

\$7 million center at the University of La Verne aims to be a hub for well-being and research



Rendering of the \$7 million Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research is supported through donations from developer and philanthropist Randall Lewis, as well as other university supporters. (Courtesy graphic)

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Most academic institutions have their own mental health clinics. Many also have fancy fitness centers. [University of La Verne](#) has both, but the two are not mutually exclusive. But a new \$7 million center for well-being and research center aims to become a hub for teaching, researching and promoting healthy lifestyle habits. Construction on the Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research will begin in a few weeks and open by fall 2019, University of La Verne President Devorah Lieberman said.

"I think it's the only center like this in the region that brings together students' academic work, faculty field research, recreational exercise, mindful activities, community engagement and community partners to will enhance the work we're doing," Lieberman said.

A donation from developer and philanthropist Randall Lewis, as well as donations from other university supporters and institutional funds are paying for the Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research.

"We must bring together the collective resources of families, schools, workplaces, and civic institutions to solve the region's most pressing health care issues," Lewis said in a statement. "This center does just that, and I am extremely proud of what we are building here."

Lieberman said the former [Davenport Dining Hall](#), at the corner of Third and C streets, will be retrofitted over the course of the academic year to become the future site of the center.

The space became available after the university built a new dining and residence hall, which are slated to open in the next couple of weeks. Lieberman said the university was working on a master plan for the campus when a group of faculty proposed the idea of repurposing the dining hall. The proposal won her support and that of the board of trustees, she said.

"Because that opened up, it gave us an opportunity to say, how can we best meet the mission of the institution? Part of the mission is ensuring students will graduate healthier than when they started – healthier physically, spiritually, emotionally and skill-wise," she said.



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The center, she said, will enhance curriculum as well expand the research under way at the campus. It will also expose students in health-related fields to timely issues in a safe and practical teaching environment.

For example, every student will be able to have their blood pressure, body mass index, glucose testing done at a testing and diagnostic room in the center, Lieberman said. Those tests will be conducted by students who are obtaining a master's degree to become a physician's assistant.

"The other thing that's really unique to this is, it's not just a center by choice. Every single freshman is required to take a course called 'Fitness for Life,' and those 600 incoming freshmen will be required to do the first part of the class in the new center," she said. "They can go through the diagnostics and testing and they can have a plan for mindfulness and exercise."



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The donation from supporters will fund the facility improvements as well the new fitness and testing lab equipment, Lieberman added. The university is still accepting donations to help pay for the operations.

The university is in the process of hiring an executive director as well as project coordinator, who be tasked with partnering with several agencies in the region to carry out some projects. Lieberman said several agencies in the region, such as White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles and [Casa Colina Hospital and Centers for Healthcare](#) in Pomona, have already signed letters of agreement for the center.

Hillcrest, the retirement community in La Verne, for example, wants to collaborate with the university on addressing lifelong well-being and balance for their residents, she said.

"The response is overwhelmingly enthusiastic because everybody understands it is meeting an educational, physical, and behavioral need that our greater community has," Lieberman said.

Fairplex is going to be a critical partner because University of La Verne students will be using its 5-acre farm to teach cooking classes. Pomona Unified School District, another partner, will bring its students to the farm to be taught by the college students, Lieberman said.

"We have so many chronic illnesses and issues in the Inland and this center, head on through education, will address those with our students. When they graduate, they'll be able to have the skills to address the health, mental and physical issues," she said.

