



LEWIS UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2027

INTRODUCTION

As we enter the 2023-2024 academic year, the landscape of collegiate athletics in the United States continues to evolve. With changes to NCAA regulations and Title IX, along with post-pandemic financial challenges, universities need to be nimble, responsive, and organized for success. Student mental health and academic preparation—two growing challenges for all students—has hit athletics particularly hard, and there is a need for proactive responses to these challenges. For universities that feature Division II athletics, the challenge is particularly significant, as we must balance a commitment to excellence in athletics with a broader mission that emphasizes academic excellence with holistic student success.

The Lewis University Athletic Strategic Plan 2023-2027 is based on an assessment of the current state of NCAA DII Athletics at Lewis University. This assessment includes the recognition of the significant achievements of Lewis Athletics—17th nationally in academic achievement in 2022-2023, 40th nationally in the Learfield Cup for fall 2022 and 66th in spring 2023—and it also recognizes challenges and threats to sustained success, such as the size and quality of facilities, sufficient staffing and operational budgets, and growing challenges related to student mental health and sustaining an inclusive environment for all student athletes.

The Athletic Strategic Plan is a road map for achieving success in all aspects of NCAA Athletics at Lewis. Grounded in Lewis's Mission and its Lasallian tradition and values, it presents a vision for distinctive excellence and a plan that will serve as a blueprint for decision-making, resource allocation and the evaluation of initiatives to grow the program, support student athletes, and make an impact on the University community.

The Athletic Strategic Plan required input and collaboration from stakeholders across the institution, including coaches, student athletes, athletic department staff, faculty, student life and student success professionals, recreation professionals, and administrators. The process for developing the plan began in the spring of 2022 with the formation of the Athletic Strategic Plan Task Force, co-chaired by Mark Swain, Professor of Art and Faculty Athletic Representative and Lorelee Smith, Head Coach, Women's Volleyball. Members of the committee led working groups over the summer of 2022 on a set of potential focus-areas, such as: facilities; diversity, equity and inclusion; and marketing and audience development; and drafted sections of this plan. The Task Force met 9 times throughout 2022-2023 to talk through the details and options in each area.

In addition to this work, there were two related initiatives that are built into the strategic plan project: 1. An Athletic Master Plan was commissioned and executed by RDG. While the scope of their work goes beyond the timeline of this strategic plan, their competitive analysis of our space, and many of their recommendations for initial projects, are incorporated into this plan; and 2. The University contracted with Enliven to engage the community in a re-branding of the athletic identity, including a new logo, wordmarks, and a mascot. The roll out of the new logo and wordmarks will be incorporated into Athletic Strategic Plan in year 1, and the mascot design will take place in 2023-2024.

Through this collaborative, multi-faceted process, Lewis University has developed a plan that reflects its unique Mission and values, positioning us for success both on and off the field.



MISSION

Lewis University, guided by its Catholic and Lasallian values, provides a diverse student population with programs for a liberal and professional education grounded in the interaction of knowledge and fidelity in the search for truth. Lewis promotes the development of the complete person through the pursuit of wisdom and justice. Fundamental to its Mission is a spirit of association which develops community in all teaching, learning and service.

Lewis University Athletics supports the Lewis University Mission by promoting the intellectual, physical, spiritual and social experiences of its student athletes, supporting them to reach their maximum potential in academic performance, athletic competition, and personal development through an environment of integrity, personal responsibility and service to the University and surrounding community. This Mission is supported by the values outlined in the Lewis University Athletics Flight Path.

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|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Unity | 4. Pride | 7. Integrity |
| 2. Learning | 5. Service | 8. Perseverance |
| 3. Humility | 6. Accountability | |

Lewis University Athletics is also guided by the University's Sanctified Zone statement. Lewis University Athletics opposes all forms of hate, prejudice and bias, and it seeks to acknowledge, value, and celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion in the experience of all student athletes.

VISION

Lewis University Athletics will be an elite, influential NCAA Division II program known for sustained academic and athletic excellence. Lewis University Athletics will win championships, garner national recognition for its distinctive approach to coaching, instill pride and inspire engagement for the larger University community, and motivate student athletes to make a positive impact on Lewis and its surrounding communities.



I. Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention

Our goal in Lewis Athletics is to increase the number of student athletes who participate in our programs, diversify our sports offerings, and create more opportunities for student athletes to compete at the collegiate level. This will not only strengthen our athletic programs but also contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of our student body. We plan to expand roster sizes and add new sports, expanding the reach and reputation of Lewis athletics to new communities throughout the region and country. To achieve larger University goals, we must consider both the immediate and long-term impact of the enrollment and retention of student athletes.

Goals

- Leverage athletic enrollments to maintain the full-time undergraduate population near 3,000 students.
- Balance the variety of athletic programming with the overall number of participating students.
- Maintain high retention of student athletes.

Assessment

- Enrollment objectives
- Retention rates

Initiatives

- Add new NCAA sport programs, balancing the opportunity for new enrollments, gender equity and capacity of athletic facilities:
 - Women's Stunt (24-25)-Roster Size: 20-25
 - Women's Wrestling (26-27)-Roster Size: 20-25
 - Men's Wrestling (2026-2027)-Roster Size: 25-30
- Determine appropriate teams to increase roster sizes to offer full NCAA scholarship amounts per students. Top priorities:
 - Men's Lacrosse (24-25): Roster Size Increase: 10
 - Women's Swimming (24-25): Roster Size Increase: 10
 - Women's Lacrosse (26-27): Roster Size Increase: 15
- Baseball (2026-2027): Roster Size Increase: 10-15
- Men's and Women's Tennis (27-28): Roster Size Increase: 10
- Enhance the overall student athlete official visit experience to incorporate more modern and standardized recruiting tactics.
- Develop mechanisms to track and analyze retention trends of why student athletes decide to leave Lewis.
- Increase collaboration between Athletics and the Office of Admission to utilize hosted athletic competitions for general recruitment purposes.



II. Identity, Marketing and Audience Development

With the implementation of a new branding campaign in fall 2023, Lewis University’s NCAA Division II Athletic program has an opportunity to reimagine and reenergize its brand and accompanying marketing program. Efficient and effective marketing of the LU brand will strengthen our Flyer pride and improve our identity locally, regionally and nationally, which will provide a foundation to attract greater audiences and enliven the overall student experience.

Goals

- Leverage brand to build a more vibrant campus community.
- Build fan base at athletic events and make the live action experience engaging for all students.
- Improve University pride.
- Increase alumni engagement at events.
- Increase a pipeline of donors to Athletics to help offset budget and enhance programs.

Assessment

- Event attendance
- Social media engagement
- Athletic apparel sales
- Student surveys
- Total dollars raised, donor retention, number of alumni giving

Initiatives

- Create and maintain Pep Band (22-23).
- Finalize and implement athletics brand identity and logo (23-24).
- Improve partnership between Athletics and Marketing and Communications to strengthen communications and branding/marketing (23-24).
- Improve partnership between Athletics and Alumni Relations to strengthen alumni engagement (23-24).
- Improve partnership between Athletics and Student Engagement to create new programming (23-24)
- Incorporate awareness of athletics through classes and co-curriculum (23-24).
- Build up Flyer Fanatics (23-24).
- Hire new position in Advancement- Athletic Gift Officer to focus on giving at the PC level and above (23-24).
- Develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy for the department as a whole and for individual teams (23)-SEE Athletic Advancement Plan.
- Create initiatives/incentives for attending lower-attended sporting events (24-25).
- Create a history wall or hallway in Neil Carey (24-25).
- Add additional position related to sports information and marketing (24-25).
- Create and introduce a new mascot (23-25).



III. Lasallian Coaching

What makes Lewis University distinctive is our collective commitment to our Lasallian foundation and the ways we ensure that it permeates the culture and campus environment, as well as how we work together and support one another. Most importantly, it inspires the way we teach and accompany our students as well as striving to create a strong sense of belonging for them as they explore their purpose and identity.

These Lasallian values that Lewis has built its core beliefs on are strongly reflected in the coaching standards of our current athletic department. The goal of each program is to not only win but also educate the student athletes in terms of their development spiritually, ethically and morally throughout their time at Lewis and into the future.

Goals

- Build a shared understanding Lasallian coaching into the culture of Lewis Athletics.
- Build an expectation that coaches participate in University-wide Lasallian formation.
- Improve understanding of best coaching practices.

Assessment

- Professional development engagement metrics
- Student surveys
- Coach presentation metrics
- Coaching awards

Initiatives

- Create a description of the characteristics of Lasallian coaching (23-24).
- Incorporate a presentation and discussion at monthly staff meetings about each of the 12 virtues of a Lasallian Educator (23-24).
- Provide coaches with opportunities and funding for professional/personal development (ELM)(23-24).
- Build a separate TEAMS page that is dedicated to Lasallian Pedagogy (23-24).
- Utilize SAAC as a means to get the athlete's perspective on what is needed from coaches (23-24).
- Professional development around athletic excellence (24-25).
- Coaches begin presenting at the May Institute about Lasallian Coaching (24-25).
- Development department-wide academy for assistant coaches on the art of Lasallian coaching (24-25).



IV. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

DEI initiatives not only ensure a more inclusive and welcoming environment for student athletes, coaches and staff, but also foster a culture of respect, teamwork and growth. Creating a diverse and inclusive athletic community promotes equity and equal opportunity for all, regardless of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic. By embracing DEI, Lewis Athletics can attract and retain a diverse pool of student athletes, enhance the overall academic and athletic experience, and contribute to a more equitable and just society. It is vital for us to prioritize DEI and integrate it into all aspects of Lewis Athletics.

Goals

- Enroll and retain a diverse group of student athletes.
- Maintain/develop a diverse group of coaches and staff that mirrors the diversity of the student athletes.
- Maintain/develop a high level of cultural competency among coaches and staff.
- Maintain/develop an inclusive environment for all student athletes.

Assessment

- Diversity of student athletes
- Diversity of coaches and staff
- Student surveys

Initiatives

- Write a DEI Statement specific to Athletics (23-24).
- Form a sub-group of SAAC where student athletes can seek support, led by an assistant coach (23-24).
- Provide professional development for coaches and staff (23-24).
- Require all staff to complete online training on unconscious bias (23-24).
- All staff to complete 2-part training DEI professional development (23-24).
- 2 staff (at least one coach) become Equity Advocates (24-25).
- Evaluate and adapt Stout Rule for hiring (23-24).
- Implement NCAA DEI initiatives through GLVC.
- Reform Title IX Gender Equity Athletic Group (23-24).
- 2 additional staff (at least one coach) become Equity Advocates (24-25).



V. Campus Engagement and Integration with Student Life

Lewis Athletics provides a platform for student athletes to showcase their skills and represent their institution through competition on and off campus. Lewis Athletics can attract a diverse range of students, faculty and staff to campus events, creating a sense of community and school spirit. Athletics also provides a range of opportunities for student employment, internships and experience with athletics, event management and broadcasting. The further integration of Lewis Athletics with student life on campus helps to promote The Lewis Experience – a well-rounded, holistic college experience that fosters a sense of belonging and pride.

Goals

- Grow pride in athletics and build school spirit.
- Improve the image of student athletes on campus as leaders and change agents.
- Identify Lewis Athletics with community engagement and service.
- Integrate Athletics fully with the strategic goals and initiatives
- in other offices that support the student experience at Lewis: Student Engagement, Residence Life, Student Services, Student Success, International Student Services and Rec Sports.
- Modernize the accessibility, friendliness and beneficial technologies that pertain to athletic events.

Initiatives

- Incorporate Athletics representation into the student life planning structure (23-24).
- Collaborate with planners of New Flyer Orientation and Welcome Week to include awareness of Lewis Athletics (23-24).
- Collaborate with Student Engagement to plan student activities around athletic events (23-24).
- Improve digital signage promotion of athletic events (23-24).
- Collaborate with the Community Engaged Learning Office to develop a comprehensive plan for service (23-24).
- Create a campaign featuring student athletes leading and making a difference in our communities (24-25).
- Develop a reward system for students to attend athletic events (24-25).

Assessment

- Student surveys
- Community engagement metrics



VI. Student Athlete Health, Wellness and Academic Support

As a Division II institution, Lewis fosters a balanced approach in which student athletes reach the highest potential in the sports they love to play, the academic goals they choose to pursue, the engagement with their campus and local communities, and the personal development and wellness they need to succeed in life after college. Holistic wellness for student athletes is an increasing challenge as the impacts of the COVID Pandemic on isolation and mental health continue to have long-term impacts on students entering college. This, combined with already increasing mental health challenges, and the traditional pressures placed on student athletes, means that Lewis must take a proactive approach to the holistic health of its student athletes.

Goals

- Foster a campus environment that adheres to the health, safety and academic needs of the demanding schedule of a student athlete.
- Provide the appropriate level of mental health counseling for student athletes.
- Improve the integration of Athletics with academic and student life support on campus.
- Provide appropriate level of strength, conditioning, nutrition and holistic wellness for student athletes.
- Athletics staff will possess leading edge understanding of holistic wellness.

Assessment

- Student surveys.
- Health and counseling metrics.

Initiatives

- Audit and align as necessary qualifications for mental health counselors with the unique needs and challenges of student athletes (23-24).
- Make the best use of dietitians provided by Sodexo and by TimelyCare to work with student athletes (23-24).
- Review and expand faculty mentoring program to include staff (23-24).
- Create academic major social and study support groups (23-24).
- Review meal plan options and hours of operation for food service locations (23-24).
- Develop education and professional development plan for Athletics Staff regarding mental health, nutrition, and holistic wellness (24-25).
- Create a new position: strength and conditioning coach (25-26).
- Add one athletic trainer position (24-25).
- Continue to increase the number of athletic trainers to align with growing enrollment (24-26).



VII. Workforce Planning and Compensation

In order for Lewis Athletics to be an elite, influential NCAA Division II program, and a program known for its unique approach to coaching excellence, it must ensure that it can recruit and retain high quality coaches and staff. Effective coaches at Lewis have the knowledge and skill to recruit and retain the most highly-qualified student athletes, creating supportive and successful communities dedicated to academic, athletic and holistic student success. We want not only to attract and retain the best DII coaches in the country, but also to attract and develop coaches who embody the principles of Lasallian coaching. In addition, as the enrollment in Lewis athletics grows, so does the need to adequately staff all aspects of the department. Finally, the strategy outlined in this section also follows Lewis's compensation philosophy that balances competitive salaries, financial sustainability, and internal equity.

Goals

- Provide appropriate salaries in alignment with Lewis University's Compensation Philosophy.
- Build a culture that rewards high performance in a broad range of areas.
- Build a culture that rewards maturity and longevity in its employees.
- Build a culture that fosters succession planning in all areas.
- Build a culture that values high quality evaluation and professional growth.

Initiatives

- Develop new peer and aspirant comparison set for Lewis Athletics based on GLVC and Learfield Cup top 75 (22-23).
- Develop and propose a bonus structure (23-24).
- Based on data-informed ratios, target understaffed areas for position creation (23-24 and beyond).
- Complete and execute Lewis University Compensation Study using the new peer and aspirant group (24-25).
- Create new title and position category for experienced Assistant Coaches: Associate Head Coach, after five years and successful evaluation (2024-2025).



VIII. Athletic Facilities Master Plan

Athletic facilities are an essential component of a successful athletics program, providing athletes with the resources and environment they need to train and compete at the highest level. Facilities enhancements and expansion will be a priority for the next 7-10 years, and we will focus on ensuring that all our facilities meet or exceed NCAA DII standards and are equipped with technology that enables the best in athletic competition; club, intramural and recreational opportunities; and academic opportunities sport management and broadcasting. The quality of our facilities is key to recruiting student athletes, and it also provides opportunity for revenue from outside groups for their use. This section of the plan was grounded in research and a 20 to 30 year athletics master plan conducted by RDG. The projects in the first few years follow their recommendations about the highest priorities for aligning with our peers and competitors.

Goals

- Achieve parity with our peers in support of holistic health of our students and student athletes.
- Achieve parity with our peers in terms of the size and quality of spaces for practice and competition.
- Provide enough facilities space to practice and compete during reasonable hours of the day and days of the week, enabling student athletes a balanced schedule to study, eat, attend classes, practice and compete.

Assessment

- Analysis of allocated square footage against peer institutions
- Student community surveys

Initiatives

- Review and respond to the Athletics Master Plan recommendations in order to make best use of RDG advice beyond FY26 (23-24).
- New digital scoreboard in Neil Carey (23-24).
- Stadium turf and track replacement (23-24).
- New turf field (23-24).
- Build expansion to Pavilion or stand-alone building for lacrosse and soccer (24-25).
- Renovate and prepare Borromeo Gym or other facility for sports expansion (25-26).
- Expand Power House (26-27).
- Continue to invest in quality upgrades, such as equipment, improvements to Neil Carey, and enhancements to the user experience of the Field House, Neil Carey and the Stadium (ongoing – FY24).



HIGH LEVEL BUDGET IMPACT

This Athletic Strategic Plan is designed to build enrollment in DII Athletics programs, improve retention of student athletes, and close persistent prosperity gaps currently existing in Lewis Athletics. This plan will build annual net revenue at a rate that exceeds increased expenses each year, allow for significant improvements to operational and personnel capacity, and address key capital investments. Over four years, it will increase annual net revenue by \$2.1 million dollars and increase expenses by \$1.4 million, thus yielding \$700,000 annually in FY2027. At no time over the next four years will the Athletic Strategic Plan decrease annual net income. Capital investments over the next four to five years will total approximately \$15 million. This plan will have a positive impact on recruitment of all students and increase residence hall occupancy. It will also increase capacity and impact in a few key offices, such as Alumni Relations and Student Wellness Center.

NEXT STEPS AND ASSESSMENT

During the 2023-2024 year, we will form a working group to manage, track and assess the strategic plan. Most of the initiatives in the plan will take place in the next two years, and so this group may become a permanent committee that tracks, assesses, and adds new initiatives in alignment with the Mission goals for future years. The goal will be to build a sustainable strategic culture and infrastructure that will remain in place and support excellence in Lewis Athletics for years to come.