

# President Villanueva Earns Phi Theta Kappa's Highest Honor

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (PTK) has named Dr. Lynda Villanueva, president of Lee College, a recipient of the Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction, the society's highest honor for community college presidents. Dr. Villanueva will be recognized during PTK Catalyst, Phi Theta Kappa's annual international convention.

The Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction honors college presidents who have demonstrated sustained, exceptional commitment to student success through academic excellence, leadership development, and access to opportunity. Nominees must have served in their role for at least five years and are selected based on nominations submitted by Phi Theta Kappa students on their campus.

"To be chosen by our own students is the greatest honor of my presidency," said Dr. Villanueva. "Phi Theta Kappa students represent excellence, discipline, and heart. They balance work, family, and academics, and still choose to lead and serve. That they would see value in my leadership is profoundly meaningful to me. They are the very reason we do this work."

Since becoming president of Lee College in 2020, Dr. Villanueva has been recognized for a leadership style grounded in optimism, momentum, and a clear focus on student success. Students describe a president who brings energy and intention to rebuilding opportunity — one who is committed to creating pathways that help students begin strong and persist with confidence.

Throughout her presidency, Dr. Villanueva has emphasized the importance of early academic success as a foundation for long-term achievement. Her leadership reflects a belief that colleges must set clear expectations, provide encouragement, and help students understand the value of maintaining high standards from the start. Under her direction, Lee College has fostered a culture that motivates students to take ownership of their academic performance and to see excellence as attainable.

Dr. Villanueva is also known for her openness and responsiveness, particularly in moments of renewal and growth. Students and campus leaders credit her willingness to listen, collaborate, and support emerging initiatives with strengthening student engagement and leadership. Her approach reinforces the message that student success is a shared responsibility—one that requires presence, partnership, and follow-through.

At the center of Dr. Villanueva's leadership is a belief in potential. She consistently communicates confidence in students' ability to rise to expectations and to shape their own futures through persistence and effort. This message has helped cultivate a campus environment where students feel encouraged to strive, improve, and remain focused on their goals.

"Dr. Villanueva leads with clarity, encouragement, and a deep belief in students," said Dr. Lynn Tincher-Ladner, President and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa. "She understands that leadership is about helping students start strong and stay the course. This recognition reflects the appreciation of students who have experienced her commitment firsthand."

The Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction is named in honor of the late Dr. Shirley B. Gordon, Phi Theta Kappa's longest-serving Board Chair and a lifelong advocate for community college students.

#### About Phi Theta Kappa

Phi Theta Kappa is the first honor society recognizing the academic achievement of students at associate degree-granting colleges and helping them grow as scholars and leaders. The Society serves more than 4.4 million members and nearly 1,250 chapters worldwide. Learn more at [ptk.org](http://ptk.org).