



Caring Campus Faculty: Improving Student Connectedness

If students don't feel connected to the college they attend, they are far less likely to return next term, regardless of the academic interventions and support services the college has provided.

Community colleges are working hard to implement research-based interventions and supports that have been demonstrated to increase educational outcomes. Yet, the needle on student success is not moving in a meaningful way. It's time to look beyond academic and student services support solutions to explore other aspects of the student experience that contribute to success. It's time to focus on connectedness.

Throughout our community college work, students tell us they want to feel cared about. They want to connect with an educator who looks like them. But barring that, they want someone who “gets” them. This is particularly salient as community college students are more diverse than ever and our current ranks of faculty have yet to catch up. This means that community college educators must do all they can to demonstrate they understand the lives of their students. And making connections are powerful motivators for students to succeed.

IEBC's Caring Campus Initiative

IEBC has a proven method for engaging with faculty to create a *Caring Campus* that ensures they are deeply involved in student success in ways that support and enhance student learning. It is beyond, but complementary to, the traditional professional development model. Furthermore, it is not dependent upon, nor does it drive, pedagogy.

This is not traditional customer service training. IEBC assigns a trained *Caring Campus* coach, who has experience at community colleges, to work with each campus. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a coach instructs in the fundamentals and directs strategy. That is what IEBC's *Caring Campus* coaches do. We 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 to develop a strategy, grounded in behavioral commitments, that they can easily implement campus-wide.

Furthermore, *Caring Campus* is not a deficit-driven model of professional development. We begin by identifying faculty members at the college with strong and consistent histories of high student retention and success in their classes. We explore and explicate the non-instructional behaviors they employ in their classes. This group then develops plans to work peer-to-peer with their colleagues to make these behaviors intentional and campus-wide, encouraging faculty to commit to these behaviors. These commitments include:

- Learning student's names the first couple weeks of class
- Meeting with each student outside of class to get to know them—Moments that Matter
- Clear and detailed syllabi

- Assessing early and often to ensure student know where they stand
- Being *Situational Fair*—understanding that students’ off-campus lives are full and complex and how to moderate these with instructional behavior.

As a result of this work, faculty intentionally become deeply engaged with students 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. As documented by Tinto in his seminal work on engagement *Leaving College* (1993), and in the well-researched book, *Relationship Rich Education* (2020), students leave because they do not feel connected to the institution; but that can be successfully addressed.

Creating Caring Campuses: The Faculty Process

The *Caring Campus* process provides new support for faculty involvement in student success efforts. The six parts of *Caring Campus* work are: leadership orientation, faculty identification and interviews, coaching sessions, an implementation kickoff, institutionalization activities and sustainability planning, and follow-up. IEBC *Caring Campus* coaches provide ongoing support throughout the process. Coaches give leadership and participating staff with their contact information—phone and email—and are available to answer questions, resolve obstacles, guide conversations between coaching sessions, share success stories, and more.



Leadership Orientation

IEBC meets in person or virtually with college leadership to ensure they are aware of *Caring Campus* and have the knowledge required to implement and support the process from identifying faculty through institutionalization. Meetings typically include presidents, vice presidents for instruction, and institutional researchers.

Faculty Member Identification and Interviews

IEBC works with the college’s institutional research department to identify faculty members with high rates of course retention and success. These faculty members are interviewed by designated college leadership using an IEBC protocol to explicate their non-instructional behaviors that promote student connectedness and success.

Coaching Sessions

Once faculty members and initial behaviors have been identified, IEBC’s coach meets virtually or face-to-face with the team five to seven times over the course of two terms. This is a measured process designed to set *Caring Campus* up for success. In the first coaching session, *Caring Campus* faculty are introduced to the data, challenges, and process. In the second coaching session the coach works with the team to finalize the behavior commitments and discuss how to actualize these. This session also introduces the concept and process of how colleges change. In the third coaching session faculty develop training curricula, including anticipated learning outcomes. In the fourth coaching session the team develops detailed implementation plans for introducing the behaviors campus-wide. The fifth coaching session includes developing a communication plan for introducing *Caring Campus* and behavioral commitments to faculty and other campus populations (staff, students, administration, et al.) to ensure smooth rollout. Additional coaching sessions are incorporated, as needed during the process, to facilitate implementation planning.

Implementation Kickoff

Once the behavior commitments are set and plans completed for implementation, training, communication, and resources IEBC works with the faculty team and college leadership to rollout the work campus-wide. The manner in which this is done complements the culture of the college to further support successful implementation. Typically, implementation coincides with a convocation.

Institutionalization and Sustainability

IEBC's involvement does not end with rollout. We are deeply committed to supporting institutionalization and sustainability of a *Caring Campus* culture of student connectedness. The coach will continue to work with college leadership to address institutionalization issues that might arise. We also work to develop sustainability plans that fully integrate *Caring Campus* behavioral commitments into the day to day operations of the college.

Follow-up

IEBC follows up with the college to monitor impact on student persistence and success, impact on staff, and the college culture. We also remain available to coach colleges to address sustainability of *Caring Campus*.

THE INSTITUTE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE (IEBC)

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