

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

51st Annual Convocation and Investiture of Student Laureates

Saturday, the eighteenth of October
Two thousand twenty-five

University of Chicago
Friedman Hall
David Rubenstein Forum

*Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed
is more important than any other thing.*

Abraham Lincoln

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

Call to Order

Dennis Lyle, Regent

Processional

The Chancellor of the Academy
Officers & Regents
Academic Trustees
Regents & Rectors
General Trustees
Class of 2025 Student Laureates

Opening of the Convocation

Todd Shapiro, Chancellor

Speaking on behalf of the Student Laureates

Kaden Thomas Finnestad
Rockford University

Presentation of the Abraham Lincoln Civic Engagement Awards Class of 2025 Student Laureates

Todd Shapiro, Chancellor
Thomas E. Skilling III, Lincoln Laureate

Remarks

Todd Shapiro, Chancellor

Recessional

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

History of the Academy

The Lincoln Academy was established by proclamation of the Governor of Illinois in 1964, shortly after the New York World's Fair. During the World's Fair a reception was given for some of our state's most celebrated sons and daughters which impressed Governor Otto Kerner and gave birth to a program to recognize distinguished Illinoisans annually through the establishment of the Order of Lincoln.

The medallion design is based on that of the French Legion of Honor. The colors represent the State symbols: red for the cardinal; deep purple for the violet; and green for the leaves of the oak tree. The motto, "Palmarum Qui Meruit, Ferat" ("Let him who merits bear the palm") is based on that of Horatio Viscount Nelson.

The first Convocation and Investiture of Laureates was held on Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1965, at the Chicago Historical Society and convocations have been held in locations across the state every year since then. During the Bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009, a special Bicentennial Edition of the Order of Lincoln was established, and thirty distinguished Lincoln scholars, collectors, artists, and curators from around the world were honored.

In 1992, Governor Jim Edgar, President of the Lincoln Academy, initiated the creation of a Hall of Fame of Historic Illinoisans whose achievements and contributions were made prior to the establishment of the Lincoln Academy in 1964. Fifty Hall of Fame Honorees were selected. In 2018, in recognition of the Bicentennial of Illinois, the Academy re-constituted the Hall of Fame and additional Historic Illinoisans have been selected.

The mission of the Lincoln Academy was expanded in 1975 by the Student Laureate Program, in which an outstanding senior from each of the four-year degree-granting colleges and universities in Illinois and one student representing our state's community colleges are honored. **Thus, the Lincoln Academy honors the Great Citizens of Today and Celebrates the Great Citizens of Tomorrow.**

The 21st Century has welcomed a world of change and diversity. The sons and daughters of the Twenty-first State continue to make their imprint on history, and in the main, help to make this a better world for their own and future generations.

The Spirit of Lincoln Endowment Fund & The Elizabeth Hubert Malott Education Endowment Fund

Endowment funds enable the Academy to expand our visibility, provide sustained support of current activities, and allow for expanded initiatives that enhance the vibrancy and impact of the Academy across the state of Illinois and beyond. The top priority for the Fund is establishing sustaining funds for the annual Student Laureate Civic Engagement Awards.

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

Organization of the Academy

The Lincoln Academy is a nonpartisan organization governed by a Board of Regents and a membership of General Trustees.

The Governor of the State of Illinois is the President of the Academy and the Board of Regents elects a Chancellor who serves as Chief Executive Officer.

The General Trustees are appointed by the Governor or elected by the Academy.

Rectors serve as ex officio trustees and assist in identifying potential nominees for the Order of Lincoln.

The Academic Trustees are the chief executive officers of all four-year colleges and universities in Illinois and three members at large.

At the discretion of the Regents, a former Governor may be elected a Regent for Life, and a former Member Regent, General Trustee, or Rector who has served in office for ten consecutive years or more may be elected an Emeritus Member, in recognition of distinguished service to the Academy.

Former Chancellors of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois

The Honorable Michael Butler (1965-1969)
Robert Bone (1969 - 1971)
William K. Alderfor (1971 - 1975)
Thomas R. Mulroy (1975 - 1979)
Marshall Burman (1979 - 1985)
John Trutter (1985 - 2001)
The Honorable John B. Simon (2001-2010)
Thomas S. Johnson (2010 – 2015)
William Bennett (2015 – 2016)
Stephanie Pace Marshall, PhD (2016 – 2019)
Frank Clark (2019-2022)
The Honorable Ronald D. Spears (2022-2025)

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

Officers of the Academy

The Honorable JB Pritzker, President	Margaret Cline, Treasurer
The Honorable Todd Shapiro, Chancellor	John Freitag, Secretary
Harold Oakley, Vice Chancellor	Leanne R. Barnhart, Executive Director

Regents for Life

The Honorable Pat Quinn	The Honorable Bruce Rauner
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Regents

Frank M. Clark	Howard Learner	The Honorable Ronald D. Spears, Immediate Past Chancellor
Jane Denes	Dennis Lyle	Doug Stewart
Marlene Dietz	Stephanie Pace Marshall, PhD	Eric Trimble
George J. Dohrmann, MD, PhD	Maria S. Pesqueira	<i>And the Officers</i>
Graham Grady	Alexandra Ransburg	
Ethel Holladay	Marc Schulman	
	Smita Shah	

General Trustees

Bryan Banks	Robert A. Easter, PhD	John Morris	Don Tracy
Pat A. Basu, MD	Erika Harold	Ronald Rabjohns, MD	Amy Trimble
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Jerry Brookhart	Julie Kellner	Shirley W. Ryan	Dana Withers
Dave Cocagne	Claire Manning	Linda Schielke, EdD	
Caralynn Nowinski	Wilbur Milhouse	Mark Slaby	<i>And the Regents</i>
Collens, MD	Delmer R. Mitchell	Scott C. Sullivan	

Rectors

Daniel Kelley, <i>Agriculture</i>	The Honorable Joy V. Cunningham, <i>Government & Law</i>
Julie Jordan Gunn, <i>The Arts & Performing Arts</i>	Jorge Ramirez, <i>Labor</i>
Michelle Collins, <i>Business, Industry & Communication</i>	Helen Morrison, MD, <i>Medicine and Science</i>
Larry Dietz, PhD, <i>Education</i>	Ricardo Estrada, <i>Social Services and Religion</i>
	Vacant, <i>Sports</i>

Emeritus Members

Peter C. Alexander	Robert J. Lenz	Courtney Shea
Rev. Stanley Davis, Jr.	Gayl S. Pyatt	Ernest Wish
Andrea Hasten	William E. Shaw	

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

2025 Student Laureates

Student Laureate	Institution	Academic Trustee
Ian Max Empen	Augustana College	Andrea K. Talentino
Diane Elaine Fuentes	Aurora University	Susana Rivera-Mills
Daleigh Ann Johnson-Pawlak	Benedictine University	Joseph J. Foy
Peyton Dahler	Blackburn College	Larry Lee
Joseph Kenneth Traskaski	Bradley University	James Shadid
Allison Bolden	Chicago State University	Zaldwaynaka “Z” Scott
Jenna Rose Davis	Columbia College Chicago	Shantay Bolton
Lillian Frances Seifferlein	Concordia University Chicago	Russell Dawn
Natashia Jean Johannes	DePaul University	Robert L. Manuel
Jocelyn Ramirez	Dominican University	Glena Temple
Alexander Morris Wilcoxon	Eastern Illinois University	Jay D. Gatrell
Yaquelin Martinez	East-West University	M. Wasiullah Khan
Mateo Gomez Bedoya	Elmhurst University	Troy D. VanAken
Kateland Diana Dearing Williams	Eureka College	Jamel Wright
Jonathan LaSean Cooper	Governors State University	Joyce Ester
Norah Rae Swinigan Atkins	Greenville University	Suzanne Davis
Emily Guest	Illinois College	Barbara Farley
Genna Gaitan	Illinois Institute of Technology	Raj Echambadi
Kruz E. Barrera	Illinois State University	Aondover Tarhule
Valeria Suarez	Illinois Wesleyan University	Sheahon Zenger
Hana Marie Cunningham	Judson University	Gene C. Crume
Zoe Araceli Pav	Knox College	C. Andrew McGadney
Emilia Guilhermina de Paula Fonseca	Lake Forest College	Robert Krebs

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

2025 Student Laureates, cont.

Student Laureate	Institution	Academic Trustee
Aletheia Johnson	Lewis University	David J. Livingston
Amelie Malone	Loyola University Chicago	Mark C. Reed
MaryAnn Romagna	McKendree University	Daniel C. Dobbins
Alex Joshua Lee Farkasch	Millikin University	Dean Pribbenow
Turner William Plumer	Monmouth College	Patricia Draves
Kayla L. Shavers	National Louis University	Nivine Megahed
Nmesoma E. Onyejekwe	North Central College	Abiodun Goke-Pariola
Sofia Grivot Volkmann	North Park University	Mary Karsten Surridge
Cassaundra Garcia	Northeastern Illinois University	Katrina Bell-Jordan
Joseph C. La Barbera	Northern Illinois University	Lisa C. Freeman
Christopher Axline	Northwestern University	Michael H. Schill
Grace Elizabeth Amburgey	Olivet Nazarene University	Gregg Chenoweth
Rebekah Maxwell	Parkland College	Pamela Lau
Juan Francisco Alessio	Principia College	Meggan Madden
Alexis Nicole Stufflebeam	Quincy University	Brian McGee
Kaden Thomas Finnestad	Rockford University	Patricia Lynott
Aviana Joy Holst	Roosevelt University	Ali Malekzadeh
Chaylan Palmer	Saint Xavier University	Keith Elder
Aalika Bharti	School of the Art Institute of Chicago	Jiseon Lee Isbara
Marsden Lee Fisher	Southern Illinois University Carbondale	Austin A. Lane
Baymuhammet Baltayev	Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	James T. Minor
Mia Joy Musick	Trinity Christian College	Aaron J. Kuecker

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

2025 Student Laureates, cont.

Student Laureate	Institution	Academic Trustee
Daniel Brett Kind	University of Chicago	Paul Alivisatos
Aparna Ramakrishnan	University of Illinois Chicago	Marie Lynn Miranda
Abigail Leigh Hemmer	University of Illinois Springfield	Janet L. Gooch
Ashley Denise Oliver	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Charles Lee Isbell, Jr.
Gianna Marie Barbaro	University of St. Francis	Ryan Hendrickson
Brandon Rogelio Zavaleta	VanderCook College of Music	Kimberly Farris
Julietta Nora Marini	Western Illinois University	Kristi Mindrup
Olivia Madlin Wiebe	Wheaton College	Philip G. Ryken

Trustees at Large

Timothy L. Killeen
University of Illinois

Daniel F. Mahony
Southern Illinois University

Brian Durham, Executive Director
Illinois Community College Board

The Lincoln Academy of Illinois

Class of 2025

Student Laureate Legacy Statements

Augustana College – Ian Max Empen

Lincoln's Leadership Legacy will guide my life of service going forward by reminding me about the power we have to change lives through simple acts of kindness. As an Eagle Scout, I was taught to "do a good deed daily", and small deeds add up quickly to create lasting change. As President of Augustana's student-run garden, Augie Acres, I have spent the last three years working diligently to improve the garden and ensure its operation for future students. Even after failures or discouragements, I kept pushing through and am now reaping the rewards of seeing our produce put into the hands of the community. Going forward, I will continue to use my talents and knowledge to lead a life of service in all that I do, never forgetting to do a good deed daily.

Aurora University – Diane Elaine Fuentes

Having not slept for about 48 hours at times, I reminisce on how President Lincoln managed the events he had to oversee, such as the Civil War, the establishment of the 13th Amendment, and the preservation of the Union. He did business at all hours, rising early in the morning and retiring late at night. Through unimaginable strain, he stood firm in his defense of liberty for all Americans, regardless of color-- at the expense of his life. His legacy inspires me to become a first-generation Latina physician, no matter the hardships I face.

When drawing blood from patients, I see the same deep, wine-colored blood go through my phlebotomy tubes. Then, why do I encounter discrimination towards patients of color to this day if we are all the same inside our anatomy? My mother, experiencing discrimination in her visits due to her Spanish, and having my cousin denied her mandatory hysterectomy because of her uninsured and DACA status, exemplifies such disparity. However, I advocate for equal healthcare by either proudly using my Spanish when needed or conducting research focusing on health disparities among BIPOC women. Now, I realize what made Lincoln successful—it was his humble leadership. Witnessing students' professional development through my mentorship and tutoring, I wholeheartedly agree with this principle. Finishing my 12-hour shift as a night patient care technician, completing my 10-mile run with a smile, and heading straight to school--excited to learn new material-- I close my tired eyes and, with my brain craving for sleep, reflect: 'I do this for my family and my community. Thank you, God, for the opportunity to experience this journey!'

Benedictine University – Daleigh Ann Johnson-Pawlak

As a leader, advocate, and servant of the greater good, Abraham Lincoln models how I desire to live a life of service, perseverance, and commitment to others. His legacy reminds me that true leadership is not about fame or authority but about first leading oneself.

Lincoln overcame poverty, discipline, and failed elections before becoming a national leader. Similarly, my journey, marked by resilience after losing my father to suicide, deepened my resolve to lead with empathy and purpose. As the first in my family to pursue medical school, I navigated the unknown,

earned a place on a cancer research team, sought mentors, and upheld a rigorous standard. I feel the weight and privilege of this path, knowing it is both my dream and a way to expand opportunity for my future children, underserved populations, and the community I serve. I strive to embody Lincoln's ideals in medicine and beyond. As an emergency department volunteer, shadowing student, and surgical oncology scribe, I have learned that leadership is often quiet, found in escorting anxious families, listening to fears, or comforting a child. Lincoln's courage in uncertainty reminds me that even small acts of presence can restore dignity. Outside the hospital, I discovered that unity and perseverance drive meaningful change through mentoring high school students in ministry, serving as a learning assistant, and competing as a Division II collegiate rower. Lincoln's call to summon the "better angels of our nature" inspires me to create spaces where others feel encouraged to grow in faith, academics, and athletics.

Lincoln's leadership legacy continues with me. My future holds service, strengthening communities, and contributing to the greater good.

Blackburn College – Peyton Dahler

Abraham Lincoln's legacy reminds me that true leadership is rooted in empathy, growth, and service to others. As a first-grade teacher and lifelong learner, I try to reflect those values by creating a classroom where curiosity is encouraged, mistakes are part of learning, and every child feels valued and included. Just as Lincoln worked for the greater good, I want to teach my students that they can be leaders who make a positive difference in their communities. By modeling kindness, resilience, and civic engagement, I hope to inspire them to believe that even small actions can bring meaningful change. Lincoln's life is a reminder, for me and for my students, that service and hope are at the heart of building a better world.

Bradley University – Joseph Kenneth Traskaski

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best way to predict your future is to create it." That quote has stuck with me throughout my journey as a student leader. I've always believed that if something needs to be done, I shouldn't wait for someone else to step up—I should be the one to act.

At Bradley University, I had the privilege of serving as Interfraternity Council President. I wanted my time in that role to matter—not just for me, but for the entire community. That meant starting honest and difficult conversations about mental health, advocating for accountability, and working to build a stronger, more connected Greek system. Not everything went perfectly, but I showed up, listened, and led with a purpose. That same drive pushed me to start a company. The company grew faster than I ever expected, which was exciting, but what meant more was the chance to give back. Whether it's mentoring fellow students or supporting local nonprofits, I've tried to use what I've learned to make things a little better for someone else.

Lincoln led during one of the most difficult chapters in our nation's history. He chose unity, progress, people, and the Nation. That's the kind of leader I strive to be, not just when it's easy, but especially when times are hard.

This award isn't the end of my leadership journey. If anything, it's a reminder that the real work is just beginning. Like Lincoln said: "Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm." That's precisely what I intend to do.

Chicago State University – Allison Bolden

President Lincoln's legacy teaches us that the most powerful stories are those that unite and elevate a nation. As a creative, I believe my purpose is not just to craft messages, but to build community. I aim to use storytelling as my instrument for service and a commitment to the greater good. Lincoln's leadership was defined by empathy, resilience, and an unwavering moral compass. I will channel these principles into my work. My canvas is the media landscape; my tools are narrative and strategy. Whether producing programming for public access television that amplifies marginalized voices or developing campaigns that inspire action, I am committed to creating content that does more than just capture attention—it captures conscience. That is what truly matters, being a voice of encouragement and to tell stories that foster understanding and connection.

Therefore, I will use my skills in media arts and strategic communication to be a bridge—just as Lincoln was a bridge between a divided nation. I will dedicate my career to telling the stories that need to be heard, advocating for those who are overlooked, and using creativity as a force for civic good.

Columbia College Chicago – Jenna Rose Davis

Abraham Lincoln's leadership legacy resonates deeply with my personal values and aspirations. Lincoln's ability to lead with empathy, to listen without prejudice, and to prioritize the well-being of the nation over personal or political gain has shaped how I view service not as an obligation, but as a calling. Helping others has been my passion my entire life. In a world that is so divided, I aim to embody Lincoln's leadership by engaging in community work that uplifts voices in spaces others cannot be in, environmental activism, and encouraging dialogue over division. Above all, I know that leadership, especially mine, is never perfect. I prioritize learning from my peers and my mistakes, rather than dwell. Leadership is not possible without learning from those around you.

Concordia University Chicago – Lillian Frances Seifferlein

Through the people and professors who have helped shape me, I have learned that the value of Christlike service can and should find its way into every part of life. Whether in the workplace or the classroom, true leadership and excellence are achieved through serving others. The Mission Statement of the Lincoln Academy mirrors this idea through its desire to inspire the next generation of leaders and to honor the values of "leadership and service in the pursuit of the betterment of humanity." In other words: serving your neighbor.

DePaul University – Natashia Jean Johannes

Abraham Lincoln's leadership continues to live on today inspiring young individuals such as myself to commit to the greater good. I am honored to receive the Student Lincoln Laureate award and will strive to honor Lincoln's legacy through the connections I make on and off campus. As I navigate through the beginning of my career I will prioritize networking with people of all backgrounds and listen to the stories and experiences they have to share. I will continue to recognize that diversity and inclusion are crucial to innovation and success.

As an aspiring actuary, I have had the opportunity to benefit from mentors in my field and am dedicated to being a resource for those coming after me. I am committed to fostering community in my field and providing support to those coming after me.

Dominican University – Jocelyn Ramirez

Abraham Lincoln's legacy reminds me that real leadership means action, not just words. Inspired by his example, I strive to use my strengths in communication and creativity for the good of my campus and my community. As a bilingual marketing major and former student-athlete, I have learned how powerful teamwork and positive collaboration can be for making a difference. Through my work as president of Women in Business, marketing director for the Association of Latino Professionals, and member of other campus organizations, I have learned to lead with empathy, listen to others, and build inclusive environments. I value perseverance and supporting everyone who comes from different backgrounds. Whether planning campus events, managing social media campaigns to promote student voices, or coaching at youth sports camps, each experience has taught me that civic engagement means showing up, giving back, and creating opportunities for others. I am committed to using my skills to tell stories that connect and empower everyone including women's sports and Latinx students. Lincoln's courage and compassion inspire me to be both a strong role model and an advocate for the greater good, even when leadership is challenging or change is slow.

I will keep striving to uplift those around me, knowing each positive action can have a lasting impact. I am proud to be recognized as a Student Laureate and will continue working to make my campus and Illinois a better place starting at Dominican.

Eastern Illinois University – Alexander Morris Wilcoxon

From a young age, my grandmother, who volunteered at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, introduced me to Lincoln's historical significance and the profound integrity he had for our nation. I have and will continue to be inspired by Lincoln's ability to unify people toward a common goal. I will remain dedicated to each of my communities by taking an active role in helping all achieve goals for the common good. Just as Lincoln led through collaboration, I too will strive to ensure that all people's voices are heard. By using Lincoln's legacy as a guide, I set my sights on leadership in both my home community and my work community. It provides a model for my vision and instills in me the courage to do what is right. As a Student Laureate Award recipient, I am inspired to continue leading and supporting those around me with a purpose and shared humanity.

East-West University – Yaquelin Martinez

I have always been recognized as a natural leader, the first to advocate and the first to make my voice heard. As a first-generation college student and the daughter of two immigrants, I carry with me the values my parents instilled, to use my voice with purpose and to never take education for granted. Being nominated for this award is an incredible honor, not just for me, but for my entire family, whose sacrifices have shaped my journey. Like Abraham Lincoln, I believe that leadership is grounded in integrity, empathy, and service. His legacy inspires me to persevere, to serve with purpose, and to lead by example. This recognition strengthens my purpose to uplift others, and to dedicate my life to creating meaningful change in my community.

Elmhurst University – Mateo Gomez Bedoya

The pursuit of a better society begins with the belief that any individual can make a positive impact on the world if they are brave enough to accept the challenge. That is what President Abraham Lincoln accomplished. He was a man of values who believed that all people were created equal and that they had the responsibility to complete the unfinished work for the advancement of a more just nation. Lincoln's ideals and actions have influenced me since a young age. As a Christian, president of the honors society in

education and foreign languages, honors program leader, Elmhurst University ambassador, orientation student leader, and researcher, I help individuals in meaningful ways, creating an environment such as the one President Lincoln envisioned. As a future educator, it is an honor to be named a Lincoln Academy Student Laureate. I believe that Lincoln's legacy embodies three principles: Hard work, humility, and responsibility. These will guide us to work for the people and the greater good.

Eureka College – Kateland Diana Dearing Williams

The legacy of Abraham Lincoln is one that represents leadership, justice, and fighting for the greater good. It is an honor to be chosen as a Lincoln Laureate to represent Eureka College. As a student-athlete with both academic and athletic success, I have a proven track record in balancing my responsibilities both on and off the field while maintaining high levels of academic excellence. My passions for soccer and statistics have allowed me to develop a unique perspective, foster teamwork, and contribute meaningfully to my community as a volunteer and a tutor, allowing me to give back and represent my strong moral code. These values that I hold have translated into my everyday life and I plan to continue to do so, following in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln's legacy.

Governors State University – Jonathan LaSean Cooper

President Abraham Lincoln's legacy of humility, empathy, and unwavering commitment to service continues to inspire my approach to leadership and public service. His ability to unite a divided nation during the Civil War and his steadfast dedication to equality serve as powerful examples of what it means to lead with both integrity and purpose. Lincoln never claimed perfection, but through his openness to listen, his willingness to admit mistakes, and his devotion to higher principles, he demonstrated that true strength is found in moral clarity and compassion.

I strive to embody these same values in my own life, whether on the battlefields of the Middle East, in the classrooms of academia, or now within the administrative offices of my village. Each of these experiences has deepened my conviction that leadership is not about personal ambition but about responsibility to others. It requires patience, discipline, and the courage to make difficult choices while never losing sight of the greater good. Humility, resilience, and a vision for collective progress have guided me in inspiring others to pursue goals once thought unattainable. Leadership, in my view, means elevating those around you and ensuring that every voice matters. Like Lincoln, I believe in building inclusive communities where every individual feels seen, heard, and valued. His legacy challenges me to remain steadfast in service, to act with transparency, and to seek unity even in times of deep division.

In honoring Lincoln's example, I reaffirm my commitment to serve with purpose, to uplift those entrusted to my care, and to cultivate hope and civic responsibility as the foundation for a better future.

Greenville University – Norah Rae Swinigan Atkins

It is thought that Abraham Lincoln once said, *"To ease another's heartache is to forget one's own."* In both my future nursing career and my life as a whole, I hope to embody this same kind of compassion while caring for others in their most vulnerable moments. I believe my time at Greenville has prepared me for this in many ways. In the classroom, I've learned the value of listening honestly and collaborating with others. On the track, I've learned that nothing worth having is easily obtained. Through both the investment of my professors and the encouragement of my coaches, I've learned that leadership

isn't just about being in front, it's about setting an example in everything you do, whether others are watching or not. To me, true leadership means serving others, rather than being served. It means reflecting the love of Jesus in a world that deeply needs it. I think Abraham Lincoln would agree with me when I say that caring for others both personally and professionally is a sacred responsibility.

Illinois College – Emily Guest

Leadership comes in many forms. It isn't about being the loudest voice in the room or demanding attention, but about presence, consistency, and the ability to elevate others. Through my experiences in sports, leadership roles, and work, I've learned that true leadership often shows up through quiet but impactful actions: listening, encouraging, supporting, and modeling the behavior you want to see. As an education major, I plan to take this mindset into my classroom to teach the next generations of leaders that they can make a difference in more than one way. With lessons in history, learning about other cultures, and other aspects of social sciences, I will guide students to be the best version of themselves to develop into citizens who want to do good for their communities and world.

Illinois Institute of Technology – Genna Gaitan

Lincoln's leadership legacy holds a timeless guide for an altruistic approach to life. To be recognized as a Laureate, one must recognize the importance of compassion, humility, and growth. Today's leaders will emerge from yesterday's trailblazers. That is what Lincoln's legacy represents. Leadership comes in many shapes and forms for there is no finite description. One may lead in silence whereas one may act by example. Success is similar in this regard, where it is acknowledged in various ways.

It is Lincoln's call to action to continue to inspire the next generation of leaders. It is our utmost responsibility to hold the door of opportunity open for any and every individual that wishes to learn the lessons of service towards the betterment of society. Through the practice of empathy, patience, and dedication, we must encourage ourselves and our peers to work together to build up our communities; we must mirror the lessons left to us by Lincoln's legacy and carry on his commitment to greater good.

Illinois State University – Kruz E. Barrera

Similar to Abraham Lincoln, my time in the Bloomington-Normal area has truly been transformative. Just as Jesse W. Fell encouraged Abraham Lincoln to run for president, it was at Illinois State University that I was inspired to become a leader. During my time at ISU, the values of Community and Civic Engagement, Learning and Scholarship, and Individualized Attention became deeply ingrained in me. Through my own Registered Student Organization, I connected with my peers and helped them on their academic paths. By working with my instructors, I am able to research current social issues that may affect students' well-being. This dedication to a greater good is what motivated me to pursue a career in Clinical/Counseling Psychology. Thanks to the support of my family, faculty, and friends, my commitment to uplifting my community and its members will always reside at the center of my soul.

Illinois Wesleyan University – Valeria Suarez

Abraham Lincoln was not born in Illinois, and neither was I. Yet his legacy has deeply shaped this state and inspired generations, myself included. Through an Illinois education, Lincoln built a legacy of empowerment through knowledge, one that continues to reach far beyond its borders. As a student from

Venezuela, I have followed his example, striving to use knowledge as a tool to uplift others and expand equality of opportunity. Illinois has given me opportunities that changed my life, and I am committed to ensuring others can have the same opportunity for personal and professional growth that the state of Illinois has provided me.

This award affirms more than recognition of hard work; it reflects a belief in the power of passion, purpose, and doing good. Becoming a Lincoln Laureate is both an honor and a responsibility to continue building my legacy while empowering others to do the same. To me, it is proof that the goodness within people from all backgrounds is still seen and celebrated. Most of all, it strengthens my faith that each of us has the ability to go out into the world and not only do good, but do well, and in doing so, help create a more caring, humane, and welcoming place for all.

Judson University – Hana Marie Cunningham

I'm incredibly honored to be chosen as a Lincoln Academy Student Laureate. Abraham Lincoln's legacy—his willingness to stand up for what's right, his selfless leadership, his pursuit of equality, and his commitment to living a purposeful life centered on unity—inspires me deeply. These are values I try to live out in my roles in ministry and civic leadership, both on campus and in the wider community. Even in the face of intense adversity and opposition, Lincoln stayed true to his principles. His integrity and humility made a lasting impact, and it's clear why he continues to be respected and remembered today. As a student leader, ministry and worship coordinator, and campus ambassador, I strive to reflect those same values. I want my leadership to be defined by courage, compassion, and a genuine commitment to serving others. My hope is to leave behind a Lincoln-reflecting legacy marked by grace, personal responsibility, and resilience.

Knox College – Zoe Araceli Pav

Abraham Lincoln has a long and rich history at Knox College. He held debates with Steven Douglass on the steps of Old Main, speaking of freedom and change for the greater good. I feel honored to walk those same steps on my way to class. Moreover, I feel a connection between my own pursuits and his legacy. My interest in biochemistry began as a desire to help others, and to find a career that would allow me to have the greatest impact. In school, I have grown to be a leader among my peers, performing on the Knox College Volleyball Team, the President's Student Advisory Council, and as an Organic Chemistry TA/Tutor among various other campus positions. Outside of Knox, I work to serve my community as an EMT at Galesburg Hospital Ambulance Services and a variety of additional volunteer activities. I have also been a camp counselor for local children and I am currently spearheading an interdisciplinary research project on campus. These myriad levels of involvement throughout my community attest to values embodied by Lincoln and evident in his statement, "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's life in your years." Although my time at Knox College is coming to a close, my devotion to these values and my Galesburg family is steadfast. In sum, Lincoln's leadership legacy is and will be a cornerstone of my ongoing commitment to a greater good.

Lake Forest College – Emilia Guilhermina de Paula Fonseca

While a leader is often in the spotlight, true leadership is a selfless process. Lincoln's Leadership Legacy illustrates that at the center of being a leader are the people you serve and represent, not yourself. Such a principle guides my commitment to listening to and understanding those whose lives are touched by

my actions while being aware of the weight of my leadership, given that affecting even a single life requires responsibility and commitment to equality and empathy.

Lewis University – Aletheia Johnson

The most effective leaders are driven by empathy and service. Abraham Lincoln transformed the divided nation by striving to unite empathy and service, seeing humanity in every individual, and committing to a more hopeful and compassionate future. In my own life, I work hard to mirror the ideals of Lincoln. When serving communities, advocating for others, or listening to alternative perspectives and experiences, I am reminded of the importance of empathetic and service-driven leadership combining to generate true transformation. One of the things that I admire the most about Lincoln's legacy is the use of empathy as a way of making change. The art of empathy in politics is a dying art that seems to crawl closer and closer to extinction. When the hope for lasting change seems long lost, I find solace in history and the evidence of compassion's power for making lasting change, as proven by Lincoln's civic engagement legacy.

For me, empathy is not merely about understanding others, it is the fuel of my commitment to change. Listening deeply to others' experiences and emotions unlocks a deeper understanding of our world. That understanding is the spark that ignites my drive to create a better future for our nation. Like Lincoln, I believe that empathy is the key to making positive change. This is why empathy continues to be the foundation of my service and will continue to guide me on my civic journey. By centering my work around empathy, I ensure I do my part in contributing to a better world that reflects the vision and compassion exemplified by Lincoln.

Loyola University Chicago – Amelie Malone

I am honored to be a recipient of the Lincoln Laureate on behalf of Loyola University Chicago. This acknowledgment has made me reflect on my personal journey and commitment to service. Since childhood, I have been justice-oriented, believing that every being is worthy of an existence that ensures and exceeds their basic needs and rights. As a first-generation scholar, African American, queer woman I'm aware that institutional systems weren't built with underrepresented identities in mind. In navigating these systemic challenges, I strive to lead with empathy and understanding. I have been dedicated to the mission of uplifting and empowering marginalized identities through advocating as a student leader for my local community, and global leadership. I don't want to view care as a political act, but as a necessary means to alleviate the suffering of those around us. But in today's world I have to, care is often categorized as political due to the need to recognize the privilege of certain groups to demand equitable care for all. We need people who are willing to create positive changes through humility and action. That is why I want to further celebrate all government assistance, INGOs, NGOs, nonprofits, and community members who support those in need and advocate for human rights. Their creation and actions keep the true meaning of humanity alive, and they are why I am able to serve my community passionately.

McKendree University – MaryAnn Romagna

I am deeply inspired to receive the Lincoln Laureate award, not just as an honor, but as a call to live by the principles Lincoln embodied. His legacy will guide my civic-minded life through three commitments: humility in leadership (correcting errors as they arise), selfless service (putting the needs of others before our own), and persistent action (if we never try, we will never succeed).

Like Lincoln, I believe leadership runs deeper than titles. It is shown through daily choices, such as showing up, lifting others, and excelling without expectation of reward. During his presidency, Lincoln had a Cabinet that included his political opponents. His ‘team of rivals’ philosophy reminds me to seek diverse perspectives, while his patience teaches me that meaningful change requires perseverance. Through my love of meeting new people from all different backgrounds and passion for global health, I founded a chapter of MEDLIFE at McKendree. Each year, we go on a medical mission trip to help underserved communities abroad. Thus far, we have visited Peru and Guatemala, but we strive to induce change in our local communities, as well. Though our fields differ, Lincoln’s life proves how much one can accomplish without compromising morals. I will carry this forward by putting community needs first, whether mentoring peers, advocating for underserved communities, or simply listening to those often unheard. As Lincoln said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” I accept this award as a commitment to create a future where service is not just an act, but a way of being.

Millikin University – Alex Joshua Lee Farkasch

Lincoln’s Leadership Legacy is a daily reminder of how crucial selflessness, dedication to service, and striving towards a greater good is in society. Lincoln was an exemplary leader of our country, and the everlasting impression he left on American society is undeniable. To follow in his footsteps is an honor that contributes to the betterment of our world. As such, I swear by always helping others, contributing to and bettering my communities, and making the world more united.

Monmouth College – Turner William Plumer

It is an honor to represent and embody Lincoln’s Leadership Legacy. It is a guide for those willing to pursue a civic-minded life and willingness to contribute to the greater good. Abraham Lincoln lived his life through leadership and guided everyone to contribute to the betterment of humanity. I am inspired to serve just as Lincoln had, to serve my communities with the utmost respect and mindfulness that every person has their unique differences, qualities, and needs. I hope to give back to my communities in every way possible, just as Lincoln gave so much for the betterment of others. I will continue to learn and embody Lincoln’s Leadership Legacy as it will continue to guide me through my life, career, and civil activities.

National Louis University – Kayla L. Shavers

Abraham Lincoln’s leadership was rooted in resilience, integrity, and unwavering commitment to the greater good. His example reminds me that true leadership is not about power or recognition, but about service, humility, and creating opportunities for others to thrive. As I complete my degree in Psychology at National Louis University, I strive to embody those qualities in both academic and community work.

Through Demoiselle 2 Femme (D2F), I have learned the importance of mentorship and service as a tool for empowerment. As an alumnus and current leader on the 30th anniversary committee, I am helping restore programming that creates safe, uplifting spaces for adolescents as they transition to womanhood. Similarly, my partnership with Jesse LeBeau in bringing teen coaching and social-emotional learning programs to schools reflects my belief that every young person deserves tools for resilience and self-confidence. Through my own faith-based M.O.M.S. and T.E.E.N support group platform, LotusEvolveCo, I continue this mission by guiding adolescents and mothers in holistic growth, combining faith and evidence-based strategies.

North Central College – Nmesoma E. Onyejekwe

Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is about showing up. Showing up for others, for justice, and for the work that needs doing. As an international student from Nigeria, raised by a widowed mother and shaped by early setbacks, I've learned that resilience is not just personal. It is a way of contributing to something larger than myself. After navigating those setbacks, I earned the full-ride Trustee Scholarship to attend North Central College in 2022 and pursue my dream of combining medicine with impactful research. The research opportunities I've experienced—from cancer cachexia at Oregon Health & Science University to muscle stem cell biology at Stanford—reflect my commitment to science that serves. I've stepped beyond my comfort zone to lead student organizations that amplify voices and create space for service. I currently serve as president of TriBeta Biological Honor Society, launched a chapter of CreateForKids to connect students with service opportunities, and help shape campus dialogue as Creative Director of NCC for Africa. As a Peer Health Educator, I support wellness initiatives that make care more accessible to my peers. These roles have helped me define who I am, recognize what is needed around me, and respond with purpose. That sense of purpose is something I believe resonates with Lincoln's legacy. Ultimately, I hope to become a physician who bridges clinical care and research, especially for communities that are often overlooked. Civic-mindedness, to me, means using every role—scientist, student, advocate—to make systems more humane and more just.

North Park University – Sofia Grivot Volkmann

Lincoln's legacy serves as a reminder that leadership should not be measured by status, but by the willingness to serve with integrity, even through adversity. As an international student, I have had to navigate unfamiliar systems, financial hardship, and long stretches away from family and friends; not just to pursue education, but also to give back. Through my work at Campus Safety, academic support, and research, I hope to have impacted and strengthened my college community while preparing for a future in medicine. I see medicine as the highest form of service: a union of science, compassion, and responsibility to others. Like Lincoln, I strive to lead by lifting others, especially when the path is difficult.

Northeastern Illinois University – Cassaundra Garcia

Sadly we currently live in a world that is dominated by discrimination and hate. The voices that ring of democracy and empathy are trying to be drowned out by propaganda and fear mongering. How do we win? We win by listening with empathy, leading with purpose and using our voices. I plan to use Lincoln's leadership Legacy to create the change that we need in our world. After all this is much bigger than me, it's about our community. They can try to keep us silent, but like a chorus our combined voices will ring out. So I commit to staying informed, advocating for what truly matters, and holding leadership accountable. That's what Lincoln would have done.

Northern Illinois University – Joseph C. La Barbera

The tenure of outstanding leaders is marked not just by the outcomes they create, but by the challenges they overcome. For President Lincoln, this is especially the case: more than anything, Lincoln is

remembered for his devotion to unity in a time of division, his dedication to liberty in an era of deep injustice, and his ability to show love and respect against a backdrop of fraternal hatred and despair. It is this drive for what is right that has earned President Lincoln a place in both our hearts and our history books.

Though society has changed greatly since the time of Abraham Lincoln, many of the same problems persist. We still let our own sense of infallibility sow disunity among us, allowing discord and strife to flourish. We still delude ourselves from striving for the promise of “liberty and justice for all,” even while many live as waifs in the shadow of the American Dream. We still succumb to a regime of technological distraction and instant gratification which cleaves us from our communities and divides our households against themselves. It is at times like this that you and I are called to be dedicated, equanimous servant leaders in the vein of the late President Lincoln. In an era of isolation and division, we must remember always to lead one another, to serve one another, and to love one another, for without the wisdom of good leadership we are disordered and confused, without the strong hand of service we are weak and unsteady, and without the guiding light of love we live in darkness and fear.

Northwestern University – Christopher Axline

Strong dedication to service and civic engagement are fundamental pillars at the forefront of my life. Through both middle and high school, I spent hundreds of hours volunteering with the Make-A-Wish Youth Leadership Committee to help grant the wishes of children with critical illnesses. Once I matriculated to Northwestern, my commitment to serving the communities I call home has continued to manifest through my work with Books and Breakfast and Streetside Health, both of which are organizations with service at their core. To me, Lincoln’s legacy embodies the power that an unrelenting pursuit of equality and positive change can have on society at large. Lincoln never yielded in his pursuit of a better, more perfect Union, and I hope to embody this steadfast approach in my life as I work to give back both through my volunteer efforts and my career goals as a physician.

I plan to continue creating positive change in my community through persistence and dedication over the long term, just as Lincoln did in his struggle for quality, freedom, and an improved Union. I strive to embody these qualities as I continue my work with the children of Evanston through Books and Breakfast, the unhoused population of Chicago through Streetside Health, and hopefully one day my future patients.

Olivet Nazarene University—Grace Elizabeth Amburgey

Lincoln’s legacy is defined by his humility and commitment to the well-being of all. I hope to leave behind a legacy that is one in the same, one where people remember the love and care I showed to others above all else. I believe my purpose in life is to spread the love of God to all those around, creating a community of compassion until His Kingdom is realized here on earth. By looking at Lincoln’s leadership, which aimed to connect all, no matter their differences, I see a model of how I want to connect with others and meet them where they are at. Through serving in leadership positions, participating in the community, and caring for those around me, I strive to embody the humility and devotion to the well-being of all that Lincoln gave so freely.

Parkland College—Rebekah Maxwell

Even before his presidency, Abraham Lincoln overcame countless trials. Nothing in his background predicted that he would become president, yet he fought for many years to eventually be elected. Lincoln has shown me through his dedication that I can overcome difficulties and strive towards what I believe in. A good leader will fight for what they dream of and will not stop until they get there. Upon election, Lincoln chose to bring his rivals into his administration as cabinet members rather than taking action against them. Here, we can see Lincoln's humility. Even though he had power, Lincoln chose to do what he thought was best for the nation rather than seeking pride. He could have simply chosen to continue working at a local level, rather, he chose to fight for something much bigger than himself. Lincoln inspires me to look to other people and seek out to serve their needs. He became president at one of the most challenging moments in U.S. history. Rather than focusing only on areas he was familiar with, Lincoln became more knowledgeable about the demands of the people. He learned more about slavery and began to fight for the rights of those enslaved. President Lincoln had a substantial growth mindset and was willing to learn and fight for what he believed in. Lincoln's leadership has inspired me to live a life of service because of his commitment to fighting for what he thought was right. Because of President Lincoln's example, I will strive to serve others more each day, fight for what is right, listen to the viewpoints of others, and never give up.

Principia College – Juan Francisco Alessio

Growing up in a small town in Argentina, I watched my father, an unpaid firefighter, lead through service and courage, which taught me that leadership is about showing up for others, not personal gain. As a first-generation international student in the U.S., I've led by example, captaining a national D1 rugby team, co-founding a \$100K investment club, mentoring over 40 students, and launching a podcast to amplify international voices. Inspired by Lincoln's legacy, I aim to use private capital as a tool to expand opportunity and create impact across Latin America.

Quincy University – Alexis Nicole Stufflebeam

Abraham Lincoln's leadership has always stood out because it was rooted in humility, integrity, and an unwavering focus on the greater good. Those qualities guide the way I try to live and lead. His belief that true leadership is about serving others motivates me to use my education to help people overcome challenges, find their voices, and create positive change in their communities. I share Lincoln's conviction that progress comes from listening carefully, working alongside others, and staying true to one's principles, even in difficult times. On campus, my leadership roles as resident director of the first-year women's residence hall, former president of Sigma Phi Eta, co-founder of Women in Law, and an active member in other student organizations have shown me how powerful compassion can be when it is paired with intentional action. These experiences remind me that leadership is not about holding authority but about building trust, fostering inclusion, and speaking up for those who feel unheard. Outside of campus, my work as a jury commissioner for Adams County, my internship at the Public Defender's Office, and my administrative position with the City of Farmington have strengthened my commitment to fairness, equity, and justice. Each of these opportunities has helped me better understand how civic engagement and public service can address systemic inequities and create lasting impact.

Lincoln's legacy is a reminder that true leadership is measured not by recognition, but by the good we leave behind. As I look ahead to a career in counseling and advocacy, I hope to carry his example

forward, working toward a world where every person's dignity and worth are recognized, respected, and uplifted.

Rockford University – Kaden Thomas Finnestad

Lincoln's leadership legacy reminds me that true greatness lies not in individual recognition but in the humility to serve a purpose greater than oneself. His example inspires me to live a civic-minded life based on humility, hard work, and determination; three values that have shaped who I am and who I strive to become. Sports taught me that leadership begins with humility, and I want to carry that same outlook into service within my community. As an athlete, I have learned that humility means putting the mission above personal pride, learning from both victory and defeat, and respecting everyone's role in the game. These lessons mirror Lincoln's ability to guide a divided nation with modesty and conviction, leading not for glory but for unity and justice. Lincoln's story reminds me that progress is built on steady and unrelenting work. Through that, Lincoln showed that real leadership requires sacrifice and resilience, even when the outcome can be uncertain. Through personal experiences, hard work has developed my character and shown me that meaningful change comes through persistence, perseverance and commitment. Lincoln's unwavering determination in the face of adversity demonstrates that strength is measured not by ease but by persistence. By following Lincoln's example, I strive to embody the characteristics of humility, hard work, and determination to make a lasting impact through service, compassion, and unity.

Roosevelt University – Aviana Joy Holst

The legacy of Abraham Lincoln is one of service. It reminds me that no matter my vocation, my ultimate purpose is to serve others. My education and training has equipped me to serve through music, offering a respite from the weight of everyday life; through education, equipping students with tools to express themselves and communicate effectively; and through advocacy, believing that it is possible to live in a world with less hunger, less war, and less inequality, and striving each day so that my words and actions can be a part of this change. Lincoln's words in the Gettysburg Address remind us that democracy depends on both sacrifice and fierce, unwavering defense of the equality and humanity of every person. In the present day, as much as ever before, these ideals are the driving force for myself and my peers in our education, careers, and interactions with the world.

Saint Xavier University – Chaylan Palmer

I am highly honored to have been chosen to represent Saint Xavier as their Student Laureate. As a result of my family and upbringing, my chosen experiences have given me a deeper understanding of humility, leadership, and the value of showing up for others. I have grown in empathy, learned how to listen deeply, gained confidence in my ability to lead with integrity, and I am reminded that service is not about recognition, but about relationships with others. Still, President Lincoln's example of strategic leadership, service, and empathy is an inspiring model to follow that will be an additional standard for myself, along with my future students as I continue on in living a life of service. His embodiment of a civic minded life of service and commitment to a greater good has encouraged me to lay the foundation of my future on these principles that have carried his legacy.

With my future in full view, empathy, service, and leadership is shaping the way I walk through life and conduct myself as an educator, advocate, and public servant. I am committed to instilling these principles into my students while dedicating myself to showing them and others empathy, compassion, and

their potential for greatness because I will always strive to radiate the spirit of President Lincoln by pursuing the betterment of the people I am leading, serving, and teaching. The opportunity to lead and serve any heart or soul that is willing is not just a title or responsibility but a blessing and true privilege that I deeply treasure and will forever embrace and acknowledge with gratitude.

School of the Art Institute of Chicago – Aalika Bharti

As an international student, I've learned how transformative it is to find a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar place. That experience has shaped my belief that true leadership begins with empathy and the willingness to create spaces where others feel supported and valued. Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is not measured by titles or power but by service, by choosing to lift others and act with integrity even in the smallest moments. His example guides me to approach every opportunity with the intent to listen deeply, build bridges, and bring people together across differences.

For me, civic-mindedness is not only about large-scale change; it's about the everyday work of cultivating community for anyone and everyone, whether in classrooms, organizations, or quiet conversations. By following Lincoln's example of service and humanity, I hope to continue fostering connections that ripple outward, creating meaningful impact one person, one community at a time.

Southern Illinois University Carbondale – Marsden Lee Fisher

It is said that a legacy lasts a lifetime. I find this statement to diminish the vitality of a legacy. In Abraham Lincoln's case, his death did not conclude the impacts of his words. His legacy will serve as a beacon, guiding me toward selfless service for the greater good. As I make my way to becoming an Army officer I will continue to uphold the Army values. One of which, I proudly say, is selfless service. Although my time in the Army is intrinsically considered service, it will not be until I can impact the greater good as he did, through empathy and humility, that I will feel as if I have served. My future career as a veterinarian will reflect the importance of selfless service in my life. As he proved throughout his lifetime, leadership ability relies on the makeup of your morals and I will continue to ensure my morals remain unwavering. I will keep myself accountable as he kept the country accountable for its oversight of human kindness. As I develop as a leader, I will continue to emit the founding values through my actions and words. Abraham Lincoln's vision of a moral equal society will remain the reasoning behind my actions as I progress through life. Although I would never wish the country to re-enter the state of turmoil that was established during his presidency, I believe that during a time of conflict where a maneuver of goodwill is necessary, he has laid the path of utmost accuracy that is difficult to deviate. I wish to ensure the longevity of the lessons he taught in my actions.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville – Baymuhammet Baltayev

Abraham Lincoln's legacy has inspired me to pursue a career in public interest law. Although the artillery bombardment in Gettysburg has long been silent, the battle for equality before the law has never ceased across different communities impacted by systems of oppression that have withstood the passing of decades. I aspire to defend the rights of marginalized communities including immigrants, LGBTQIA+ people, and workers, opening a path for them to thrive fully. Lincoln's dictum that the Constitution (and the law) are "the silver frame" of "the golden apple" of the principle of liberty reminds me that questioning the status quo, regardless of consequence and in face of unpopularity, is the work of securing a democratic and just future for all. It can lead to social progress and help inspire resilient communities. I learned from

Lincoln's legacy that only through continuous articulation and thoughtful debate of unpopular or even divisive positions can we advocate for the social justice reforms necessary to fulfill the promise of freedom and equality. It is my hope and commitment to use the education, training and experience I gained through the unparalleled education at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and the John Martinson Honors Program to advance the cause Lincoln so courageously championed.

Trinity Christian College – Mia Joy Musick

A legacy like that of Abraham Lincoln is one that I'm sure few people expect to live up to. There are many reasons why 160 years after his death, we still praise his many achievements. However, I don't believe that Lincoln desired future generations to simply applaud him. He would see us all as capable change-makers of our own time if we are only willing to answer the call. I am inspired by Lincoln's heart to seek justice, equality, and love even while facing adversity. I feel a sense of duty to face the giants of the place and time in which I have been put, just as Lincoln faced his own. As a social work major, I have not lacked exposure to such giants. I mourn the brokenness of our current society and yet, I have hope that I can play a part in bringing redemption to our world. I see this as the call on my life, and one that I will need great encouragement for. When I look at the work of Lincoln, and the people and institutions that have impacted me thus far, I gain some of that encouragement. It is through this motivation that I have seen positive outcomes come from my own efforts. As I continue on in life and work, my hope is that my efforts to spread equality, justice, and love will continue impacting the world around me. I have deep gratitude for the Lincoln Academy, my fellow Student Laureates, all those at Trinity Christian College, and my family for giving me a chance to live out this dream of mine. Thank you!!

University of Chicago – Daniel Brett Kind

One hundred sixty-four years ago, an unheralded congressman from the western frontier boarded a train from Springfield to Washington. In twelve days, President-Elect Lincoln made eighty stops, giving short, candid speeches from the caboose to present himself to an injured nation. I wish whistle-stop tours were still in fashion; to me, they embody Lincoln's ethos as a civil servant--one I hope to emulate. The locomotive of effective public service is powered by moral principles. In his 1838 Lyceum Address, a young Lincoln argued that the coal for this engine was passion. When I see injustice in the world, I feel fear, fury, and frustration. These emotions are energizing, but if I merely let them fester, I will burn up inside. To truly make a difference, I must channel them into purpose, refining my raw passion into convictions and beliefs. But a train is not merely an engine; its purpose is to carry passengers and cargo. An effective leader recognizes that service is not for oneself but for the people being carried forward. For Lincoln, devotion to law and country provided the rails to ensure the train of change moved steadily, with the best chance to avoid violence or destruction.

Lincoln knew he was imperfect: he erred, doubted, and often failed. It was by wrestling with his conscience that he bound the Union together and carved a path toward emancipation. In Illinois, as I wrestle with my own conscience a century and a half later, I take heart in his example: to temper fear with purpose, serve with humility, and measure law against moral truth in pursuit of a more just nation.

University of Illinois Chicago – Aparna Ramakrishnan

Abraham Lincoln's leadership legacy reminds me that service to others is not rooted in titles or recognition, but in a deep responsibility to act with integrity, humility, and purpose. His ability to listen

across lines of division, to hold empathy and conviction at once, and to pursue unity without sacrificing principle is a model I carry with me as I navigate public service and policy.

To me, living a civic-minded life means working toward systems that uplift those most often unheard. As a student and aspiring physician trained in policy, I've followed Lincoln's example by leading with both heart and strategy—whether that's advocating for youth mental health legislation, researching Medicaid access, or helping improve nonprofit processes to better serve the public. His legacy challenges me to lead in ways that are quiet but enduring, to commit to change that is incremental but intentional, and to value the long arc of justice even when progress feels slow.

University of Illinois Springfield – Abigail Leigh Hemmer

I am immensely grateful to God and the Lincoln Academy of Illinois for the incredible opportunity to be named a 2025 Student Laureate. Former American President Abraham Lincoln led those around him with unparalleled integrity, driven by a moral responsibility to courageously stand up for the disempowered and establish a unified, salubrious society in which every life has dignity. The power of his compassionate, merciful approach to “heal the wounds” of a country torn apart by deep moral and political divisions during the Civil War inspires my own work as a medical laboratory science student and healthcare worker. Throughout my future medical career, I strive to embody Lincoln's compassionate leadership and perseverance by empathetically listening to and boldly advocating for those who are suffering. I also plan to extend this commitment to meaningful pursuits beyond healthcare. By continuing to volunteer at local community outreach programs and emphasizing philanthropy as a leader in women's empowerment organizations, I hope to exemplify Lincoln's role as a devoted civil servant and friend of the undervalued. While this award recognizes the various service efforts I have already undertaken, I move forward with a grateful heart, eager to continue honoring Lincoln's legacy through a lifetime of meaningful community engagement.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign – Ashley Denise Oliver

There are three words that come to mind when I think of a service-committed leader: selfless, empathetic, and dedicated. These qualities are not only admirable but essential for anyone who seeks to create lasting change in their community. Choosing to be a civic-minded leader and to lead a service-driven life means making a decision to prioritize the needs of others, listening to those around us, understanding their struggles, and most importantly, using our skills and resources to uplift and support them. Throughout my time in undergrad, I have been surrounded by strong leaders that have nourished my desire to give back. For me, service is not an obligation, but a reflection of a fraction of my gratitude for the opportunities, patience, and encouragement I've received throughout my life. For this reason, I can say it is a blessing to have the opportunity to serve my community alongside my peers.

University of St. Francis – Giana Marie Barbaro

In my pursuit of a diverse education experience at a small liberal arts university, I have been able to nurture my values of service and commitment to a greater good. As I move forward with these paramount values in mind, I find that there is no better way to pursue a civic-minded life of service than to follow in the footsteps of great leaders like Lincoln himself. Therefore, I aspire to attend law school and become a practicing attorney. I am deeply honored to accept this award from The Lincoln Academy of Illinois and to dedicate myself to the mission of this organization. I look forward to being a representative of Lincoln and his legacy of leadership in my own life, particularly in my future career. I will carry forward Lincoln's resolution to act as a servant leader for my fellow citizens, my state, and my country.

VanderCook College of Music – Brandon Rogelio Zavaleta

In order to inspire the people of the world, you need to have a fire in your heart. One that burns bright for the people you'll work with every day. Having a passion for excellence and a commitment to doing good work is one of the first steps of being a leader. However, what makes a good leader comes from more than just the quality of their craft. If creating opportunities for others meant at a young age I had to step outside my comfort zone and lead others, so be it. Now, after all these years I realize leaders must be the role model, not the exception. I, like many leaders' desire to serve others for the betterment of their community. I've known for years that no matter what I did in my life, music had to be a part of it. My senior year quote reads "Music is always better when you share it with others". To nurture the traits of Lincoln, we as music educators must pave the way for others who have the aptitude for music, leadership, and more. We empower others the same way our mentors and colleagues have empowered us. Even if we can't please everyone, the compromises we make in our everyday lives must not make us lose sight of our principles and morals. I think that I can always do better for the people who look up to me. Being a part of VanderCook and the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity has shown me that leaders will always lead and that it's important to have a positive attitude and outlook over yourself and others.

Western Illinois University – Julietta Nora Marini

Abraham Lincoln is not remembered for his power or influence on historical events. Instead, Lincoln is remembered for his dedication as a civil servant, committed to uniting people and acting at all times with integrity. In our lives, this should also be our focus. We should strive to take action when we see injustices in the world, and we should endeavor to leave this world a better place than when we found it.

Wheaton College – Olivia Madlin Wiebe

Abraham Lincoln has been widely regarded as one of America's greatest presidents. His legacy is often summarized as that of a moral hero and national martyr, leading the Union in the Civil War and dying at the hands of an assassin. While Americans revere Lincoln's legacy, this modern admiration obscures the reality of his presidency: Lincoln was deeply unpopular in his own time. One month into his presidency, a third of the country outrightly rejected Lincoln's leadership, seceding from the Union and waging war against it. While the South vilified him, many in the North also expressed disgust. Political cartoons in Union papers portrayed Lincoln as "the baboon" and abolitionists condemned him for being too cautious and moderate. In his day, Lincoln was not a moral hero or national martyr but a flawed man navigating a bitterly divided nation, with both loyal supporters and fierce critics. Heroism and martyrdom aside, Lincoln displayed perseverance. His leadership, despite personal losses and national disapproval, inspires me to face criticism with resilience, remain steady in conviction, and pursue service even when misunderstood. Serving the greater good is not about constructing a favorable legacy, since legacies ultimately depend on how others choose to remember us. What we can do – as Lincoln did – is remain true and persistent in our convictions.

As Wheaton College's recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Civic Engagement Award, I hope to embody this model of faithful leadership: remaining true to Wheaton's motto of living "For Christ and His Kingdom" and applying historical thinking beyond the classroom to civic life, so that my leadership may serve not my public image but a greater hope.

