guide the college moving forward: visibility.

“The higher education landscape is changing very quickly,” Trzaska said. “Our success is going to be in our ability to be as visible as we can to our community, our students and the students who may not yet realize college is for them.”

According to Trzaska, visibility means being present where students are, removing barriers to access and ensuring Lewis and Clark remains flexible and responsive to community needs.

Strong Financial Foundation Supports Student-Focused Investments

Despite continued challenges in higher education funding, Lewis and Clark remains financially strong.

Trzaska reported that more than 54.7 percent of the college's budget directly supports instruction, academic support and student services, reflecting the institution's commitment to student success. He also noted that Lewis and Clark has experienced a reduction of approximately \$3.2 million in state funding over the past three years yet was able to close out its most recent fiscal year with a projected \$1.9 million surplus.

The college's strengthened financial position has allowed leaders to invest strategically in initiatives designed to improve student outcomes, including innovation projects through the college's BLINK Initiative and exploring new scholarship opportunities to help more dual credit students continue their education at Lewis and Clark after high school graduation.

“As long as that investment moves the needle for our students, it's a worthy investment,” Trzaska said.

Building Bridges from High School to College

A major focus of the event was expanding educational pathways and increasing access for students across the college district.

One example is the growing partnership between Lewis and Clark and the Bunker Hill School District, highlighted by Superintendent Todd Dugan during his remarks.

Dugan shared details about the district's “Power of 15” initiative, which guarantees students access to 15 hours of college credit at LC while still in high school. Through innovative use of dual credit, concurrent enrollment and Lewis and Clark's BlendFlex

course options, students can begin earning college credits regardless of transportation or scheduling challenges.

“We are changing trajectories for kids' futures for the better,” Dugan said. “What other reason do we need?”

The partnership has contributed to increased enrollment and expanded opportunities for rural students, serving as a model that Lewis and Clark hopes to replicate with additional school districts throughout the region.

Students at the Center

Student Trustee and nursing student Emily Hoge shared her perspective on student life and leadership at Lewis and Clark.

During the past year, the college hosted a variety of student-focused events, including Career Day, Springfest, Grad Bash, Trailblazer Welcome Day and the new LC Summer Road Trips, which brought the college into communities across the district.

Hoge also highlighted the President's Student Advisory Council, which gives students opportunities to provide feedback directly to college leadership.

“Creating a positive student experience goes far beyond what happens inside the classroom,” Hoge said. “It's about building relationships, providing opportunities for students to be involved, listening to their voices and creating an environment where they feel supported and valued.”

Strategic Priorities for 2026-27

Campus leaders provided updates on the college's four strategic key directions:

Enrollment and Retention (KD1)

Efforts are underway to increase student retention from 60 percent to 62.5 percent by 2027. Plans include a redesigned online orientation, expanded communication strategies, an “own the district” initiative called Trailblazer Territory, student interest surveys, and the launch of a new student support initiative called the KD Connection Crew.

Program and Workforce Development (KD2)

The college recently completed the first year of its new Human Services program and is exploring the development of associate degree programs in diagnostic medical sonography and cardiovascular sonography.

Additional efforts will focus on strengthening workforce partnerships, aligning academic programs with employer needs, and implementing a more coordinated grant management process.

Culture and Community Engagement (KD3)

Lewis and Clark is expanding both internal and external engagement through a new team culture framework, alumni outreach initiatives, philanthropic development and stronger partnerships with schools, businesses and community organizations.

Technology and Data Transformation (KD4)

The college continues to modernize technology systems, enhance cybersecurity, streamline processes and support responsible artificial intelligence adoption across campus.

PACE Continues Expanding Flexible Learning Options

A highlight of the presentation was continued growth of PACE (Performance Assessed Competency Education), Lewis and Clark's innovative competency-based education model.

What began three years ago with a single welding course has grown to approximately 300 students enrolled in 60 course sections.

PACE allows students to progress by demonstrating mastery of skills rather than following traditional semester timelines, providing flexibility for working adults and students balancing family and professional responsibilities.

“Sometimes life happens,” Trzaska said. “Creating opportunities like BlendFlex and PACE ensures that a temporary setback doesn't have to become the end of a student's educational journey.”

Major Campus Improvements Underway

College officials also provided updates on several significant campus improvement projects.

The college's long-awaited \$50 million Main Complex Renovation Project continues to advance. The project includes renovations to Fobes, Baldwin and Caldwell Halls, with plans to transform Fobes into a centralized Student Welcome Center. The renovation includes modernized classrooms, updated building systems, and improved accessibility features.

Additional projects include:

- New roofing across multiple campus buildings
- Building system and HVAC upgrades
- ADA sidewalk improvements
- Fire panel modernization
- Enhanced campus wayfinding signage
- Security camera upgrades
- Ongoing infrastructure improvements throughout campus

Athletics Reach Record Growth

Lewis and Clark Athletics continues to experience significant momentum.

Over the past three years, the number of student-athletes has increased from fewer than 140 to 213 student-athletes, while athletic fundraising efforts have generated approximately \$600,000. Athletic social media accounts recorded nearly 7.9 million views and more than 148,000 interactions during the past year.

The college also announced the launch of men's club hockey, with the inaugural season beginning Sept. 18, and plans to introduce clay shooting in Fall 2027.

Looking Ahead

As the event concluded, Trzaska thanked community partners, team members, and students for their continued support and collaboration.

“Our community is in a really good place,” he said. “We can't be in that really good place unless we have really great people. Each of you brings something unique, and that matters in the overall formula of Lewis and Clark.”

The message throughout the afternoon was clear: Lewis and Clark is building on a strong foundation while continuing to innovate, expand access and create opportunities that help students, employers and communities succeed throughout the region.

Miss This Year's Event?

Watch the recording on the college's YouTube Channel at <https://youtu.be/6Hc0mXm4RkI?si=HCNDF-nwhj4SXOoI>

The college's Strategic Plan can also be viewed in full online at <https://www.lc.edu/college-information/mission-vision-and-values/strategic-plan.html>.

This recap was created with the help of Otter.ai transcription and MS Co-pilot.