Lee Specialist Joins D.O.E. Roundtable

Dr. Brandon Warren, Lee College Huntsville Center's Transition Specialist, met with U.S. Department of Education Secretary, Miguel Cardona in a roundtable discussion about extending government funded Pell Grants to currently incarcerated students.

Warren was recommended by the Vera Institute of Justice to participate as a key contributor in the virtual discussion, because of his expertise in transition operations and his first-hand experience with education in prisons.

"The most important thing I wanted to point out was the undeniable value of having college in prison," said Warren. "Beyond the practical benefits of saving taxpayers money by reducing recidivism rates and increasing employability once prisoners get out, there's also a personal transformation and a family restoration that happens when students in prison accomplish their educational goals."

He further recommended that all degree and certificate programs should come from accredited institutions like Lee College, and the coursework should be just as rigorous as the institution's "free world" counterparts. Warren also emphasized his belief that people in prison with long-term and life sentences should not be excluded from accessible education.

"Even if someone is serving a long-term or life sentence and will never get out of prison, they are the ones who create and maintain the culture inside the prisons," he said. "If they change, the entire prison culture will change for the better."

Having served several years in prison himself, Warren is a formerly incarcerated student and an alumnus of the Lee College Huntsville Center. In 2015, he returned to the prison system, but this time to help other currently incarcerated students prepare for success after their release.

As a Transitional Specialist for the Lee College Huntsville Center, Warren does this by assisting in job placements, continuing education, and helping incarcerated students find the resources they need to live a constructive and meaningful life outside the prison walls.

In 2020, Warren earned a Doctor of Education from the University of St. Thomas, and he continues to pour into Lee College Huntsville Center, the very place that gave him his fresh start in life.

Dr. Lynda Villanueva, Lee College President, said she is proud of the valuable mission that continues to be accomplished at the Lee College Huntsville Center.

"Lee College believes in second chances and the transformative power of education in the lives of students and their families," said Villanueva. "We are honored that our institution was represented as part of this critical discussion with Education Secretary Cardona."

Lee College's Huntsville Center currently provides academic and technical programs to more than 1,200 incarcerated students at eight Texas Department of Criminal Justice units.