

Implementing Caring Campus

Strategies College Presidents Use to Improve Culture and Support Reform

By Elisabeth A. Barnett, Selena Cho, and Andrea Lopez Salazar

The work of higher ed, I think, needs to be more human—get back to the basics of the connection is how we make a difference. And so when I heard that [Caring Campus] existed, I was like, “Well, this is it. This is the thing that we need to leverage.”

—President of a community college participating in Caring Campus

Research suggests that the effectiveness of a college is influenced by its institutional culture (Smart, 2003). Indeed, colleges that want to embark on reforms to improve their performance and increase student success—through, for example, curricular changes, modified teaching strategies, and improvements to student advising and supports—recognize (or discover) that college culture mediates and is implicated in any serious undertaking to change practice on a large scale. A positive culture among faculty, staff, and administrators can provide some level of trust that proposed reform efforts are, at the very least, well intentioned and worthy of consideration. What is more, a positive college culture builds an environment where both students and college personnel feel welcomed and are likely to be their best selves on campus (Kezar, 2014). It is for reasons like these that college leaders, and especially college presidents, think a lot about how to foster a positive college culture.

Caring Campus is at once a reform effort colleges engage in to improve the daily experience of their students and an approach meant to influence the norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that make up a college’s culture.¹ Developed by the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC), Caring Campus supports college faculty and staff as they learn about and engage in specific behaviors aimed at increasing each student’s sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Because Caring Campus affects the experiences and dispositions of both college employees and students, college leaders who choose to participate in Caring Campus often do so as part of their vision for improving their college’s culture.

This report—the fourth in a series of CCRC publications on Caring Campus undertaken in partnership with IEBC—examines strategies that presidents of community colleges implementing Caring Campus are using to develop a more positive

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culture and support this culture-focused reform. These strategies may be useful to other colleges implementing Caring Campus or other reforms, particularly those that involve considerable interpersonal engagement among faculty, staff, and students.

Caring Campus and College Leadership

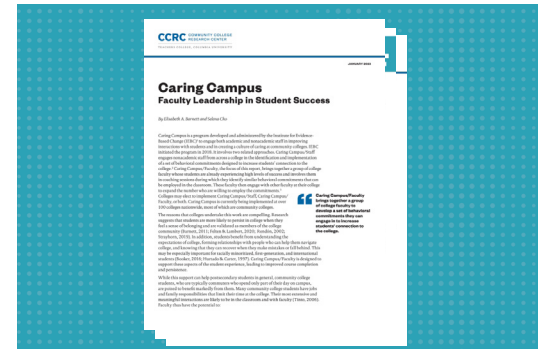
What is Caring Campus?

Caring Campus seeks to increase students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy—and thus their persistence and success in college—by improving interactions between students and the college's faculty, nonacademic staff, or both. This is accomplished by having faculty and/or staff learn about and commit to a set of behaviors that they enact habitually to help students feel cared for and valued. Caring Campus has been adopted by over 100 two-year and four-year colleges in 19 states, with some implementing Caring Campus/Faculty, some implementing Caring Campus/Staff, and some undertaking both (IEBC, n.d.).

Caring Campus is led by college faculty and/or staff, with support and oversight by college presidents and other leaders. Once a college decides to undertake this work, a core group of faculty and/or staff is invited to engage in sessions with an IEBC coach who supports participants as they develop a set of student-facing behavioral commitments and a plan for campus-wide implementation. Caring Campus/Faculty focuses on behaviors that faculty members can employ in their classrooms, such as learning and using students' names, creating clear and detailed syllabi, and meeting one-on-one with each student in the first few weeks of the semester. Caring Campus/Staff aims to involve staff members from all student service and operations departments that interact with students at any point in their college experience. They take on behavioral commitments such as offering assistance to students who seem lost, taking the initiative to tell students about resources available at the college, and conducting “warm handoffs” when students are transferred to another department.

Caring Campus and College Culture

Caring Campus's theory of change (see Figure 1) posits that the implementation and scale-up of Caring Campus behavioral commitments will lead to positive college-culture outcomes. While one set of positive outcomes relates to students—Caring Campus is theorized to support improvements in student outcomes such as retention and course success—another set of outcomes relates to faculty, staff, and the institution as a whole: Caring Campus is theorized to improve faculty and staff attitudes and well-being and to strengthen relationships among faculty, staff, and



PRIOR CCRC RESEARCH ON CARING CAMPUS

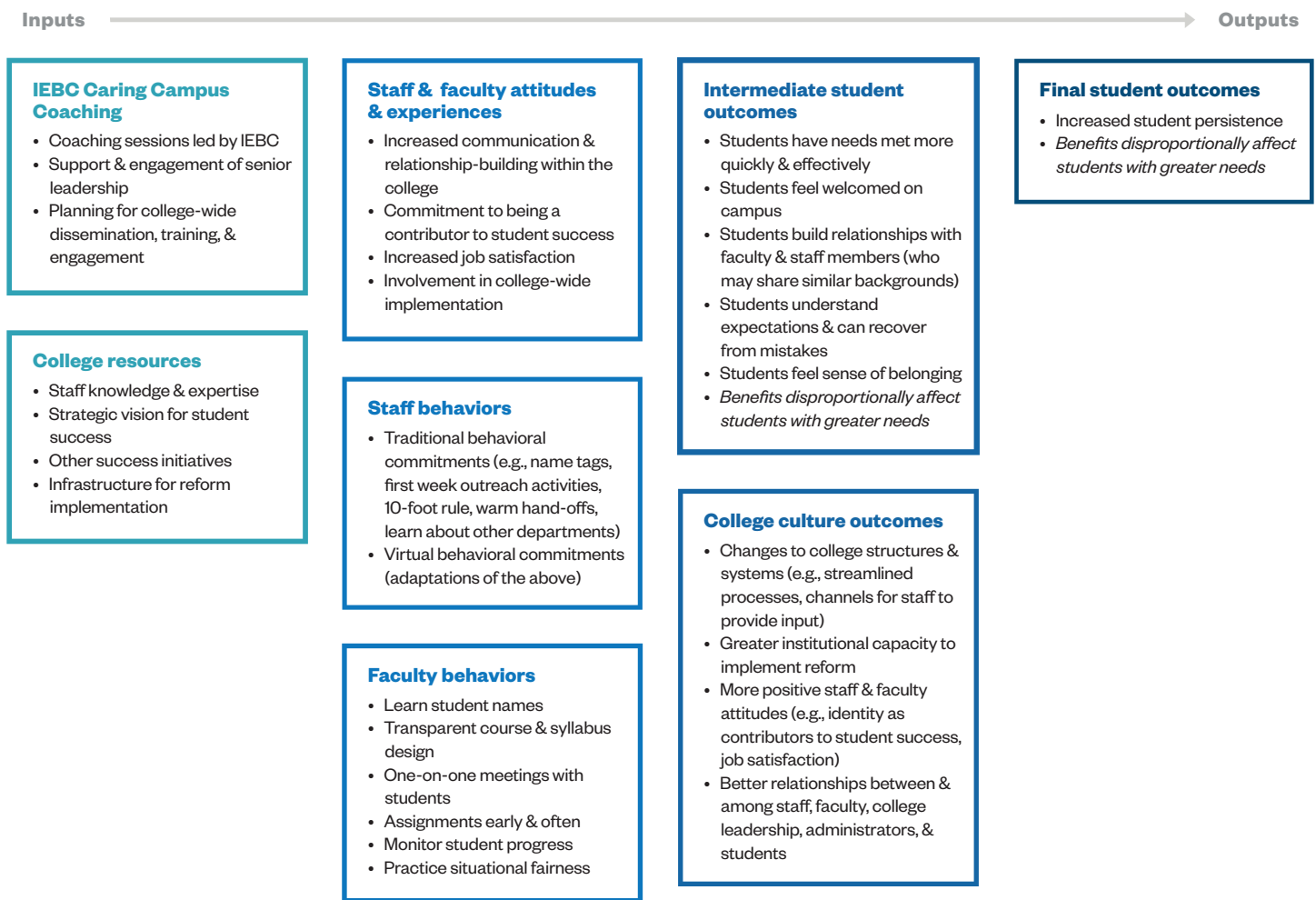
Caring Campus: Faculty Leadership in Student Success
(Barnett & Cho, 2023)

Implementing Caring Campus With Nonacademic Staff: Lessons From Participating Colleges
(Barnett & Bickerstaff, 2022)

Caring Campus: An Initiative to Involve Community College Staff in Increasing Student Success
(Bickerstaff et al., 2021)

administrators. This should occur because the Caring Campus coaching process and the wider college adoption process bring together faculty, staff, and administrators from various departments and offices across campus that normally operate in silos, and also because certain Caring Campus behaviors, such as conducting warm handoffs, require familiarity, collegiality, and collaboration among various departments and offices on campus. Lastly, Caring Campus’s theory of change posits that positive engagement and closer relationships among faculty and staff can lead to improved institutional structures and a greater institutional capacity to implement reform.

Figure 1.
Caring Campus Theory of Change



Presidents’ Rationale for Supporting Caring Campus

Interview data from our previous research as well as from the present study has demonstrated that college presidents’ goals or visions for an improved college culture are often a key reason for introducing Caring Campus to their college. For example, one president said, “Caring Campus is going to make our campus culture

more relationship based versus transaction based.” Most importantly, in line with the Caring Campus theory of change, college presidents view Caring Campus as central to student retention, course success, and completion rates, because Caring Campus is intended to assure students that they are part of a community and that there are individuals at the college who care for them and want them to succeed. To quote two presidents:

My goal would be that with every single student that walks into their classroom, whether it’s on Zoom or in one of the classrooms down the hall, that every single student knows that there is at least one person at this college [who] “believes that I’m smart, that I can learn, that I’m going to succeed.”

I would like students to leave [our college] having completed their degree, but also feeling like they felt like they were part of the community. I would like the data on our completion to go up, but I’d also like [our students] to say that’s how they felt.

College presidents also champion Caring Campus because they think it can improve employee satisfaction, often an important goal:

One of the things Caring Campus has really brought to us is thinking about, “Okay, if we’re a caring campus, what are we doing to help support work-life balance for our employees? What does that look like?”

I would like our culture for employees and staff to be such that they love coming to work.

Finally, college presidents see Caring Campus as providing college faculty and staff with concrete ways to align themselves and their behaviors with the desired culture of the college. For example, one college president said that the Caring Campus values and behaviors help to articulate what it means to be an employee at their college.

Leading Caring Campus

From its experience in supporting the implementation of Caring Campus across the country, IEBC has observed that presidents play an essential role in its implementation: fostering buy-in, enthusiasm, and commitment to Caring Campus and creating needed structural supports. Prior research supports IEBC’s observations of the importance of college presidents: While research literature on institutional culture change is vast and diverse, it recognizes college presidents as key players in shaping and changing college culture (Kezar, 2014; Wyner, 2021).

Researchers have found that the behaviors of presidents and other campus leaders have a powerful influence on the quality and performance of their institutions (Kezar, 2014; Smart, 2003). Wyner’s (2021) perspective is especially relevant to the community college context: “Without strong senior leadership, reforms cannot add up to what every student needs, because community colleges are traditionally decentralized in too many ways—curriculum, hiring, budgeting, and professional development are frequently driven at the department level, and thus may not easily cohere and serve a change agenda” (p. 5).

Wyner (2021) further highlights the role of culture: “In the end, it is the culture of a community college that dictates whether it can sustainably improve student outcomes. And presidents are the key to building highly effective student-oriented cultures” (p. 3). Similarly, Lakos and Phipps (2004) argue that strategic change cannot occur without a strong cultural foundation: “Culture determines attitudes and patterns of thought about what is important and what must be done. If strategic change is needed, culture change is absolutely essential for success” (pp. 348–349).

Therefore, examining the role college presidents play in Caring Campus can provide useful strategies for leaders seeking to navigate and actualize culture change at their institutions. Moreover, a careful look at culture-focused change leadership is perhaps more critical now as colleges emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to remote operations necessitated by the pandemic and the resulting feelings of disconnection and isolation gave new urgency to the focus on college culture. The pandemic prompted college presidents to ask, “How can we make our college a place where faculty and staff want to work, and a place where students want to come to school and finish their programs?” Using interviewee reflections on the process of implementing Caring Campus at nine community colleges, this report examines concrete strategies employed by college presidents to change their college’s culture for the better and to engage in successful reform.

Study Methods

In the summer of 2022, CCRC researchers carried out data collection activities virtually in order to address the following research question: What are the strategies used by community college presidents to implement and institutionalize Caring Campus that could be applied to other culture-focused reforms? We conducted interviews with nine presidents of community colleges implementing Caring Campus/Faculty, Caring Campus/Staff, or both. (See the Appendix for more information about the community colleges participating in the study.) In addition, we interviewed four IEBC coaches, all of whom had experience coaching both Caring Campus/Faculty and Caring Campus/Staff.

Each interview was about an hour in length, audio-recorded with the participant’s permission, and transcribed. We developed and used a semi-structured interview protocol to address the research question; protocol questions were informed by a review of literature on higher education leadership as well as by our prior research on Caring Campus. We coded the transcripts using a scheme grounded in the research question. We then conducted an analysis of the coded excerpts to surface key themes.

Findings

The presidents interviewed highlighted a set of seven strategies that they considered important to the successful implementation of Caring Campus. Several interviewees also noted that many of these strategies can be useful in implementing other culture-focused reforms. We outline the strategies and their rationale below.

1. Communicating the Vision

When taking on a new initiative or seeking to initiate change, college presidents communicate their vision about the benefits of the reform and their commitment to its full implementation.

Communicating effectively and frequently about Caring Campus was often what presidents spoke of first when we asked about their role in the implementation and institutionalization of Caring Campus. Every president that we interviewed considered communication to be a key responsibility of the president. Their primary goal in communicating with the broader college community was typically described as a way to inspire more faculty and staff and to get excited about and involved in Caring Campus. One president shared,

Well, the president sets the tone. Everyone looks to the president to what she or he is doing and talking about, and so they are really the tone-setters about what that college is going to think about.

Presidents often aim to convey their own enthusiasm and support for the work. They used words such as “cheerleader,” “champion,” “spokesperson,” and “ambassador” to describe their role. Their enthusiasm encourages faculty and staff to buy into and participate in Caring Campus. As one president stated,

There’s a performative aspect to it, and there’s a perception/image-making aspect to it, in which people need to see that the president is not just supportive of this, but this is a priority for the campus. ... So I’ve told them, “Anytime and anywhere, you let me know and I am there,” and I’ll tell people how important this is. I’m happy to be the spokesperson and ambassador out there.

Many of the presidents thought it important to clearly articulate the reasons for any new work and be ready to do so in multiple settings. One stated that this helped garner support: “People want to know the why, but if we communicate why and bring them in, they are typically on board.”

They also felt that college faculty and staff need to know that the president carefully selects which ideas to support, with the overall direction of the college in mind:

We say no to a lot of probably pretty good ideas because we really want to make sure it’s tied to what our focus is, what our strategic plan is.

A number of presidents made a point of avoiding the word “initiative” when referring to Caring Campus. One president was adamant about this, emphasizing that most

Presidential Strategies to Support Caring Campus

1. *Communicating the vision*
2. *Modeling behavioral commitments*
3. *Aligning new and existing work*
4. *Establishing effective human resource practices*
5. *Creating relevant structures*
6. *Staying in touch*
7. *Celebrating wins*

initiatives are short-lived: “This is beyond an initiative that comes and goes. This is a way of life that becomes embedded into our institutional culture.” Another president commented that initiatives are generally abandoned soon after they begin: “We don’t call them initiatives because everyone has initiative fatigue, and initiatives never go anywhere. They die in committee.”

2. Modeling Behavioral Commitments

It is not sufficient to talk the talk. When trying to initiate changes in practice such as those inherent in Caring Campus, presidents find ways to walk the walk. This involves modeling the behavioral commitments central to Caring Campus and devoting time to related activities.

For some presidents, the prominence and visibility of their position on campus make it especially important for them to take an active role in Caring Campus. These presidents sought out opportunities to participate at key moments so it would be clear to college faculty and staff that this was a priority. One president said,

Number one: Show up ... for the [coaching sessions]. Everyone watches where a president or the senior team is. Showing up sends an incredibly important message, and that message is, “This is my priority, so I’m glad you’re here, and I’m here too.” ... Number two: Embody the learnings.

Modeling the Caring Campus behaviors was also understood to be an effective way of showing faculty and staff what Caring Campus looks like in practice. Especially for those who did not participate in coaching, the college leaders’ way of interacting with others could serve as an example of how to behave in caring ways. For instance, one president pointed out, “I think my role is to model all of it every day with everyone—students, faculty, staff, the community. I can’t expect other people to do things I won’t do.” Referring to several of the behavioral commitments, another shared, “I need to know everybody’s name. I need to ask them if they need help. I need to be responsive.”

Presidents spoke about modeling as a way to demonstrate that Caring Campus requires everyone at the college, regardless of rank or office, to enact the behavioral commitments in service of students. Some presidents also highlighted the need to demonstrate humility and camaraderie, communicating that they are not mandating the behaviors for others but doing the work alongside everyone else:

I think [you] can set aside your role as president, and the fact that you are the most powerful person in the institution, and demonstrate an ability to be a peer to people. For example, ... when we have events and—oops, we need more water—I’ll be the person that runs to get more pitchers of water. I want people to see that. And my ethos is, as a servant leader, use me as you will, and I’m willing to do whatever it takes.

3. Aligning New and Existing Work

Presidents seek ways to make sure that new undertakings are aligned with existing priorities, initiatives, and strategic plans. This can improve efficiency and create a unified set of activities in service of a central vision.

Presidents were most likely to link Caring Campus with college strategic planning, guided pathways work, and equity initiatives. An IEBC coach noted that, in many cases, “Caring Campus is adding the human component to other efforts [colleges] are already engaged in.”

At some colleges, Caring Campus is interwoven with strategic plans. While some presidents use the strategic planning process to create a hospitable environment for Caring Campus, others view Caring Campus as a mechanism for achieving the goals of the college strategic plan. One president shared their belief that higher education “needs to be more human” and that Caring Campus allows the college to elevate this focus. Caring Campus fits well with this college’s goal to help students grow academically and socially, and it allows them to institutionalize support for students by setting targets for the enactment of specific behaviors.

Caring Campus is often aligned with existing initiatives. Guided pathways is a popular whole-college reform approach that provides coherent program maps to students and supports them in completing credentials of value in the job market. While guided pathways is often focused on structural changes, such as streamlining program pathways, Caring Campus is seen by presidents as a way to incorporate interpersonal behaviors that can better support students along their path. The president at one college noted that Caring Campus and guided pathways complement each other: “Caring Campus and guided pathways are two legs of the same table, and they support each other.” Another said, “It’s really important that we have these pathways, but if we have these pathways, and they go to an advisor who’s cold to them, it doesn’t even matter.”

Many presidents also see Caring Campus as aligned with their work to advance equity, given its focus on community building and fostering a sense of belonging. One college president shared that Caring Campus has the potential to support and empower marginalized students because it encourages faculty and staff to pay close attention to individual students’ needs. Another stated, “It’s one of our equity strategies. [Equity] work has been a huge focus for [the college], and the data has been just compelling every term that this work is most impactful for students of color.”

After implementing Caring Campus for several years, another president shared that it has allowed for a broader understanding of equity at the college:

So, as we try to embed an equity lens in all of our work, when faculty really spend time with students and understand who they are, what it takes for them to get to class, what their lives are like outside of [the college], I think it deepens understanding for faculty ... about why equity matters for all of our students.

4. Establishing Effective Human Resource Practices

Presidents advance human resource practices that put the right people in charge of important work and that integrate Caring Campus into college personnel management practices.

College presidents depend on others to implement many of their ideas, and choosing the right people to do this is critical. At some colleges, internal promotions put individuals already involved with Caring Campus in positions to support its implementation. For example, one college internally promoted the staff member who was leading the college's Caring Campus work to director of human resources. As a result, Caring Campus values and behavioral commitments have been embedded more seamlessly into the college's hiring and onboarding practices. Presidents also sought people to lead Caring Campus who were already highly respected:

Finding ambassadors of the work, like key ambassadors. It's been critical for our work—finding people who believe in the value of this work and are ambassadors with their peers.

At other colleges, positions were created and adjusted to support the implementation of Caring Campus. For example, one college employs project implementation coordinators, “who are staff that help provide that backbone support for faculty.” They offer logistical and administrative support to faculty members running Caring Campus who do not always have the time or knowledge of available tools to manage the ins and outs of implementation. The coordinators help with tasks such as breaking down big goals into smaller tasks and timelines, managing lists of participants, and administering surveys.

Presidents also sought to involve established groups within the college as a way to ensure sustainability. For example, existing organizational structures could be used to make sure that Caring Campus had a clear “home” within the college. One college president from California involved the Classified Senate, an organization of professional staff “who are so engaged in this work and constantly thinking of new ways that they can continue to improve what they're doing.” The idea is that this organization will be able to provide direction to the work over the long term, even if there are changes in college leadership. At other colleges, the Centers for Teaching and Learning were involved as key partners in this aspect of the work.

Other presidents sought to involve trusted organizations external to the college. One president believes that any new initiative should be supported by coaching from an outside organization such as IEBC:

I have certain rules that if we're going to take on any big project that's outside, that involves changing the culture . . . , that we always need outside coaching support, and this model allowed for the outside coaching support.

Relatedly, multiple presidents spoke about incorporating Caring Campus principles into job descriptions as well as using reporting and review structures to integrate the work into college culture and operations:

I'm more interested in it being clearly explained to our people, especially through job descriptions and ongoing professional development, what it means to be a [college] faculty or staff member. And Caring Campus principles, I think, have to be part of explaining that.

We've changed our job descriptions in the last nine months to focus on values. ... They're focused on student success, equity, a sense of belonging at the institution. ... And so we're pretty up front, and I think we've been pretty successful, actually, in the people we've gotten through those [job descriptions].

After putting the right people in charge of leading the work, presidents considered it important to trust and support them. One was enthusiastic about the internal faculty and staff experts enlisted to lead Caring Campus, saying that they are “fantastic” and that he “follows their lead 100%.” Especially in working with faculty, presidents emphasized the importance of allowing those charged with leadership to retain control of the work:

The number of times as a leader that you have to make an executive top-down decision should be a very, very small percentage, less than 5%. And the majority should be collaborative decision-making ... because nobody likes to work in a place where they have no agency and decision-making power.

Finally, there were a number of cases in which professional development was seen as helpful for more robust implementation of Caring Campus. One president acknowledged that enacting cultural change may not be easy for faculty and staff to do without help and viewed Caring Campus as playing a role in faculty and staff learning:

What I love about Caring Campus is that it understands that you can have world-class human beings, whether they are staff members or faculty members, who actually don't come to that kind of human engagement naturally or have [not] been trained in that way. ... It takes elements that we know are essential for creating a welcoming, inclusive place, [and] those practices are things anyone can learn and adopt and do.

5. Creating Relevant Structures

Presidents are thoughtful about how to change college governance systems and structures to better enable desired reforms and build a positive culture. This includes collecting and using data on student outcomes.

Some presidents were developing structures that they believed would facilitate implementation of Caring Campus as well as other positive changes. At one college, following unionization of the faculty, the president saw an opportunity to engage faculty and other college staff in a new governance system designed to increase participation in decision-making at the college. This new system is structured around four pillars: student success, equity, completion, and a culture of belonging. Committees and subcommittees are addressing the different pillars and bringing forward ideas for strengthening each aspect of the college. The president shared:

So I laid out a structure of ... what I thought we could do with regard to focusing on student success, equity, completion, and also creating a culture of belonging for our employees and our students. ... We had about 100 people volunteer to be on subcommittees. The equity review committee is basically the co-chairs of each of the subcommittees.

Another president discussed the creation of an “equity-based budgeting process” to allocate resources to priority items that advance equity and improve student outcomes, including Caring Campus:

We really try to make sure that we are allocating resources to those things that we think will advance our equity and student success efforts. So giving release time to [Caring Campus] chairs and those investing in the work—that’s part of resourcing it as well.

An alternative strategy described by one president involves structuring reform activities, including Caring Campus activities, around a system of projects. This provides a framework for managing a range of activities focused on accomplishing specific goals, while also avoiding the creation of new initiatives and initiative fatigue. A common reading helped college leaders to structure their projects according to certain principles:

We’re project based. We have project teams. All project leads have read [FranklinCovey’s] The Four Disciplines of Execution (4DX). And we approach things from a project management mindset rather than as an initiative or a strategy. ... Caring Campus is a project that fits under “create a world-class learner experience.” And we have project dashboards where we can see where the project is.

When thinking about ways to sustain and scale change, many college presidents were concerned with monitoring progress and measuring impact. Traditional measures of student success such as persistence, course success, and college completion rates were most commonly used. Multiple presidents shared that one of their goals is to work with and sometimes bolster their institutional research offices to expand the college’s ability to collect, analyze, and share data that could illuminate the effectiveness of Caring Campus:

I’d like to identify metrics ... to create ways of identifying leading and lagging indicators and a dashboard that anybody can go to on any day and see how are we doing. [We are] trying to build the research capacity at our college.

Related to monitoring progress, presidents also consider it important to step in when things are not going as desired:

When we talk about people who are disinclined to engage in supportive behaviors and caring behaviors, you then have to start having conversations about performance. ... But that’s the role of administrators to address that. We can’t shy away from it. I certainly never shy away from having those conversations with people, because I think shying away is the way that we end up harming students.

6. Staying in Touch

When seeking to initiate a change, college presidents find ways to stay in touch with the faculty and staff members who are leading the change as well as the broader campus community.

The presidents we interviewed talked about the importance of maintaining regular communication with those on the front lines of creating change. They addressed three ways of doing this.

The first of these, not surprisingly, is holding regular meetings with the college employees who are leading Caring Campus implementation. At one college that is implementing Caring Campus for both faculty and staff, the president meets with the lead staff member and the lead faculty member together three times a semester to discuss Caring Campus, mainly to stay informed about what they are doing and thinking:

I'm following their lead. ... They're very well respected throughout the institution. ... I communicate with them often. They definitely are people I like to listen to in this kind of direction.

Second, presidents can bring Caring Campus staff/faculty leaders into larger regular meetings at the college so that these leaders can stay in communication with the broader college leadership. At one college, the Caring Campus co-chairs (the two faculty members who lead implementation) are “plugged into an institutional body that meets monthly, monitoring [the college’s] overall student success and retention goals.”

Third, presidents talked about “agendizing” Caring Campus—that is, embedding Caring Campus as a regular agenda item in meetings. This can take the form of discussing how the implementation of Caring Campus is going or of talking about personal experiences with caring interactions. For example, at one college, the president begins every college committee or department division meeting with a “Caring Campus moment”:

That simple gesture to put [Caring Campus the] first thing on an agenda before you even dive into the minutes and the business at hand, to allow individuals to reflect and acknowledge and perhaps give a shout-out or to say they observed a Caring Campus moment or they were a recipient of a Caring Campus moment ... really provided a platform for everyone to begin to be more reflective of what it means to be a caring campus.

Presidents also spoke about the importance of staying in touch with the broader campus community rather than remaining out of sight in an office. This was viewed as a way to gather information about how things are going at the college generally, as well as to learn about progress on Caring Campus and other prioritized work. It also can be seen as a caring gesture, showing college staff that their work is important and worthy of a visit from the president:

I tell people the most powerful thing that you can do is ... what I call the walkabout. Once a week, walk through campus, say hello to people, introduce yourself to people you don't know.

7. Celebrating Wins

When seeking ways to sustain and scale a change, college presidents make sure to celebrate the wins. Employee recognition and appreciation can boost morale, motivation, and energy for the work.

A number of college presidents considered it important to celebrate wins as a way of elevating the behaviors and outcomes that they want to see. This is also seen as helpful for forming relationships with staff and motivating them to live up to their potential. Presidents use a number of mechanisms to celebrate.

Existing college communications media such as college newsletters and email blasts offer an effective and low-cost platform for celebrating the wins, which can be folded into the regular communications discussed in the previous section. One college circulates a newsletter twice a week that includes short pieces celebrating what’s happening with Caring Campus. Another college president sends a monthly leadership update highlighting college employees whom they refer to as “lifesavers”—those who made a difference for someone else at the college. The president also sends Life Saver candies to those who are being recognized.

In other settings, awards are used to elevate the implementation of Caring Campus behaviors. One college spends about \$20,000 per year recognizing high-performing employees and hands out “prestigious and highly coveted” Strategic Board Excellence Awards. Some of those awards have been given to staff members who have consistently demonstrated Caring Campus principles. The president noted that these are “very carefully awarded, so they’re meaningful, and I think that’s important.” Other colleges award much smaller tokens of appreciation such as pins and certificates.

Relatedly, some presidents pointed to the intrinsic rewards of participating in Caring Campus. They believe that both faculty and staff find meaning and fulfillment in caring interactions with students. Two presidents spoke of this:

Those faculty who engage, they will speak to the fact that it is what fills their bucket, their purpose, and is the reason why they teach. So although it’s maybe a more investment in time, it certainly results in replenishment of their purpose and energy rather than depleting it.

We now have this increasing body of faculty that have been through the program [and] staff who have been through the program who have that incredible sense of reward. ... They get the feedback from the students at the end of the experience or the end of the course who are like, “You made me feel like I could do this.” That’s like food to faculty and staff.

Conclusion

As Tinto and Pusser (2006) state, “Increased institutional rates of student success do not arise by chance. They are the result of a series of intentional institutional actions, policies, and practices that are consistently applied over the long term” (p. 16). As with most initiatives undertaken by organizations, leadership is central to sustained institutional change that makes a difference.

This is even the case when the work is framed as a bottom-up, faculty-led effort, as with Caring Campus. Leaders typically strive for a balance—actively offering support, signaling that the work is a priority, and taking on limited roles as needed—while also conveying that they have trust in the leaders who are overseeing implementation at the grassroots level. With Caring Campus, we see that presidents are encouraging leadership from members of the faculty and staff communities on campus while also creating pressure for needed cultural change.

This report has shown that presidents involved in Caring Campus use a range of strategies to support efforts by core personnel and the larger college community as they undertake reform. Importantly, the strategies also encourage cultural change aimed at a more positive, engaged, and student-focused environment. We hope that this report helps to provide an understanding of the role of college presidents in driving and institutionalizing culture-focused reform. We also hope that it will be of particular value to those leaders who are implementing Caring Campus as they consider how to best initiate and nurture this work.

Endnotes

1. In this report, we utilize Kuh and Whitt's (1988) definition of culture as “persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university” (p. 6).

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Appendix: Participating Community Colleges

Table A1.
Information on Community Colleges Participating in the Study

COLLEGE NAME	LOCATION	MSI DESIGNATION	CARING CAMPUS MODEL IMPLEMENTED (FACULTY, STAFF, OR BOTH)	FALL ENROLLMENT, 2021 (IPEDS DATA)
Community College of Rhode Island	Warwick, RI	-	Both	11,962
Central Arizona College	Coolidge, AZ	HSI	Both	4,841
Delta College	University Center, MI	-	Both	7,054
Irvine Valley College	Irvine, CA	AANAPISI	Staff	11,045
Mountwest Community and Technical College	Huntington, WV	-	Both	1,127
Oakton Community College	Des Plaines, IL	AANAPISI	Faculty	7,433
San Juan College	Farmington, NM	NASNTI	Both	5,307
Stark State College	North Canton, OH	-	Both	10,596
West Valley College	Saratoga, CA	AANAPISI, HSI	Both	6,717

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