



INSTITUTE *for* EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE



## Caring Campus

**PROVIDING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES  
IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES:  
A *CARING CAMPUS* APPROACH**

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**GUIDE THREE**  
**INCORPORATING RACIAL EQUITY  
INTO *CARING CAMPUS***

# GUIDE THREE

## INCORPORATING RACIAL EQUITY INTO CARING CAMPUS

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Following the publication in spring 2020 of the popular first two guides in our series *Providing Student Support Services in Extraordinary Times: A Caring Campus Approach*, we are pleased to offer this third guide. The first two guides addressed professional staff connecting with students in a virtual environment and supporting campus professional staff. This third guide, *Incorporating Racial Equity into Caring Campus* addresses how professional staff and others can incorporate concepts of racial equity into *Caring Campus*; and specifically, the behavioral commitments.

IEBC's *Caring Campus* is based on research that shows students who feel more connected to their college are more likely to persist from semester to semester and complete their educational goals. Increasing connectedness, therefore, especially in a virtual environment, goes a long way toward increasing the likelihood of student persistence and increased student success.

Professional staff play an important role in ensuring student connectedness. Guides One and Two include both structural and behavioral recommendations. Both guides provide solid approaches for staff helping students to stay connected to, and supported by, the college in normal times and in this current environment. Guide Three incorporates intentional behaviors through a racial equity lens as we ask: How do we ensure that professional staff are able to support all of our students—especially students of color—effectively and respectfully? How can racial equity be integrated into the connections that professional staff have with students?



Guide Three, *Incorporating Racial Equity into Caring Campus*, is designed to be useful, usable and actionable. It is not just a guide about what to do and why, but also includes suggestions about how to engage in the recommended behaviors.

*Incorporating Racial Equity into Caring Campus* identifies the most common *Caring Campus* behavioral commitments and presents three racial equity-related concepts: implicit bias, asset- versus deficit-based thinking and action, and equity mindedness. Finally, we share strategies on how to implement behavioral commitments in ways that take these concepts into account.

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

We make a number of assumptions as we provide guidance to connect with students in ways that promote racial equity. We assume that professional staff and students...

- ▶ are primarily working at home with possibilities that, while at home, other obligations may take them away from work during normal business hours;
- ▶ have contact with one another and, for staff, their supervisors;
- ▶ have access to a computer and telephone that they may have to share at times;
- ▶ have normal stressors and challenges during a shelter-in-place order; and
- ▶ are willing and able to continue their work, doing their best to adjust to the modifications in their work environment.

Professional staff members are the unsung heroes of community colleges. Many, like their faculty and administrative colleagues, hold advanced degrees. They are dedicated to the mission of the college and to supporting students they serve. Many professional staff attended the college where they are now employed and feel a strong, almost familial, connection to the institution. That said, everyone is working under stressful conditions today.

## **CARING CAMPUS AND IMPROVING RACIAL EQUITY**

The killing of George Floyd and the subsequent nationwide reckoning of discrimination against persons of color has made salient issues of racial equity in higher education. There are a number of excellent organizations working with colleges around the country to address racial inequity. This is deep work that takes place over at least a year and perhaps much longer. *Caring Campus* occupies a different space. It is in response to requests from our colleges that we seek to help educators with specific, easily implemented ways that the most common *Caring Campus* behavioral commitments can be sensitive to, and work to improve, racial equity.

## POPULAR CARING CAMPUS BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENTS

IEBC's *Caring Campus* team has developed, in consultation with the many colleges we work with, behavioral commitments that first were developed in face-to-face environments and then modified for implementation in a virtual environment.

The behavioral commitments in the table below are the most common behavioral commitments from over 50 *Caring Campus* colleges.

FACE-TO-FACE	VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT
<p><b>Ten Foot Rule:</b> Whenever a student is within ten feet and seems to need assistance, take the initiative to approach them. Say hello, smile, and use a positive tone.</p>	<p><b>Reaching Out:</b> If your college requests and/or allows, reach out to students via phone, email, and text to let them know you're available to answer questions, respond to concerns, etc.</p>
<p><b>Nametags:</b> Wear name badges or lanyards with the college name on them so that students will know who to approach with questions.</p>	<p><b>Give Your Information Up Front:</b> Start each contact with your name and department. Ask for the student's name and contact information in case you get disconnected.</p>
<p><b>Cross-Department Awareness:</b> Learn about other departments so you know where to send students. Maintain accurate and up-to-date detailed directories.</p>	<p><b>Cross-Department Awareness:</b> Learn about other departments so you know where to refer students. Maintain accurate and up-to-date detailed directories.</p>
<p><b>Warm Referrals:</b> Call ahead to identify someone who will assist the student. If possible, walk the student to the office they need to get to. Follow up to ensure the student's issue is resolved.</p>	<p><b>Warm Referrals:</b> Use the student's callback information to call the receiving office, make the connection on the student's behalf, and ask them to contact the student. Follow-up.</p>
<p><b>First Week Greetings:</b> During the first week of classes, set up information tables and meet students in the parking lot; welcome students to the college.</p>	<p><b>Reach Out to Students:</b> At key times, such as the first week of classes or as dates to drop courses and file for degrees approach, reach out to students—especially first time in college students—to ensure they have the information they need.</p>

Although these behavioral commitments are easy to implement, it is not evident how these behaviors can be authentically practiced with all students. We asked ourselves, "How can colleges ensure these behaviors are supporting improvements in racial equity, so all students feel connected to their college in ways that promote success?"

## THREE RACIAL EQUITY CONCEPTS

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Based on the feedback and examples from *Caring Campus* colleges, we address three racial equity concepts to support existing behavioral commitments. The first concept is **implicit (or unconscious) bias**, which refers to the development of attitudes, opinions and/or stereotypes that affect our knowledge, understanding, behaviors, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases are formed over a lifetime and are the result of our experience and what we learn from the media, advertising, our families and friends. Micro aggressions are a common example of implicit bias.

**Micro aggressions are defined as the everyday, intentional or unintentional behaviors that communicate bias.**

The second relevant concept is **asset- versus deficit-based thinking and action**. Deficit-based thinking leads us to look at students as needing to be fixed. Many students come to college feeling like impostors, which can be exacerbated by a deficit-based mindset on the part of leadership, faculty, and staff. Many students question whether or not they belong in college. An asset-based mindset begins with acknowledging that every student brings a rich set of experiences and culture to our institutions. Different is not less-than. If we are serious about making improvements in racial equity, it is important to build on student assets and support student success. We often hear the phrase, “We must meet our students where they are.” Asset-based mindsets make this real.

Finally, we address **equity-mindedness**, which, according to the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California,



“refers to the perspective or mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes. These practitioners are willing to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their students, and critically reassess their own practices. It also requires that practitioners are race-conscious and aware of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American Higher Education.” Equity-mindedness, therefore, is about owning the educator role and responsibilities to address the needs of each and every student.

These concepts applied to *Caring Campus* work, afford the opportunity for all educators to discuss how to practice equity-minded behaviors. In this framework, engaging in *Caring Campus* behaviors is a way for college professionals to consciously make connections with students that are sensitive to each student’s needs.

## ENSURING BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENTS ARE EQUITABLE

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Now, let's examine how behavioral commitments can be implemented in ways that are sensitive to racial equity.

One college noted that engaging in the Ten Foot Rule (see Table on page 3) may be perceived by Black students as a message of confrontation. Black students have reported times when they were in a store and a clerk came up to them, out of many customers in the store, and asked if they needed help. The perception students have is that the clerk is questioning their presence and purpose in the store. Therefore, a campus employee approaching a student of color can be perceived along those same lines. So how can the behavioral commitment of the Ten Foot Rule be conveyed as warm and supportive, not confrontational or suspicious?

Positive Psychology tells us that it is important for the professional staff member to smile. A smile gives off a warm and welcoming message and those who smile are perceived as non-threatening. Smiling also produces hormones in our brain that make us feel good. In addition to smiling, the greeting can be modified from "Can I help you?" to "How are you doing today?" Then the professional staff member can ask if the student needs anything. This represents a change from looking at the student from a deficit-based perspective to an asset-based perspective. Although the intent begins with a recognition this student might need assistance, the question does not assume the same.

Nametags create an environment where those who can assist is explicit and obvious, which doesn't place the possibly embarrassing burden of knowing whom to ask upon the student. It is important that students believe that they can approach a staff member for any number of reasons. But students need to know who on campus can respond knowledgeably. This is why nametags are so important. Nametags are an invitation to friendliness and are a badge of experience. It is important that professional staff members wear their nametags.

It is important for the professional staff member to introduce themselves first and then ask the student their name. Asking the student their name, rather than first asking for their student identification number, is an important way of acknowledging the human-ness of every student. It ensures we are pronouncing a student's name properly, which is a sign of respect. It is also important for the staff member to not start out questioning why the students is seeking help, but rather to ask the student "How is your day going?" or "I'm glad to see you!"

Warm referrals can address racial equity as well. How we make referrals, and to which staff, can reflect our implicit biases and expose our deficit assumptions about certain groups of students. When done properly, a warm referral can demonstrate equity-mindedness. A warm referral means calling ahead so we can refer a student to a specific staff member in the receiving department and following up to ensure the student's needs were met. It also can include walking a student over to another department. These are equity-minded behaviors that send a message that it's all right not to know.

Our last behavioral commitment concerns first week greetings during non-COVID-19 times. It is important to go where students congregate. Setting up welcome tables and greeting students when they enter from a parking lot or a bus stop is important, but it is also important to set up welcome tables near the gym, food services and other areas. Staff need to get out from behind the table and greet all students. Staff cannot be selective based on implicit biases that get reflected in personal choices about which students to approach.

For this final virtual behavioral commitment, it is important to reach out to all students in high-risk groups. In this way the college is taking responsibility for connecting with students, is not waiting for evidence of non-connectedness, and not assuming the student's lack of connecting reflects a deficiency. *Caring Campus* colleges have reached out to students who had yet to login to their course, students in geographic areas with poor internet reception, and students in low socio-economic areas who are most likely to be in need of hardware such as laptops or tablets, among others. Plans need to be in place to address non-English speaking households.

## SUMMARY

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Colleges are complex and intimidating places. Professional staff can help all students successfully engage with the college bureaucracy and help them to “do college”. They can do so by treating all students equitably and in a caring manner. In fact, a recent report from Unidos US, reported that students who were the survivors—those who have completed their educational goals—shared that one of the key factors to their success was having a college official who had their back. Students will face multiple challenges to academic success: not only institution-related, but also family- and work-related. They are not always able to negotiate these difficulties successfully and stay in college. Having a staff member who cares about them and their academic success, is a key component of *Caring Campus*. And one of the ways to develop that relationship is to engage with students. We must recognize and get past our implicit biases and engage in behaviors that help all students feel welcome and cared about in an authentic manner.

*Caring Campus* is about making sure that all students feel welcome and cared about. Practicing these behavioral commitments with all students will go a long way to improving student success and racial equity.

For further information about this Guide, Guide One, Guide Two or any other services that IEBC provides, please contact:

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INSTITUTE *for* EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE

**The Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders – community colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, employers and others – use coaching, collaboration and data to make informed decisions and craft solutions that improve practice and dramatically increase student success. We partner with our clients to successfully implement customized evidence-based solutions to today's most pressing issues. Learn more about IEBC at [www.iebcnow.org](http://www.iebcnow.org).