

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December, 2005
Presented by: Karlene L. Connor

Good Morning Members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends.

It is an honor to be selected to represent the students as a speaker at commencement. Today, I want to talk a little about Lewis and the many wonderful experiences I have had here. I think that most of you will be able to relate to these experiences.

I came to Lewis as a transfer student from Joliet Junior College, after taking a year off from school. When I decided to return to college, I looked at several universities. What I read about Lewis appealed to me because of its academic programs, its location –I could still commute, and because it is Catholic, which I have been accustomed to from childhood. After applying and being accepted, I quickly found out that Lewis offered so much more than just academic programs and extracurricular activities. The University's brochures and web page cannot express the sense of community and belonging that one experiences at Lewis, even as a commuter student.

Being a transfer student from a public junior college, I was surprised by how well the students knew one another and by the special relationships between the faculty and staff. The environment here gives you a sense of community. The people really care about you and that you succeed in your studies. One of the things I like best about Lewis is the atmosphere that reflects the Spirit of Association. I like walking around campus and being able to stop and chat with other students and teachers. I like that the professors know their students by name and will stop and talk about coursework, our lives, our

futures, and listen and appreciate our comments and suggestions. It is easy for the students to get to know their instructors.

The faculty and staff go above and beyond what they are required to do, and beyond what most people expect from them. I have had many teachers over the past 2 ½ years, who have made their home phone numbers, private email addresses, and even their cell phone numbers available to their classes. If any student had any problems he or she could always reach them. As a commuter student, this was extremely helpful. I have never before had teachers so committed to students' success, at this level. It is inspiring and says you a lot about the values of Lewis University.

At Lewis, the faculty and staff, in keeping with the Lasallian heritage and University Mission statement, truly believe in promoting Association, Justice, Wisdom, Fidelity, and Knowledge. Through the spirit of Association, Lewis offers students, both commuters and residents, the opportunity to get to know one another in the classroom, as well as through the many extracurricular activities and through programs such as evening socials and breakfasts.

In pursuit of Wisdom and Justice, Lewis promotes student volunteer projects and social responsibility and awareness programs, including various seminars that educate and call students to action. The University fosters Knowledge through its challenging academic programs that urge us to always pursue learning; and Fidelity through its faith-based community and theological studies.

All of the values of the Lewis Mission Statement have influenced my life and my education, but I would like to focus on the pursuit of knowledge and access to affordable education. Without access to affordable education, people cannot gain the valuable

knowledge that will be essential to improving their lives. Too many people are denied the experience of college studies because they cannot afford the cost of higher education. In order to create a better society and better communities, the participants of this society must be educated.

While Lewis does a great job in trying to help students gain access to affordable education through scholarships, financial aid and student employment, we still need the government and private enterprises to play a bigger role in funding higher education. From my own personal experience, the limited funding available for education forced me to work two part-time jobs in order to pay tuition and keep up with my other financial responsibilities. I'm sure many of you had similar experiences.