

Completion Coach motivates Weekend College students to persist to graduation

BAYTOWN, TX — As a community college graduate who took developmental classes, commuted to her Queens, N.Y., campus and juggled schoolwork with caring for her grandmother, Jessica Falla is especially well suited for her role as the Completion Coach for Lee College's innovative Weekend College program.

Whenever a Weekend College student needs help with a problem inside or outside of the classroom, Falla is only a phone call, text message, email or visit away — and many students credit the consistent, warm and knowledgeable support of their Completion Coach for motivating them to conquer challenges and persist toward their degree.

"The common ground is that everyone is filled to the brim with responsibilities. No one can be just a college student; they have all of these roles they play that have to remain intact even while they go to school," said Falla, who holds a Master of Education degree in school counseling.

"I understand what it's like being pulled in so many different directions, and I was always grateful for the personal interactions I had with staff and counselors when I was in college," she said. "I want students to walk into my office and feel they can relax and open up. Whatever barrier they're facing, I take it on with them and we will overcome it together."

Weekend College students can 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 balance classes with work and other responsibilities.

A free information session for prospective Weekend College students will be held from 7-8:30 p.m., Thursday, April 13, in the Rundell Hall Conference Center on campus. Faculty, staff and current students will outline the five different majors offered — Transfer in Allied Health, General Studies – Social Science Concentration, Business Administration and Management, Industrial Welding Technology and Computer and Network Maintenance Technology — and give details about enrolling for the Fall 2017 semester. Information will be available in English and Spanish, and refreshments will be provided.

Additional information sessions are set for May 21, June 10, July 18 and Aug. 2.

Weekend College students are kept together in small cohorts of 18-25 people 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. With block scheduling, students know exactly which courses to take and when they will be held — and once accepted into the program, they are guaranteed to always have the classes they need for their degree.

For her part as Completion Coach, Falla considers herself to be a student advocate. She regularly drops by classes and makes herself available on Fridays, Saturdays and any day students need her. She helps them decide if the Weekend College is the right

fit for their goals; connects them to campus and community resources; invites them to bring their children and families to college events; and breaks down the parts of applying for and attending college that overwhelm them the most.

It's also important to encourage students to take ownership of their education and be accountable for their own learning and success, said Falla, who enjoys being a role model and trusted adviser as they pursue higher education and work toward a brighter future.

"I get to know these students for two years and watch them graduate," she said. "We're very lucky to see them grow, adjust and reach their reward. It's a great and wonderful experience."