



INSTITUTE for EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE
Informing Decisions · Improving Practice · Increasing Student Success

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Ascendium Awards New \$2 Million Grant to the Institute for Evidence-Based Change Supporting Its ‘Caring Campus Initiative’

San Diego, Calif. Ascendium Education Group, one of the nation’s leading higher education philanthropies, has awarded a second grant to the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) for the “Caring Campus Initiative.”

In addition to expanding our work with college staff to increase student retention by cultivating a Caring Campus environment, the new round of Ascendium funding will allow us to focus on faculty and their role in increasing student success. This new grant also supports IEBC’s work with the Community College Research Center (CCRC) to better understand how the initiative works to change college culture and improve student outcomes.

The objective of Caring Campus is to increase student retention and success in community colleges by creating and cultivating Caring Campus environments through intentional behaviors by faculty and staff to improve students’ sense of caring and connectedness to the college. “We believe there are common behaviors that better connect students with staff and faculty,” said IEBC President and CEO Dr. Brad Phillips. “It’s a means to an end. The means are behaviors – the end is student success.

“We really believe this project realizes IEBC’s mission of improving student success and closing equity gaps. We hear a lot of words about meeting students where they are. Caring Campus really puts this into action,” said Phillips.

Ascendium funding will allow IEBC to invite two groups of seven colleges each to participate in Caring Campus faculty initiative, with each group running for one year across two consecutive years.

CCRC researchers will address two dimensions of the program in their evaluation. First, they will seek to understand the implementation of Caring Campus project activities, including those that establish conditions conducive to innovative change efforts. Second, CCRC will assess how the Caring Campus program affects college culture and student success.

Three Caring Campus groups will be established for research: colleges implementing Caring Campus among staff only, colleges implementing Caring Campus among faculty only, and colleges who have implemented the work with both staff and faculty.

“We’re excited to support this opportunity to learn more about how campus culture can serve to promote student success rather than impede it,” said Amy Kerwin, Vice President of Education Philanthropy at Ascendium.

“This is a great opportunity for us to work with CCRC and tease out what it takes to implement this approach and how it affects students.” said IEBC Vice President Jordan E. Horowitz. “How does this behavior change lead to culture change?”

“We want to learn whether the problems we are trying to address are addressed through student connectedness. The research is there. We are trying to apply lessons from the research on student connectedness and success.”

Previous research has documented that students leave college because they do not feel connected to the institution (e.g., *Leaving College* by Vincent Tinto, 1993). Caring Campus recognizes and leverages the value of connectedness to increase the likelihood that students will continue towards, and succeed in attaining, their educational goals. Faculty and staff interaction with students can set the stage for successful enrollment, persistence, and completion. It is particularly important for students from historically underserved populations and students less familiar with college to feel welcome and that they belong in college.

About the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC)

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders – community colleges, universities, K-12 school systems employers, and others – use evidence-based data, collaboration, and coaching to make informed decisions and craft solutions that improve practice and dramatically increase student success through our innovative approach. Learn more about IEBC at www.iebcnow.org.

About Ascendium

Known for decades as Great Lakes, we’re now Ascendium Education Group. While our name has changed, our mission remains the same: helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. We invest in projects designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates, apprenticeships and internships, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Our work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels — with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. To learn more, visit ascendiumphilanthropy.org.

About Community College Research Center (CCRC)

CCRC studies community colleges because they provide critical access to postsecondary education and are uniquely positioned to promote equity and social mobility in the United States. Our mission is to conduct research that helps these institutions strengthen opportunities and improve outcomes for their students, particularly those from underserved populations. CCRC is based at Teachers College, Columbia University. To learn more, visit <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/>