

University of Kentucky Alumni Association

# KENTUCKY

## Alumni

WINTER 2017

**Lewis Honors College:**  
Alumnus Thomas Lewis reimagines  
honors education at UK

# LEWIS HONORS COLLEGE:

*Unique opportunities for motivated students*

Thanks to foresight of alumnus Thomas Lewis, UK students will reap rewards through challenging curriculum.

By Robin Roenker



Alumnus Thomas Lewis, standing, met with Lewis Honors College students in the lobby of Lewis Hall. Left to right are Savon Gray (UK senior from Louisville), Ben Jones (UK junior from Harlan), Lewis, and Christa Newman (UK senior from Lexington).

This fall marked the official launch of the new Lewis Honors College at the University of Kentucky. Supported by a \$23 million gift from Kentucky native and UK alumnus Thomas W. Lewis '71 EN and his wife Jan — the single largest gift in UK's history — the Lewis Honors College has its sights set on becoming one of the nation's premier honors colleges.

While generations of alumni have fond memories of their participation in UK's former Honors Program, which was established in 1958, the new Lewis Honors College is something altogether different. The upgrade from program to college is intentional and significant.

"Having the university create a new honors college with dedicated faculty and staff and a dedicated dean was critical," says Lewis, whose gift partially supported the construction of the new Lewis Hall, which houses the Honors College, and will enable UK to more than double its Honors College staff by fall 2018, including the hiring of its first dean, five new career counselors, five academic advisors, and 12 full-time Lewis lecturers. "There are very few honors colleges in the country that have dedicated faculty, but we will, and they will be able to spend time with students and get to know them personally," Lewis says.

The college's new dean, Christian Brady, left a 10-year post as dean of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State to help build and shape the UK Lewis Honors College from scratch.

"I've been in honors education for 13 years, first at Tulane and then at Penn State, and I know of no other honors program or college that has something like what we're going to be developing here at UK," says Brady.

## A NEW ERA

Lewis Honors College students are bright, motivated learners who pursue the UK major and degree path of their choice while supplementing their course schedules with additional honors coursework. To complete the Honors College curriculum, students must finish at least 30 hours of designated honors courses, as well as a senior thesis or research project. Honors students at UK get priority

registration and have access to smaller, honors-designated classes, which focus on developing critical thinking skills and boast unique opportunities for liberal arts inquiry.



Gracie Proffitt

Honors class topics run the gamut from an intensive seminar on World War II to an analysis of the intersection of math and science in art, says Gracie Proffitt, an elementary education junior from Louisville, who cited

those examples as her favorite honors classes so far.

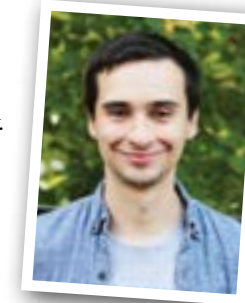
Sometimes narrowing which honors courses to take can be a challenge. "They all sound so interesting that it's hard to choose when it's time to register," Prof-

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— Dean Christian Brady



Dean Christian Brady, left, and Tom Lewis stand near the entrance to Lewis Honors College.



Connor VanMeter

you might not be able to experience otherwise," says senior Connor VanMeter of Lexington, who will graduate in May with dual degrees in computer science and agricultural biotechnology. "Through honors, I took a class taught by Kay Woods that looked at how plays incorporate science and history. It introduced me to an instructor who ended up being one of my favorites at UK and exposed me to something I wouldn't have learned in computer science or biotechnology."

What sets the UK Lewis Honors College apart from others across the nation, Brady says, is its intention to focus on developing the whole student, both inside and outside of the classroom. That includes establishment of a new Center for Personal Development within the Honors College, which will assist students in traditional career counseling services, such as resume writing and job and internship searches, but will also work with students on a more personal level to help them identify their unique skill sets and life goals.

"Career advising tends to be job-focused. Part of Mr. Lewis' vision that I certainly resonate with, and which is an integral part of our college, is that for our students, their educational journey needs to begin with first having a greater understanding of themselves, of who they are and in broad terms what they would like to do in life," Brady says. Case in point: this fall, incoming Lewis Honors College freshmen will be asked to complete an online personal assessment to help them identify their interests and skills before beginning day one of their UK coursework.

Rather than having a certain career path drive students' academic choices, the Lewis Honors College wants its students to think about their futures from a different, more personalized perspective. "We plan to work with our students to help them develop a personal mission statement, to help them develop a broader vi-

fitt says. "They're definitely not like normal classes that I have to take for my major."

"Being in honors is a little more work than a minor, but it's like getting a minor in something that

you might not be able to experience otherwise," says senior Connor VanMeter of Lexington, who will graduate in May with dual degrees in computer science and agricultural biotechnology.

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sion of the potential for their impact in their community and the world around them. And then their choice of majors and jobs will follow from that,” Brady says.

Sally Foster, former director of career services at the UK Gatton College of Business and Economics, is directing the Lewis Honors College center for personal development, overseeing a staff of what is soon to be a total of four dedicated career counselors. The college will also house five dedicated academic advisors, providing UK honors students with unprecedented access to support and guidance for any issue, whether academic or otherwise, that they may face during their time on campus.

Foster says she feels that the opportunity to help students address not only their career goals, but their personal and professional growth, is a privilege. “I look forward to seeing what our students will continue to accomplish as they make their mark on the world,” she says.

While having a dozen new dedicated honors lecturers is a plus, Brady’s model for the Honors College also includes having many courses taught by faculty across an array of campus disciplines. In fact, he anticipates that hundreds of faculty will have an opportunity to lead classes designated as honors courses. These will be open to both honors students and nonhonors students.

“Honors at Kentucky will soon be one of the best in the nation because we have this tremendous faculty here,” Brady says. “We’re going to be building engagement and partnerships with all the departments across campus. We want the Honors College to be a benefit for the broader university. If there are seats available in an honors classroom and a nonhonors student wants to step up and register, that’s fantastic. We want them to challenge themselves to meet that goal.”

### SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITY – LARGE POTENTIAL IMPACT

All of the Lewis Honors College faculty and staff offices are on the first floor of the new, beautifully-appointed \$37 million

Lewis Hall — the dedicated hub of the Lewis Honors College — which sits at the corner of University Drive and Hilltop Avenue, just across from the William T. Young Library.

In addition to first-floor offices, study areas, and classrooms space, the new residence hall features four floors of living space, including room for 346 residents in two-bedroom suites outfitted with ample closets, dual-sinks, mini kitchens and Tempur-Pedic mattresses.

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— Abby Gannon

It’s expected that next year an Honors Quad will be formed to include Lewis, Donovan, Johnson and Haggin halls. While not all students living in the quad will be honors students, the majority will be. Having access to a living/learning community of like-minded students is, many students say, one of the best parts of the honors college experience.

“It was so beneficial to be able to live and work and study around students that were in my classes and who valued education as much as I did,” says Abby Gannon, an Honors College sophomore from Pike



Abby Gannon

County majoring in community and leadership development. Last year, Gannon lived in Johnson Hall, which was UK’s designated honors residence hall before the completion of Lewis Hall.

### PHILANTHROPIC COMMITMENT

Lewis Hall sits on what was the former fraternity row, just a block or so from the location of the Sigma Chi house, where Lewis lived for three of his four undergraduate years at UK. Talking by phone from his home in Arizona, where his home building company T.W. Lewis Co. is headquartered, Lewis spoke fondly of his time on campus and was hopeful about the impact the Lewis Honors College could have, not just on the future of the university, but the state as a whole.

“For me, the gift was partly a means of honoring my family, which goes back seven generations in Kentucky,” says Lewis, who grew up in Lexington. “I have such affection for the state of Kentucky and the people of Kentucky. And secondly, I’ve long been an advocate of helping people — especially young people — become the best they can be. I saw this as an intersection of those two goals.”

Lewis and his wife had been longtime, active donors to scholarship programs at UK, Arizona State University (ASU), and the University of North Carolina, where Lewis received his MBA, but the transformational effect of the Honors College at ASU convinced Lewis that a new honors college at UK could be equally impactful. “ASU used to have an average academic reputation. But with the addition of its Barrett Honors College, suddenly it had earned a great academic reputation, and all the best students in Arizona quit leaving the state and

started going there,” Lewis says. “I thought, ‘Wow, this is a model that could be perfect for the University of Kentucky.’”

Lewis worked with UK President Eli Capilouto, Vice President for UK Philanthropy Mike Richey, and members of an Honors College Advisory Board for more than two years to outline goals and mission for the new college.

When announcing Lewis’s gift and plans for the new college in 2015, Capilouto said that it would “help us open the doors of UK even wider — not simply to students with outstanding academic achievement, but also those with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and financial means, who will benefit enormously from the focused and excellent educational experience offered by an Honors College that will be among the finest in the country.”

Seeing his vision for the Honors College come to fruition has been deeply rewarding, Lewis says. “The whole purpose of this Honors College is to better prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities of life. And I think all universities, including UK, can do a better job of that,” he says. “It’s a changing world. It’s a crazy world. Students have changed a lot over the last 20 years. We need new models to help better prepare them for their journeys.”

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERISM

In addition to its focus on personal development, the Lewis Honors College will also emphasize the importance of community engagement and volunteerism, offering ample opportunities for honors students to impact both the campus and the larger Lexington community for the better.

In fact, more than a particular GPA or standardized test score, says Brady, it’s students’ interest in looking outside themselves for a way to serve that makes

them an ideal honors candidate. “I know it’s cheesy, but it’s also true, when we say that we’re not only looking for the smarts but the heart,” he says. “When we’re looking at applicants, we want to see evidence of leadership and social engagement.”

“We do want students to engage in their community as part of honors,” agrees Hannah LeGris, director of recruitment for the Lewis Honors College. Students can even earn honors course credits for volunteering in service learning programs while at UK, she says. This year, for example, Gannon is receiving honors credits

for her work as a service mentor with AMACHI, a Lexington-based nonprofit that supports children whose parents are incarcerated.

“We believe that the more we can help our students develop, the more they can contribute to the university, the Kentucky community and the world at large,” Brady says.

Ultimately, Brady would like to see the Honors College grow, he says, to include roughly 10 percent of the undergraduate student body, or roughly 2,200 students. It currently has 2,038 students, and Brady hopes to make applying for the college as a sophomore or junior a new, attractive option for students who either didn’t apply as incoming freshman or who didn’t get in initially.

But the real mark of the Honors College’s success won’t come in enrollment figures or even in rankings of graduate school or professional school placements, Brady says. “The true assessment of the value of the Lewis Honors College for our students and the community will be the long term. It’s about where our students are and what they’re doing for their communities five and 10 and 20 years from now.” ■

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— Thomas Lewis



DEAN CHRISTIAN BRADY

The first dean of the Lewis Honors College, Christian Brady, comes to UK from one of the most highly regarded honors programs in the country. Brady spent the last 10 years serving as dean of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State University. Previously, he directed the honors program at Tulane University.

At Penn State, Schreyer — under Brady’s leadership — raised more than \$80 million to enhance honors education, developed a renowned leadership academy and tripled applications to the college while also increasing selectivity.

Brady is a scholar of ancient Hebrew and Jewish literature. He has written two books and has a third one in progress. Brady also is the author of numerous scholarly articles and papers.

“It is a great honor and responsibility to be the founding dean of the Lewis Honors College. Honors education is not an exercise in elitism; rather it is providing UK honors students with an enhanced educational experience that will also benefit the entire university. Our goals are nothing less than building the best honors program in the nation and developing women and men who will transform this world in a positive way,” he said.

Lewis Hall provides students with various support areas for their work, including this light-filled classroom that overlooks a patio and courtyard.

