

Cal State LA receives College Futures Foundation grant to increase transfer student success in STEM fields



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Cal State LA has been awarded a \$300,000 grant from the College Futures Foundation (CFF) to create new baccalaureate pathways aimed at increasing transfer student success in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

The grant will establish the Successful Transfer and Retention (STAR) program at Cal State LA, which supports CFF's work to ensure that more students who reflect California's diversity will complete a bachelor's degree.

The STAR program will focus on the development and implementation of new pathways to bachelor's degree programs in the university's College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology (ECST) by collaborating with local community colleges.

"Through the STAR program, we are looking forward to establishing engineering and technology pathway agreements with community colleges and developing a pre- and post-transfer peer mentoring program, thereby enhancing institutional capacity to support transfer students," said San Gabriel resident Jane Dong, a Cal State LA professor who is the grant's leading principal investigator.

Funded by the two-year CFF grant, the program will also be coordinated by co-principal investigators Daniel Galvan, director of acceleration initiatives and student engagement, and Rupa Purasinghe, chair of the Department of Technology.

The STAR program will develop pathways to increase transfer success in all ECST majors, including the newly developed bachelor's degree program in engineering technology. The new Engineering Technology (ETEC) program has fewer math and science requirements and will prepare students for high-demand professional careers in engineering technology.

"Establishing guided pathways to the new ETEC program will enhance the likelihood of transfer and baccalaureate degree attainment for students who enter community colleges in technical or vocational programs in applied technology, many of whom are underrepresented minorities in STEM," said Dong, the associate dean of ECST. "This will open new doors for those students in the vocational programs."

Overall, Dong noted that the STAR pathways program seeks to address key challenges that transfer students frequently encounter at two-year and four-year schools, such as "navigating the transfer process, loss of credits during transfer and post-transfer academic shock."

With the improved articulation, guided pathways and holistic support from peer mentors, the plan is for the program to increase the number of transfer students and help them to attain bachelor's degrees in the STEM fields.

Advising resources and a peer mentoring program will be developed to support community college students to navigate through the pathways to a bachelor's degree.

A supportive peer community structure will also be created to strengthen the sense of belonging among new transfer students and to accelerate their degree progress once they are at Cal State LA.

Simultaneously, the project will seek to identify effective strategies for pathway implementation that can be transferable to other institutions.

"We expect that our project will lead to closer ties between Cal State LA and our local community college partners, and produce model transfer pathways and a peer-mentoring program for engineering and technology degree programs that could be adopted throughout the state," said ECST Dean Emily Allen.