

Laredo College receives over \$5M in funds for STEM, civics instruction

On Monday, Oct. 4, Laredo College and Congressman Henry Cuellar announced that the college has been awarded with \$5.25 million for the Laredo College LEAPS Power Project and the 2021 Citizenship and Integration Program.

The Learning, Excellence and Academic Preparedness in STEM (LEAPS) POWER Project's mission is to help students majoring in science, technology, engineering and mathematics overcome various academic and financial barriers.

This multi-million-dollar research grant will be in support of the LEAPS Promoting Optimal Wellness and Emotional Resilience (POWER) Project, which aims to increase the number of degree-seeking Hispanic and low-income students in STEM fields and increase the number of articulations with universities.

"We are excited about continuing the wonderful work of helping students succeed. This is the third Title III STEM Articulation grant for the college. This new funding provides undergraduate research, advising, mentoring, tutoring as well as wrap around support to promote optimal wellness and emotional resilience aggravated by COVID-19," stated Dr. Nora Garza, Vice President for Resource Development and External Affairs.

Congressman Henry Cuellar, a staunch advocate for better opportunities in higher education across Texas, was also instrumental in securing this funding for Laredo College in support of STEM education.

"These funds will allow Laredo College to increase Hispanic students' sense of belonging in higher education and STEM careers. Quality STEM education can prepare students for their future and allow them to reach their full potential. Through these funds, the LEAPS Power



Project is now a reality. I look forward to watching student graduation and transfer rates in STEM education dramatically increase," said Congressman Cuellar. "Furthermore, the Azteca Economic Development will support part time civics instructors who guide applicants through the U.S. citizenship process. I fully support Dreamers and other migrants who come to our country to learn and be productive citizens. I will continue to support all students who strive to improve their lives through education."

The LEAPS POWER Project grant was obtained through the Hispanic Serving Institutions—STEM and Articulation Program at the U.S. Department of Education. It stipulates that its goals are to investigate the impact of undergraduate research opportunities and self-efficacy on student retention as defined by the students' persistence through graduation and/or core completion. This funding will be geared toward 100 Hispanic students pursuing STEM majors yearly, five faculty partners, nine staff members, four academic tutors and five research mentors.

Among the project's goals are to increase the number of Hispanic and low-income students attaining degrees in STEM as well as developing and enhancing model transfer and articulation

agreements with other higher education institutions. There are four components to address the goals and objectives of the grant—academic and student services, articulation agreements, affordable paths to knowledge and skills and promoting optimal wellness and emotional resilience.

Moreover, the 2021 Citizenship and Integration Program from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will provide funding to enroll a minimum of 200 students to navigate the citizenship process. The \$250,000 grant funding will also support the recruitment of an additional 250 applicants and cover two years of civics instruction and salary costs of the program manager, program intake assistant and civics instructors. Partnering with Azteca Economic Development and Preservation to offer application services as a subcontractor, Laredo College will help area residents secure United States citizenship through this initiative.

"We are honored about being selected as one of the recipients of the Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Integration Grant. We are very pleased that we can help the community in gaining their citizenship through this important initiative," Laredo College Dean of Community Education Sandra Cortez said.

LC, TAMIU renew shared commitment through MOU agreement

With the stroke of multiple pens, a long-cherished agreement between Laredo's champions of higher education has been renewed.

In ceremonies Thursday, the leaders of Laredo College (LC) and Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) once again committed to a shared path benefiting students and their higher education goals with a renewed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The MOU was signed in TAMIU's Sue and Radcliffe Killam Library.

TAMIU President Dr. Pablo Arenaz said the accord signals a renewal of the institutions' shared commitment and vision for higher education here, something he finds especially affirming in today's climate of challenge.

"This MOU helps to codify something we both cherish: a shared commitment to higher education and our students. While the past 18+ months of the COVID-19 Pandemic have brought real challenges for higher education in our community and region, we have both been sustained by the essential missions we deliver for students and their brighter futures. This MOU affirms that and encourages us to continue to do more," Dr. Arenaz said.

LC Interim President Dr. Marisela Rodriguez Tijerina concurred, noting the MOU helps make transfers seamless.

"This agreement is another example of how LC and TAMIU work together for the benefit of our students and community. It provides students a direct path in transferring seamlessly to TAMIU and assists them throughout their educational journey and completion," Dr. Tijerina added. "I look forward to collaborating more with TAMIU and continuing to build more opportunities for our students."

The MOU serves to set forth major principles of mutual cooperation and expectations between the two institutions.



Among provisions are the development of web-published transfer guides for degree programs that share the acceptance of credits applicable to the plan's degree program. The MOU also sets in place institutional collaborations, guidance on admissions and recruiting and the opportunity for the completion of an associate's degree or reverse transfer. The renewed MOU remains in force for a period of five years and is subject to renewal or modification by mutual written consent of both parties.