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Caring Campus

## **IEBC Caring Campus Coaches Shine the Light on Staff**

Participants in IEBC’s Caring Campus initiative learn the importance of their meaningful connection with students. IEBC uses a coaching model to involve staff in student success in a strategic, systematic way – often leveraging behaviors already in practice among staff who don’t fully realize the vital role they can play.

IEBC Caring Campus Coach Jean Petty provides hands-on guidance to staff at campuses participating in the program. The former community college dean and career pathways consultant’s résumé gives her the ideal skills to lead staff in embracing the program’s key principles, including her own personal stumbles as a community college student before finding her way with help from dedicated staff.



*Jean Petty*

“When I was a dean at Rio Hondo (Community College in Whittier, California), it was the custodial staff who were instrumental in coming to me and saying, ‘Hey, Richard’s car isn’t working, and he’s in danger of dropping out.’ Then we could step in and help,” said Petty.

“Most people on community college campuses are very caring. With the Caring Campus approach, once they start to have input on behaviors making their college more respectful, more inclusive, and better at having students stay on, they really want to help students and help with the effectiveness of getting students to stay.”

Petty conducts IEBC’s series of coaching sessions with staff at each participant campus. “The meetings are fun and interactive, and they are designed that way on purpose,” she explained, “I don’t do much lecturing. I set the stage, and they do a lot of work together.

“It allows staff to think, ‘What small changes can be made to give students a sense of belonging and feeling appreciated?’ It’s not about layering on a new process, or a whole new project. Caring Campus is about enhancing and acknowledging what they’re already doing,” she added.

Petty says staff wants those meaningful connections with students.

“They’re gaining new skills along the way they can take forward after the coaching sessions are completed,” said Petty. “This is just the beginning for them. They now have the tools and the support they need. They know the barriers students deal with, and they have a new way to help them navigate forward. Later, they can say, ‘What else can we do?’ and they have the tools from these sessions to figure this out.

“It’s wonderful to watch the staff move from, thinking, ‘I’m not sure what this is all about or why I’m here,’ to the light going on. It’s always very humbling to listen to them,” said Petty.

Petty says staff frequently have far more opportunity than faculty to interact with students, from helping a student fill out a financial aid form to providing directions on campus.

“Whether the encounters are positive or negative, they all have a huge impact on whether a student stays in college,” said Petty.

“Given the opportunity to talk about a few of those experiences, it can almost bring us to tears. With this work, they are able to reach more students. I like to think as a Caring Campus coach, I help fuel those passions. I help give them a road map, I help them sustain a long term commitment to become an even more Caring Campus down the road,” said Petty.

Petty said everyone involved in Caring Campus benefits from understanding the reality many students face. “We sometimes forget their whole world does not revolve around school. They are older. They come from families who never stepped on a college campus. It can be an intimidating place.

“But when they get a warm welcome, they feel more at home. What more could you ask from this work? It’s a whole area that’s been overlooked,” said Petty.

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IEBC is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders — community colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, employers, and others — use data and collaboration to make informed decisions and craft solutions that improve practice and dramatically increase student success. Learn more about IEBC at [www.iebcnow.org](http://www.iebcnow.org).