

Desi Marquez Remembers Being in Student's Shoes

Desi Marquez was the first person in his family to attend college. He still vividly recalls how unsure and confused he was about the college application process as a high school senior.

“The idea of college is something I wanted to do, but I assumed they would come to me,” says Marquez. “My mom and dad didn’t have a notion of what a student should do to prepare to go to college.”

Marquez was fortunate to cross paths with Arizona State University recruiter Yira Thorne. Twenty-six years later, he still recalls how she took a personal interest in Marquez’s success, helping him apply and pursue financial aid. Marquez was admitted and received a full scholarship.



Once on campus, Marquez says, “She really cared. I came from a small town. Going to a big university was a shock to me. She must have picked up on that and took me under her wing... She was an angel in a sense.”

Today, Marquez finds himself in a similar role as a financial aid technician at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California. “We are the face of financial aid. We interact with students... we try to put ourselves out there from a service perspective.” This involves walk-in access, multiple information channels, and proactive outreach opportunities.

Marquez describes the public service philosophy as student centric. “We’ve all been students before. We have all graduated from university or private colleges. We have a good grasp of what our student body needs and wants. We all have work-life experience we can bring to the table and connect with the students.”

With the introduction of IEBC’s “Caring Campus” approach to serving students, Marquez says what was already good service is becoming outstanding service. “If anything, it’s elevated my approach toward students. Now for example, instead of waiting for students to come to me, I go to them.

“Before, I wouldn’t really think about my surroundings. Caring Campus opened my eyes to be more receptive to students who might need a friendly hello... Even though to us financial aid seems easy, to students it can be complex and confusing. They don’t even know what to ask. Caring Campus made us aware, trying to anticipate what their needs are.”

Even someone as devoted to quality student service as Marquez found the principles embraced by the IEBC Caring Campus approach helped him improve his interaction with students. He offered a recent example.

“I was working at the financial aid front counter. I made a point with every student I saw to ask, ‘Elizabeth, how are your classes going?’ Even though they came in with a specific question, I asked about their day.

“The students were a little taken aback... most students come up to the counter nervous, worried, and stressed. You see them relax and smile. I like that. We get so caught up with our work and giving consistent, accurate information to students, we forget they are humans who crave conversation and warm interaction.

“Caring Campus reminds me it’s good to have a lighthearted conversation with a student in the middle of a complicated situation,” said Marquez.

Marquez says he is excited about the Caring Campus initiative. His colleagues are starting to understand how much it has to offer, and in working to bridge the gap with students, they are seeing results. “They realize, ‘oh yeah, I can make a difference,’ and you see it in the students.

“It’s elevated our level of service. It started before Caring Campus, but it’s all connected because it’s making such a positive impact with students. It reassures us we are on the right path.”

Marquez says as someone who remembers being in a student’s shoes, he understands what they are looking for. “I would want a knowledgeable individual who I can trust and who truly listens to me, and genuinely cares about my concerns, understands my educational goals, and WANTS to me help. I would want to be treated as a valued student, and not just a number waiting in line.”

Marquez says staff may not realize the kind of impact they can make on a student’s life. He often reflects on his own experience. “Maybe like me, someone will think back, ‘Wow, Desi or my co-workers made a difference.’ Put your whole effort into making a positive difference for our students.”

Southwestern College is participating in IEBC’s Caring Campus California, which is funded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

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