

Lee wins national student success award

Lee College has earned national recognition from the American Association of Community Colleges for its work to engage the entire campus and community in creating a college-going culture that ensures a successful student experience from high school through higher education.

The association announced Lee College the winner of the 2015 Award of Excellence for Student Success Monday, April 20, at its annual awards gala in San Antonio. The coveted award honors the American community college that has best demonstrated — through evidence — a sustained commitment to student success, and proactively advances that cause.

“Lee College is focused on enhancing the learning, participation and success of our students,” said Pres. Dr. Dennis Brown. “We believe in providing support to students from connection to graduation, then on to the workforce in the career of their choice, or to a four-year institution. It is exciting to see the hard work and commitment of our outstanding faculty, staff, Board of Regents and community honored by the American Association of Community Colleges on a national level.”

The Student Success to the Core approach at Lee College is focused on involving all influencers in the process of helping students make a seamless transition into higher education. Dr. Christy Ponce, Vice President for Student Success, Workforce and Resource Development, said student success has been an institution-wide effort to support students from entry to completion of their chosen degree or certificate.

“It has been incredible to see every department get involved in some way: hosting students on campus to preview academic and technical programs; hosting STEM and family events; promoting fast-track training programs; offering scholarships, internships, and industry mentor opportunities; and helping students one-on-one through each of the enrollment steps,” Ponce said. “The dedicated individuals at Lee College have all come together in a big way to support student access, retention, and completion and are working to eliminate student barriers.”

High school and college counselors and faculty collaborate to align curricula to reduce the need for developmental coursework and increase student success in college classes. Students work with peer mentors and have the opportunity to take dual-credit courses while still in high school. Parents are offered resources that strengthen the at-home support system, like the free and bilingual Parent College 101. Parents surveyed about their participation called the program helpful and highly informative.

“This national award for Student Success is a testament to the great work going on at Lee College, from the main campus and McNair Center in Baytown, to the centers in Huntsville and Liberty, and all of our dual-credit sites,” Ponce said. “The college is scaling successful efforts and leading new regional initiatives on STEM and workforce, and is committed to helping each of our students be successful in reaching their educational goals.”

Business and industry partners, as well as non-profit organizations and local government and community volunteers, participate in the “Cradle to Career” network. There are also enhanced science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs,

scholarships and paid internships. DeDe Griffith, director of Student Success, noted the national champion Lee College Debate Team, award-winning Honors Program and organizations like Phi Theta Kappa as proof the student-centered approach has merit.

“Working collaboratively, students, faculty, staff and administrators are breaking down silos for the greater outcomes for students,” Griffith said. “Every day there are examples of faculty, staff and administrators demonstrating a commitment beyond their general duties to help students complete their degree or certificate. It is all about forming meaningful relationships — internally and externally, but most importantly with students.”

The American Association of Community Colleges also praised the Gulf Coast Partners Achieving Student Success (GCPASS) Program, a partnership between Lee College and the Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District for which the college was awarded the prestigious 2014 Texas Higher Education Star Award. Through GCPASS, the college provides comprehensive off-site enrollment services at no charge to seniors at each of the 11 high schools in its service area.

“GCPASS has been an integral part of eliminating student barriers and fears about higher education,” Brown said. “While other Texas schools have experienced enrollment declines, GCPASS has helped us increase enrollment — in part by attracting and supporting students who might not otherwise have gone to college.”

Lee College was also one of four national finalists for the 2015 Award of Excellence in the Exemplary Board/CEO category in recognition of the working relationship between Brown and the Board of Regents in college governance.