

Caring Campus: Engaging Professional Staff in Student Success Efforts

Professional staff are the unsung heroes of the community colleges, providing critical connections that have great potential for expansion and student benefit. Unfortunately, these professionals are rarely included as part of the planning and implementation of community college student success initiatives. This omission can be corrected when they are introduced to system-changing efforts, become more engaged in the development and implementation of campus-wide interventions and have a clear understanding of their role in student success efforts and other college-wide initiatives.

Caring Campus provides colleges with the means to involve professional staff in student success efforts by coaching them to identify and implement behavioral commitments intentionally and campus-wide. These behavioral commitments create a culture that signals to students the college cares about them. They also foster a greater sense of connectedness between the student and college. Caring Campus helps build a campus that acknowledges the important role professional staff need to play in all student success efforts.

IEBC's Caring Campus Initiative

IEBC believes, and the research has demonstrated, that students come where they feel welcome and stay where they feel cared about. Professional staff can have a great impact on students' feeling of connectedness to the college. Caring Campus is a proven method for engaging with professional staff that ensures their deep involvement in student success. It involves coaching of professional staff. This means working with every student service and operations department that engages with students—directly or indirectly—at every point in the student's experience, from connection to completion. Every department identifies successful strategies and makes a series of “behavioral commitments” that guide how they interact with students.

This is not traditional customer service training. A coach instructs in the fundamentals and directs strategy. That is what IEBC's *Caring Campus* coaches do with professional staff. Coaches transmit knowledge about the fundamentals of what can be done to increase student connectedness to the college, which leads to increases in student success. We also help departments and divisions develop a strategy, grounded in behavioral commitments, that they can easily implement campus-wide.

Creating Caring Campuses: The Process

The *Caring Campus* process provides new support for staff involvement in student success efforts. The five parts of *Caring Campus California* work are: kickoff event, coaching visits with ongoing support, a joint implementation session for leadership and staff, a final rollout session, and continued monitoring.



Kickoff Event

IEBC meets with college leadership in advance of the first coaching session to ensure the president and cabinet, department leadership, and others understand the *Caring Campus* process and their role. This helps ensure leadership supports the initiative, understands what is expected of their participating staff, and will provide the resources and support required for successful implementation and institutionalization. This kickoff event may be conducted virtually, via videoconference, if necessary.

Coaching Sessions

Following the leadership orientation, IEBC coaches conduct coaching sessions with staff. These may be conducted as two half-day on-site sessions or four two-hour videoconference sessions, depending on the college's status providing services on-site. Staff representatives from all student-facing departments and divisions are invited to attend, as well as others the college may decide to include. During these sessions, the *Caring Campus* coach assists staff in identifying the behavioral commitments they will make regarding face-to-face and/or virtual interactions with students that strengthen their connection to the college. Next, staff develop implementation plans for each behavioral commitment. Staff also create communication and monitoring plans for their campus. They also plan for the leadership follow-up session to address institutionalization and sustainability.

Examples of behavioral commitments include:

- Commit to calling the student by name, making eye contact, smiling, saying hello, acknowledging students as people.
- Commit to ensuring the student's issue is resolved before they leave.
- Commit to knowing what each department does and where to identify staff with specific assignments (e.g., veterans, disabled students) and skills (e.g., languages spoken).
- Commit to making warm referrals; contacting a person in the department where the student is being sent, ensuring the student knows how to get there, and following up.

Ongoing Support

Staff work between meetings to finalize commitments and plans. Throughout the process, IEBC coaches are on-call to respond to questions and troubleshoot challenges via telephone, email, videoconferencing and other internet technologies.

Leadership Follow-up Session

Leadership and staff come together for a joint session with their coach to review the work and plan for institutionalization and sustainability. As with other sessions, this may be virtual or face-to-face. Staff present their behavioral commitments to leadership, who identify ways to support, monitor, and celebrate them.

Final Session

IEBC develops and conducts a final session customized to the needs of the college. At some colleges we participate in convocations to roll-out the initiative campus-wide. Sometimes we meet with leadership to discuss implementation challenges and strategize institutionalization efforts. At other colleges, the participating staff request a supplemental facilitated coaching session to work on implementation challenges as they transition from a task force that identifies problems and solutions to a working group that facilitates ongoing implementation and meets emerging challenges.

Continued Monitoring

IEBC continues to work with the college's institutional researcher to monitor impact on student persistence and success. We also remain available to coach colleges to address sustainability of *Caring Campus*.

As a result of this process, professional staff become deeply engaged with students—intentionally and campus-wide—on a level that has not occurred before. The core benefit of this work is making a connection with students, many of whom have not had an adult who has cared about them in an educational system. This connection cannot be overestimated.

It is also important to note that the *Caring Campus* process also integrates professional staff with the work of the faculty in support of student success initiatives, thus creating a true partnership among colleagues. An unanticipated benefit of this process is that, in evaluations of the initiative and its implementation at their college, staff report being happier about their work and that there is more collegiality among faculty and staff members. *Caring Campus* leads to culture change.

For more information, contact IEBC at info@iebcnow.org or visit our website at www.iebcnow.org.

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