

Student Lasallian Commencement Address

December 2022

Presented by: Stephanie Lingenfelter

Good Morning, Members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Livingston, honored guests, faculty, staff, friends, family, and of course, my fellow graduates - we made it. I am more than honored to be here before you and with you today.

I invite all of you to take this time with me to reflect on our years spent at Lewis. Think back first to why you chose Lewis. For me, it was seeing my own values reflected in the Lasallian core principles – specifically, the values of concern for the poor and social justice, and quality education. In my time here, Lewis has continually lived up to these principles, teaching me how to better integrate these principles into my life to become Lasallian.

These principles were reflected in all the classes. My freshman year, I signed up for a gen-ed government class and honestly wasn't super excited about it. I wanted to learn about the environment, not state and local government. However, I ended up learning so much from that class since it was a community-engaged learning course where I got to volunteer at a forest preserve. In addition, I got to learn about environmental regulations, relating directly back to my environmental science major. This class not only allowed me to give back to the local community, but also reflected the quality education Lewis seeks to provide to its students by intertwining multiple majors and topics into all classes.

The principle of quality education is further showcased through Lewis' small class sizes and liberal arts education. At Lewis, we all took classes in diversity and social justice, economics, history, and more, allowing us to come out of undergraduate school as well-rounded individuals with knowledge beyond just our majors. In addition, the small classes allowed us to foster meaningful connections with our professors.

In my time here, I was able to write for the newspaper, even becoming editor-in- chief as a STEM major. This is an experience I might not have gotten at a bigger university, but it was that experience at Lewis that taught me the most and allowed me to grow. During my time on staff, I gained valuable leadership and communication skills, made lifelong friends, and got to share my passion for the environment with others.

Overall, Lewis has lived up to the Lasallian principle of a quality education that offers numerous opportunities outside of our majors, professors who truly care about their students, while at the same time incorporating the principle of concern for the poor and social justice into the curriculum.

Community engaged learning courses engage students outside of the classroom with local communities, connecting real-life experiences with lectures. In my three and a half years here, I've been able to work with food desert communities, research food insecurity, and be engaged in the local community. I know this isn't just in the environmental science department either. Lewis works to incorporate the principle of concern for the poor into all majors. For example, having marketing classes help small businesses in disadvantaged communities and by requiring all students to take at least one community-engaged learning course.

This fulfillment of the Lasallian principles is what makes Lewis so great, and what allows us as students to grow into our best selves. This is further reflected in Lewis' sustainability mission that is dear to my heart.

I love sustainability because of the interconnectedness between the environment, social justice, and the economy that looks at the full picture. Lewis understands and prioritizes this, introducing sustainability in numerous courses across multiple disciplines. Almost all my gen-eds have had some lecture or discussion about sustainability - whether it be about social justice issues, climate change, environmental regulations, or the economic costs associated with social and environmental problems.

During my time here, I also got to participate in the Sustainability Club where we planned campus and community events to raise awareness about environmental and social issues. This opportunity provided me with quality education with hands- on experiences and opened my eyes to other social justice issues, increasing my awareness and concern for said issues.

Not only do we see this commitment to sustainability in the mission statement and courses, but also in the campus environment as well. We got to study on a tree campus with a nature trail. This fostered a healthy and beautiful learning environment that brought nature into the college experience.

Ultimately, I chose Lewis because of its commitment to the Lasallian principles of quality education and concern for the poor and social justice. These principles were always evident in my time here, and I know all of us graduates will leave here with a better understanding of what it means to be Lasallian.

As we start our careers and move on to our futures, we know the importance of community service, being a lifelong learner, and respecting others due to our time here. It is vital for all of us to remember these lessons and implement them throughout our entire lives by continuing to live up to the Lasallian mission values that have been instilled in us.

Thank you all for taking this time to reflect on our time here at Lewis with me. We made it through, even with a pandemic. You should all be proud of the hard work you put in for this degree. Congratulations, good luck on all your future endeavors, and have a blessed holiday season.