Lee College Awarded $3.1 Million Grant

Lee College Receives $3.1 Million Grant to Expand University Transfer Opportunities

Funding from Houston Endowment will strengthen student support and create clearer pathways to bachelor's degrees

Lee College has been awarded a $3.1 million grant from Houston Endowment to strengthen university transfer pathways, improve student success and help more students pursue bachelor's degrees. The three-year investment is part of a $33.2 million regional initiative supporting nine Gulf Coast community colleges in expanding student pathways to credentials and careers that provide family-sustaining wages.

The grant will help Lee College strengthen student support, simplify the transfer process and reduce barriers that can prevent students from continuing their education at four-year universities.

“This investment from Houston Endowment will help us strengthen the connections between community college and university education, making the path to a four-year degree clearer and more accessible for our students. By expanding these opportunities, we're helping students achieve their educational goals, while also preparing a stronger workforce and a brighter future for our communities,” said Lee College President Jacob Atkin.

At the center of the initiative is a Proactive Transfer Success Model designed to provide students with consistent guidance from their first semester through transfer to a four-year university. Through the model, Transfer Success Coaches will work directly with students who intend to transfer, providing individualized support and guidance at key checkpoints of 15, 30 and 45 semester credit hours.

The program will initially focus on students pursuing engineering and criminal justice degrees, as well as first-time college students who have not yet selected a major. The approach is intended to help students develop clear academic plans, stay on track toward their educational goals and navigate the transfer process with dedicated support.

“For too many of our students, the bachelor's degree is the goal, but the path to get there is unclear, disconnected, or simply out of reach. This investment from Houston Endowment allows us to change that. We are redesigning how we support students from their first semester through transfer, so that every student who comes to Lee College with the dream of a four-year degree has a clear plan, a dedicated team behind them, and a real pathway to a career that can sustain their family,” said Dr. Marissa Moreno, Lee College vice president of Transfer, Placement and Workforce Development.

Lee College is also exploring the development of a University Center at its Baytown campus. The proposed center would allow students to take upper-division university courses from partner institutions without leaving the community, helping reduce transportation and other barriers for those pursuing bachelor's degrees. The college is working to establish relationships with potential university partners.

The $3.1 million award builds on a $500,000 planning grant Houston Endowment awarded to Lee College in 2025. Several strategies developed during the initial planning phase will continue and expand during implementation.

These include the Transfer Navigator program, which connects students preparing to transfer with Lee College alumni who have already made the transition to a four-year university. Through the program, alumni mentor students, participate in informational panels, visit university campuses and help students navigate the transfer process.

The college will also continue developing its myPath student planning portal to help students map out coursework for their transfer degree programs, along with an AI-powered online assistant that provides transfer guidance outside regular business hours. Additional efforts include expanding transfer advising, strengthening academic assessments and building collaborative university and workforce partnerships.

Lee College is working closely with Lamar University, Sam Houston State University and the University of Houston-Downtown to develop additional transfer opportunities. The college has also signed memorandums of understanding with six other universities.

Over the three-year grant period, Lee College aims to increase student transfer rates, develop stronger university partnerships and create more seamless pathways to bachelor's degrees.

About Houston Endowment

Houston Endowment is a private foundation established in 1937 by Jesse H. Jones and his wife, Mary Gibbs Jones, to improve the quality of life for everyone in Greater Houston. Today, it has more than $2 billion in assets and invests about $100 million a year in strengthening public education, increasing civic engagement, enhancing the region’s arts sector, and growing Houston’s green spaces—as well as addressing emerging opportunities in our region. Working with fellow Houstonians, Houston Endowment pursues bold goals, builds partnerships, and invests in innovative solutions to create a vibrant region where all have the opportunity to thrive.