

Highlighting a S.T.A.R.—System with Targeted Actions and Results

Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN) site visitors from Houston Community College (HCC) and Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) visited Lee College offices in Huntsville on January 7, 2020. Higher leadership from both colleges were present and contributed to the conversation. Lee College representatives included Donna Zuniga, Dean; Kenneth 'Mick' Normington, TWC Grant Coordinator; Felix Buxkemper, Counselor; and Lance Byrd, Advisor. HCC was represented by Nakia Edwards, Director of Workforce Development, and Jeannie Hale, Program Manager. DCCCD was represented by Gloria Smith, Senior Director of Workforce and Adult Education; Ruben Johnson, Executive Dean Workforce Cedar Valley College; Monica Stansberry, Senior Program Specialist, Curriculum and Professional Development; Jesus Mercado, Program Manager, Corrections; and Jennifer McNabb, Instructional Specialist, Corrections.

The primary objective of the site visit to Lee College–Huntsville was to view the Truck Driving program for Corrections and discuss how to strengthen the integrated, contextualized curriculum for this program. At the beginning of 2020, Lee College had enrolled 219 inmates at 4 different prisons in 6 different technical trades as part of the college's Integrated Education and Training (IET) program. Of those initially enrolled, 167 have finished their technical and tutoring classes or are still enrolled in those classes. So far 33 students have completed a technical certificate or license.

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The morning began with an overview of the program and then an onsite visit to the Lee College Wynn Unit in Huntsville. During the visit, site visitors were also able to view the Welding program and the Library Lab. Traditionally, inmates are unable to access the internet for any research, which makes it cumbersome for inmates to access relevant material for their research methods class. As a solution for this problem, Lee College purchased the *Egrannery* database tool. This tool allows inmates to search the unique database of *Egrannery*. The tool allows students to look up basic information, as it is essentially a limited version of *Wikipedia* and the *World Book Encyclopedia*. The tool has a tracking device which makes it easier to follow the

digital footprint of the inmates. The instructor can then report any incidents or inappropriate materials to the resource counselors and block the activity.

The second stop was the Truck Driving classroom. There were approximately 36 students in class. The instructor covered the rules related to checkpoints of the truck. All male inmates that are allowed to take the truck driving class are considered “trustees” and have considerably more liberties than other inmates, including recreational time outside. These trustee students accumulate more than 800 hours of Commercial Driver's License training, including both class time and time driving an 18-wheel truck. The driving time includes hauling a trailer across town to deliver food to other nearby prisons. The Lee College truck driving classroom now also includes a computerized truck driving simulator, purchased with JET grant funds from the Texas Workforce Commission. Students adhere to all qualifications for the CDL license.

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Site visitors also viewed Huntsville’s Welding program. The lead instructor uses inmates as assistants, and classes are held all day. The technical experience needed for welding is an ongoing practice, and students leave with a vast amount of skills in at least four different types of welding, including Tig, Mig, Stick, and Fluxcore. All training meets multiple certification requirements from the American Welding Society.

After the tour, the site visitors and their hosts met back at the offices for lunch to debrief. They discussed ongoing challenges faced by Lee College and their partner, Wyndham School District, which provides instructors for the literacy classes. They also discussed possible ways to address some of these challenges. For example, Lee College has already worked out many of the issues pertaining to recruiting, testing, and class alignment. Other possibilities discussed included (a) transfer of credit or articulation agreements with other community colleges, (b) adding other prison units to the list where students can enroll in courses; and (c) allowing Windham teachers to use their PD content to count as PD for the grant.

The site visitors also suggested that Lee College consider writing an addendum to their Accelerate Texas grant from TWC to address some areas that need improvements. For example, they could use competency-based learning modules to help students accelerate through the program at their own individual pace.

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Both DCCCD and HCC look forward to an ongoing relationship with Lee College as all three college systems seek to provide better IET program services to students in correctional settings.