

Lee Research Examines FAST Program

Lee College is sharing key findings from an innovative research study examining Texas' Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) program, a state initiative designed to reduce the cost of dual credit courses and expand access to higher education for students with financial need.

In 2024, Lee College was the only community college in the nation selected to receive funding through the Dual Enrollment Research Fund. The college was awarded a two-year, \$160,000 grant to conduct a study titled, "A Mixed-Methods Study of Texas' Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) Program: Examining Implementation, Participation, and Academic Momentum." The research is led by Dr. Marissa Moreno and explores how the FAST program is being implemented across Texas and its impact on students, schools, and college access.

The Dual Enrollment Research Fund supports cutting-edge research that advances knowledge and best practices in dual enrollment, helping high school students earn college credit while completing their secondary education. Through this study, Lee College is contributing valuable insights that can help inform educational policy and program development both in Texas and nationwide.

This study examined how high school practitioners across a Texas metropolitan area understood and implemented the FAST program during its inaugural year. Researchers found that strong partnerships between community colleges and local school districts were essential to the program's early success.

High school counselors, administrators, and dual credit staff frequently relied on community college partners to interpret policy changes, navigate program requirements, and communicate opportunities to students and families. While participants reported challenges related to limited staffing, training needs, and the complexity of answering questions about a new state initiative, they also demonstrated creativity and determination in expanding awareness of the program.

Among the successful strategies identified in the study were family information events, targeted student outreach efforts, and collaborations with community organizations to connect eligible students with resources.

The study also examined outcomes for more than 3,000 students from the 2024 and 2025 graduating classes at one independent school district partner. Despite the persistent gap in dual-credit participation between FAST-eligible students and their peers, low-income students who did participate were just as likely to enroll in college and earned similar first-semester grades and college credits as their peers. These findings suggest that reducing tuition costs is an important step and underscore the need for continued efforts to expand access to dual credit opportunities for more low-income students.

"These findings underscore the vital role community colleges play in expanding educational opportunities for students," said Moreno. "Community colleges are not only providers of dual credit courses but also trusted partners that help schools navigate policy changes and ensure students have access to affordable pathways to higher education."

As the FAST program evolves, Moreno believes the study's findings can help educators, policymakers, and colleges improve access to higher education for low-income students in Texas and beyond.

"Ultimately, as Texas continues to expand access to dual credit, strengthening these partnerships can help reduce future college cost and increase pathways to college success," said Moreno.