

SELECT A CITY ▾

EXECUTIVES OF THE YEAR  
These leaders had the biggest ideas in 2018 >

YOUR ACCOUNT  
lcc@lcc.edu ▾

INDUSTRIES & TOPICS

🏠 NEWS LISTS & AWARDS PEOPLE & COMPANIES EVENTS MORE... 🔍

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF LCC@LCC.EDU

From the Portland Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2019/02/20/wim-wiewel-talks-small-college-issues.html>

PBJ Interview

# Wim Wiewel talks small college issues, entrepreneurship and Lewis & Clark's community connections

**President Wim Wiewel believes in the value of a strong connection to the community**

Feb 20, 2019, 7:05pm PST **Updated: Feb 21, 2019, 9:52am PST**

Subscriber-Only Article Preview | For full site access: [Subscribe Now](#)

Wim Wiewel has been Lewis & Clark College's president for a little more than a year.

His new duties include such tasks as representing the private Portland school at national conferences. In fact, on the recent Friday afternoon that he sat for an interview with the Business Journal in his stately, yet modestly decorated, office, he was preparing to leave for a national conference on climate change.

"We're part of a group of 600 schools committed to achieving carbon neutrality," Wiewel said.

It's a big part of his job as Wiewel continues to settle into his new role after nine years as Portland State University's president. We caught up with Wiewel to discuss differences between running an urban university and a wooded private college, as well as how Lewis & Clark can avoid financial issues that have decimated other Portland-area institutions.

This interview has been edited.

**You moved from PSU to Lewis & Clark just weeks after you were supposed to retire. It's greener here than it is downtown.** Portland State was an urban actor sitting right there in the middle of the city. The nice thing about Lewis and Clark is that it is like a place of retreat, of quiet, of contemplation. But it's not out in the middle of nowhere. This is one of our strengths: (unlike) a lot of traditional liberal arts colleges, like Oberlin, even Whitman in Walla Walla, we're a very easy bus ride into a city. We run our



LEWIS & CLARK COLLEGE

Wim Wiewel quickly acclimated to his new Lewis & Clark College surroundings.

own shuttle that actually goes right to PSU. And we're very excited about the plans for a rapid transit line down (Southwest) Barbur (Boulevard). It probably won't happen until long beyond my tenure, in the late 2020s, but it's exciting.

**There's also a big difference between the public and private college settings.** I haven't done any research on how many people make this move, but it's pretty unusual apparently. You really notice it in Oregon now that it's February and the legislative session is going on, and I don't actually have to pay much attention to that. That's a plus.

**Especially with the traditionally flat or even lower funding Oregon's universities have stomached.**

Although you can't entirely ignore it because obviously the legislature does get into the business and higher education in general. Another thing, and I'm not sure there is a gracious way of saying it, but I describe it as a bit of a sense of entitlements that "we are a public university, we are serving the public good and therefore the public should support us." And if the public doesn't, which of course it never does, it must be because "the president isn't making the case very well" or "because the legislature is stupid" or "because the voters are misled." Whereas at Lewis and Clark, I'm finding an acute consciousness of the fact that salaries are paid by tuition that students pay and that therefore, (administrators and instructors) are very ready to get engaged in our efforts to attract the right students and retain those students. Tuition is 80 percent of our budget ...

**Does it give you more instant feedback as to how well you're doing?** You bet. Of course, public schools care about retaining the students. But here you care about it for moral and mission reasons, of course, but because it really drives your bottom line.

The other big difference is that we have about 11 or 12 students for every faculty member as opposed to one for every 25 or so. But the faculty here works every bit as hard ... At some level, especially at large public institutions with inadequate funding, people just feel they're always running behind and they know they can't really do as good a job as they would like.

**How tied is your enrollment to the economy?** Education has a bit of a counter cyclical aspect: People tend to think, when the economy is bad, you might as well go to school. Especially in fields like computer science, you can get a job after just having studied for a year, or two years. That certainly helped when I joined PSU, in 2008. My timing was perfect. Then again, our enrollment kept going up the first three years there. And so I never had to worry about enrollment management. It wasn't until 2011 or 201 that we started to have to (funding) and we had to increase tuition a lot to make up for that.

**A lot of your peer schools around Portland have had it rough lately. Linfield cut faculty, Concordia just announced cuts. Marylhurst closed down.** This is regrettable, but maybe for those institutions, they may be making the right decisions for them. We believe that there will continue to be a demand for a liberal arts college, and we see it in the success of our students. At its best, liberal arts teach critical thinking, research, understanding diversity, understanding your place globally. I don't want to say this just about this institution, but the students overseas, particularly in Europe, are so attracted to coming to study in the United States because of that approach to liberal arts.

**A lot of the issues at those other colleges related to metrics. How's Lewis & Clark doing?** Our law school had a dip after the recession, as most law schools did. This year was the first that we had an increase there. We'll be smaller as a law school than we were, say, before the recession. So we have right-sized that ... The graduate school of education and counseling had a dip as well. So there were fewer jobs for teachers. We took over Marylhurst's art therapy program That's been a great success, and we continue to add new counseling programs. So our grad school is definitely growing. The

undergraduate program has been a bit up and down, starting with the class that we admitted four years ago ... There is no doubt that the competition for liberal arts students, especially ones who can pay a reasonable amount of tuition, has become tougher.

**Does the competition happen locally?** Not really. Schools from the Midwest and the Northeast are now trying to draw students from here and from California.

**How do you avoid what's happening at Marylhurst and Concordia?** We are very deeply involved in what we call strategic enrollment management, which really means a much more deliberate focus on where do you recruit, how do you recruit, how do you package your financial aid to maximize the likelihood that students will actually enroll. So the more competitive environment has forced us to be more intentional and seek more deliberate targets, in the undergrad program. We're also giving a lot of thought to new programs that we can offer, maybe interdisciplinary new interdisciplinary majors or minors certificates. We're probably going to add some sports that we don't have, like men's soccer and women's lacrosse, which tend to draw new students.

**I know you have a program for startups, too.** I used to be a dean of urban planning, and know that entrepreneurial thinking is very valuable. Our Bates Center for Entrepreneurship (teaches how to) recognize good new ideas and how to gain support for and implement those ideas. It demonstrates that the classic liberal arts disciplines can be a foundation for all kinds of occupations.

**What are some of your other goals?** We have a \$155 million campaign going. The last campaign ended in 1998, which is really, really bad. Twenty years is a pretty big lag.

Another one is reconnecting to college to Portland.

**Do you feel disconnected?** In the eighties and nineties with President Michael Mooney (who was forced to resign after questions were raised about an early 2000s loan the college made to an energy investor), the college did get support from sort of the civic and business leadership of the Portland metropolitan area ... that has kind of fallen away in the last 15 or so years for a variety of reasons. Some of which may be having to do with things to college did or didn't do. Some of it frankly has to do with the changes in Portland itself as we lost local institutions that became part of multinational conglomerates.

Nonetheless, we of course think that we play a very big role. we train a lot of local teachers and principals. There is not a law firm or a corporation of any size here that doesn't have one of our law graduates working for them.

**Do a lot of Lewis & Clark students stick around the region?** This is an important statistic: While 10 percent of our undergraduates come from Oregon, something like 40 or 50 percent of them stay or at least spend part of their working lives here. That's how small select colleges like this really contributed to the, growth of talents in Portland. We draw very smart people from all over the country.

**So after 10 years, are you a Portlander for good?** Oh yeah. When the people from Lewis and Clark first started talking to me about my willingness to consider throwing my hat in the ring, there was a sense that, well maybe I'd be here for a year or two. But I really love this place, and again, that's not saying anything negative about Portland State, which is an incredibly critical institution for the city and the region. But here, I feel I never have to apologize for the quality of our work. And, God willing and health providing, I hope to be here for a long time.

**Andy Giegerich**



Managing Editor  
*Portland Business Journal*

