

# Weekend College gives working students time to pursue degree

## Free information session on Feb. 23 will detail unique program that caters to adult learners

BAYTOWN, TX — As a mother of four working full time to support her family, Raquel Velazquez didn't think she would ever be able to go back to school and earn the college degree she always wanted. Then she learned about the Weekend College at Lee College.

Through the Weekend College, students earn associate degrees in less than 2 years by attending classes only on Friday evenings and Saturdays. Funded through a \$2.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the program caters to adult learners and others who want to advance their careers but have to juggle school with work and other responsibilities.

The first of several free information sessions for prospective Weekend College students will be held from 7-8:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 23, in the Rundell Hall Conference Center on campus. Participants will hear from faculty, staff and current students about the five different program options – General Studies -Transfer in Allied Health, General Studies – Social Science Concentration, Business Administration and Management, Industrial Welding Technology and Computer and Network Maintenance Technology – and learn how to enroll in the program for the Fall 2017 semester. Information will be available in both English and Spanish, and refreshments will be provided.

Additional information sessions will be held March 4, April 13, May 21, June 10, July 18 and Aug. 2.

“It sounded like it was going to work for me,” said Velazquez, who picked up a flyer about the Weekend College while helping her daughter register for classes. She entered the program just as her son and daughter were getting started at Lee College and will be the first of them to graduate, earning an Associate of Applied Science degree in Business Administration and Management in May.

Of the first cohort of students to enroll in the Weekend College in Fall 2015, fully 65 percent are expected to complete their degree programs within three years or less – significantly more than the state average of 12 percent.

Grant director Victoria Marron attributes the high success rate to the unique design of the Weekend College program. The same groups of 18-25 students are kept together from enrollment to graduation or transfer. Courses are offered at multiple Lee College locations to make them more convenient, and many are delivered in a hybrid format that blends online and classroom instruction. Block scheduling ensures students know exactly which courses to take and when they will be held, and Weekend College courses are never dropped or filled to capacity. Once accepted into the program, students will always have the classes they need for their degree.

Weekend College students work with a completion coach who helps them apply for the program, secure financial aid and conquer any challenges that arise while they are enrolled in school and even after graduation. They also receive personalized advising, financial assistance and round-the-clock tutoring as needed.

Initially “terrified” to return to school and unsure how she would make time for everything on her lengthy to-do list, Velazquez said she now encourages others to consider the Weekend College. Having guaranteed classes and a cohort of classmates with whom she has forged strong connections make completing the program easier than she expected.

“Looking back on it, it just happens; time just flies and everything ends up working out,” Velazquez said. “What I tell people is that if I can find the time, you can find the time. If I can do it, you can do it. Ask questions, contact a counselor, get all the information you can and see if it’s a good fit for you.”