

Mission & History

The Mission of Manhattan University

Manhattan University is an independent Catholic institution of higher learning that embraces qualified men and women of all faiths, cultures, and traditions. The mission of Manhattan University is to provide a contemporary, person-centered educational experience that prepares graduates for lives of personal development, professional success, civic engagement, and service to their fellow human beings. The University pursues this mission through programs that integrate a broad liberal education with concentration in specific disciplines in the arts and sciences or with professional preparation in business, education and engineering.

Established in 1853 by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the University continues to draw its inspiration from the heritage of John Baptist de La Salle, the innovator of modern pedagogy and patron saint of teachers. Among the hallmarks of this Lasallian heritage are excellence in teaching, respect for human dignity, reflection on faith and its relation to reason, an emphasis on ethical conduct, and commitment to social justice.

Historical Note

In May 1853, five Christian Brothers moved their small Canal Street school to what was then known as Manhattanville, a section of New York City at 131st Street and Broadway. The Brothers brought with them more than their furniture and their students. They were the bearers of an educational tradition that began in 17th century France with Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of their order and today acknowledged by the Catholic Church as the Patron Saint of Teachers. De La Salle formed a community of religious Brothers who would devote themselves exclusively to their work as teachers. Their students would be the children of the artisans and the underprivileged; their mission would be the intellectual, spiritual, moral, economic and social flourishing of those students. Responding to the needs of his time, De La Salle created a new type of school system and elevated the work of teaching school — treating it as a profession and a vocation. The Brothers were urged to go beyond rote memory to “touch the hearts” of the students. Practical subjects were taught that would lead to a useful role in society; religion was taught to impart a commitment to Christian ethics.

Between 1853 and 1863, the school grew significantly, adding university-level courses in 1859 and first using the name Manhattan College in 1861. It was chartered by the Board of Regents of the State of New York on April 2, 1863. Manhattan College was an unusual institution compared to its peer institutions at the time. From the beginning, the university sought to combine broad learning in the traditional liberal arts with rigorous technical and pre-professional training. As the first university catalog put it, the curriculum of Manhattan College combined the “advantages of a first-class college and Polytechnic Institute,” offering courses in both “the liberal and useful arts and sciences.”

As the school grew, new quarters were needed. The cornerstone of the “New Manhattan” was laid in 1922 on property bordered by the Hudson River and Van Cortlandt Park, in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx, its present location. The addition of new buildings

and student residences has enlarged and enhanced the campus significantly. From this accessible site, the university is able to offer access to the cultural, educational, business and entertainment opportunities of New York City, as well as a self-contained residential campus environment.

Today Manhattan University identifies itself as a Catholic university in the Lasallian tradition. That tradition has continued to characterize the special educational experience offered by the University over its long history. Its constant focus has been the education of the disadvantaged. From its beginning, the University has paid particular attention to educating first-generation university students, and was an early proponent of access to disadvantaged and minority students, establishing special scholarship funds as early as 1938. That commitment continues today and is evident in Manhattan's diverse student body, many of whom are the first in their families to attend university, and most of whom are supported by significant financial aid.

The University continues to realize the objectives stated in its first catalog by maintaining a full range of programs in the liberal arts and sciences, combined with professional programs in engineering, business and education. The quality of the undergraduate programs is demonstrated in many ways, for example, in the presence on campus of chapters of prestigious honor societies such as Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi and Tau Beta Pi.

Over the years, Manhattan University has seen many changes, and yet it maintains its deep commitment to its heritage and ideals. What was a predominantly Christian Brothers faculty has become predominantly lay, and includes a significant percentage of women. The University became coeducational and accepted its first women undergraduate students in 1973. Currently, women comprise almost half of the full-time undergraduate student body.

With the opening of Horan Hall (1990) and its twin, East Hill (2008), the University completed a major transformation from a majority-commuter to a majority-residential university. Manhattan University now offers a four-year guarantee of resident housing and 80 percent of the student body chooses to live on or near campus. Currently, the University has a student body of approximately 3,500 — 2,900 undergraduates and 600 graduate and continuing education students. The student-faculty ratio is 12:1.

The University continues to follow the founding spirit of John Baptist de La Salle by being responsive to the needs of its place and time. Innovation grounded in tradition has always been a hallmark of Lasallian education, and Manhattan University's new strategic plan (<https://manhattan.edu/about/mission-strategicplan.php>), "Renewing the Promise," commits the University to a course of continuous improvement of its programs and facilities in response to emerging needs.