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A Conversation with Brad Phillips and Jordan Horowitz

It's not easy to get IEBC President and CEO Brad Phillips and IEBC Vice President Jordan Horowitz to find time to pause and reflect on the impressive body of work IEBC has accomplished over the past year.

The upcoming year will be no different, with a new grant from Ascendium Education Group supporting a new *Caring Campus* initiative with two new groups of seven colleges. In addition to expanding the program working with staff and faculty to increase student retention by cultivating a caring campus environment, the new round of Ascendium funding will also allow IEBC to work with the Community College Research Center (CCRC) to evaluate the initiative's impact on students, faculty, and staff.

As 2019 comes to a close, Brad and Jordan reflected on the positive work done to date, and the potential in the year ahead.

Q: Brad and Jordan, what do you hope to learn from working with faculty under the new grant?

Brad Phillips: Before we do any coaching, we help the colleges identify faculty who already have high retention and success rates. They may be using exactly the same pedagogy. When you interview them, without exception, the ones who have higher success have better connections with their students – pedagogy does not seem to matter. Students who have an adult in authority who really cares about them is the key. This may be the first person who has ever really cared about them.

Jordan Horowitz: We sincerely believe this project realizes the underlying social justice aspects of our work. A big part of Caring Campus, and a reason it's called Caring Campus, is that people throughout the college need to accept who their students are. Today's community college students live full and complicated lives in addition to the challenges of achieving their educational goals. We hear a lot of words about meeting students where they are, a lot of jargon and quotes about it. Caring Campus really puts this into action.



IEBC President/CEO Brad Phillips

Q. Under the first grant, IEBC's work focused on staff. What differences do you expect from the work under your second grant with faculty?

Brad: Students cannot graduate unless they stay in class. If you stay in class, you're more likely to get a passing grade. If you get a passing grade, about 80 percent of students persist. This work helps faculty better connect with students on a non-academic level. Currently, there are many pedagogical tactics and interventions. Our work isn't about that. IEBC is adding the human component to what they do.

Jordan: This is a great opportunity for us to tease out what makes this work with all elements of the college. What is the real impact among faculty, staff, leadership and students, and how does this behavior change lead to culture change?

I started out as a therapist for many years before moving into research. Lay folks believe you need to change people's attitudes to get them to change their behavior. In fact, research shows changing behavior leads to attitude change. And attitude change among a group of people is culture change.



Chief Operating Officer Jordan Horowitz

Q. Please describe CCRC's role in its partnership with IEBC.

Brad: We want CCRC to explicate how the Caring Campus process unfolds at a college, and really help the field try to understand, based on the culture of the college, how best to implement and make this work stick. We would like them to help us really understand the factors that help Caring Campus take hold.

Jordan: We hope CCRC will help us with the student perspective and why this works for them. Second, 'How can you change the culture?' We believe this is an important question contributing to the literature on college culture and how colleges change. How do you go from changing behavior to changing culture? It's the bigger focus of CCRC's work. It will backward map to the impact of Caring Campus and similar programs.

Q. Why does IEBC use the coaching model with Caring Campus?

Jordan: This is not one and done professional development, where someone from IEBC leads an all-day, all-staff training. Coaches do two things: bring instructions about the fundamentals, and then ensure folks know them; and they also create system change across a team. That's why we adopted this coaching model. We don't go in and say "this is what has to happen." We work with a group over a considerable period of time. An important part of the work is between coaching sessions, where participants get peer-to-peer feedback. This improves acceptance, and it builds momentum.

After the final coaching session, the coach is still available and around. We maintain connections with leadership. How about these behavioral commitments being implemented? Where are their gaps? The coach can help the college support institutionalization and sustainability.

Brad: This work is about faculty and staff supporting each other with administrative support to make the commitments a reality. We stress this in our coaching. The old adage about teaching a person to fish rather than giving them a fish is what our coaching is about. We know that the future is dynamic – the constant in our world is change. By coaching colleges they have a model to use and adapt to changes as they occur – all in the name of improving student connection and ultimately, student persistence and success. Using this approach, both faculty and staff love to participate – in fact surveying institutions that have engaged in this work, faculty and staff cite that they are more satisfied with their jobs.

Q. How do you see the Caring Campus program making a positive impact on student success?

Brad: We believe there are common behaviors that better connect students with faculty and staff. It's a means to an end. The means are behavior – the end is student success. Colleges have all sorts of programs, policies and procedures. But none include the human component. IEBC's Caring Campus includes the human component.

Jordan: I don't want to set us above as much as set us apart. We are willing to look outside academic success for solutions. The research is there – but turning it into an effective intervention is what sets Caring Campus apart.

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