Lee College Huntsville Center celebrates largest graduating class in 51-year history

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Nearly 200 incarcerated by Texas Department of Criminal Justice earn associate degrees

HUNTSVILLE, TX — As he embraced his wife and his mother after receiving his Associate of Applied Science degree from the Lee College Huntsville Center, Quincy Moore, Sr., struggled to describe what it meant to be one of more than 180 graduates honored at the commencement ceremony inside the chapel of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Wynne Unit prison.

The Class of 2017 is the largest in the 51-year history of the Huntsville Center, one of the biggest and oldest correctional education programs in the United States. The center offers associate degrees and certificate programs in technical and academic fields to a growing enrollment of more than 1,200 students across six TDCJ units.

“There’s not an adjective to properly explain how I feel with my family being here with me, as well as this accomplishment that I made,” said Moore, who majored in horticulture and earned cum laude honors. After completing 16 years behind bars, he looks forward to freedom and using his degree to provide for his family and set a more positive example for his youngest son, Quincy Jr.

“Scooter (Langley) was a great instructor who taught me how to till soil and plant seeds, but I also cultivated my mind,” Moore said. “Education broadens your mind and offers you different opportunities. It exposes you to different things, and it has changed me for the better.”

Lee College Pres. Dr. Dennis Brown praised the Huntsville students — dressed in traditional black robes and mortarboards over their white TDCJ uniforms — for pursuing education and taking steps to become fully employed and productive citizens upon release. Recidivism data show that offenders who receive education while in prison are significantly less likely to return, he said.

“The curriculum is strenuous, rigorous and challenging, and they have achieved a major milestone in their lives,” Brown said. “We are so proud to have them leave here today, go out into the world and represent us as Lee College graduates.”

Before the graduates were called to the front of the chapel to receive their degrees, commencement speaker Terrell Blount reminded them to remember that life unfolds in phases both good and bad. The key to getting over the inevitable bumps in the road is being resilient and focused on the greater goal: leaving prison walls and never coming back. Completing a Lee College education is a way to truly prepare for that eventual release, rather than just biding time by waiting to go home, he said.

“When you’re hit with something, do not simply get up; you rise to the occasion and above the critics who say you don’t deserve a second chance or a third chance,” said

Blount, himself a former offender who now serves as a program associate for the Vera Institute of Justice in New York City. “Rise because every morning leads to a new day. Rise because when you’re released, you’re not an ex-inmate or an ex-convict. You’re a person who serves a purpose on the planet, ascending to new levels.”