

## **Caring Campus: Engaging Professional Staff in Student Success Efforts**

Professional staff are often the first contact students have with a college: a phone call to student services, a meeting with financial aid officers, facilities and operation staff while walking across campus, bookstore clerks, and a wide range of other personnel. Their interaction with students can set the stage for student success. Specifically, professional staff need to be engaged in system-changing efforts, be more involved in the development and implementation of campus-wide interventions, and to have a clear understanding of their important role in ensuring the success of this work.

### ***IEBC's Caring Campus***

IEBC has a proven method for engaging with professional staff to create a Caring Campus that ensures they are deeply involved in student success. Because it is beyond, but complementary to, the traditional staff development model, it involves deep 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 staff member engages in a series of behavioral commitments around how they interact with students.

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

As a result of this work, professional staff become 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), students leave because they do not feel connected to the institution; but that can be successfully addressed. We like to note that students come where they feel welcome and stay where they feel cared for.

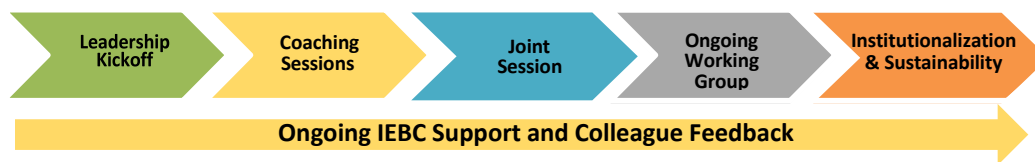
In a research brief about Caring Campus, the Community College Research Center notes:

- Caring Campus successfully positions staff as respected change makers.
- Caring Campus cultivates a sense of unity.
- Caring Campus enhances staff knowledge.
- Professional staff are also able to build their leadership skills and strengthen interpersonal relationships in ways that can lay the groundwork for future innovation and student-centered practices.
- Caring Campus has the potential to improve equity.

The Caring Campus process also integrates professional staff with the work of the faculty in support of student success, 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, professional staff report being happier about their work, are assuming more leadership in student success efforts, and that there is more collegiality among faculty and professional staff members.

### ***Creating Caring Campuses: The Process***

The Caring Campus process provides new support for professional staff involvement in student success efforts. The five parts of Caring Campus work are: kickoff event for leadership, coaching sessions with professional staff, joint session with professional staff and leadership, ongoing working group implementation, and institutionalization and sustainability.



### *Leadership Kickoff*

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 provide the resources and support required for successful implementation and institutionalization.

### *Coaching Visits*

Following the leadership orientation, IEBC coaches engage with professional staff in two half-day coaching sessions. One professional staff member from each department and division is invited to attend. Over the course of these coaching sessions, professional staff are oriented to Caring Campus and create implementation plans for each of the five behavioral commitments, as well as for implementing each behavior in a virtual environment. Between coaching sessions participants obtain feedback from their colleagues to inform the next session’s activities. Professional staff also develop a charge for their working group, expectations for leadership support, a plan for communicating about Caring Campus, and a 90-day next steps plan. They also plan for the joint session.

### *Joint Session*

Leadership and professional staff come together for a joint session with their coach to review the work and plan for institutionalization and sustainability. Staff present their draft plans to leadership, who identify ways to support, monitor, and celebrate them.

### *Working Group*

The core group of professional staff who participated in the coaching sessions meet monthly to implement their plans. They review their drafts and modify, as needed. Representatives from leadership participate in the meetings to provide support and commit necessary resources. The group also strategizes about how to link to other groups on campus and increase representation from their colleagues.

### *Institutionalization and Sustainability*

IEBC follows up with the college to support institutionalization and 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. IEBC convenes occasional virtual roundtables for liaisons and presidents so colleges can learn from each other. We also maintain a library of artifacts—sample nametags, Caring Campus newsletters, videos, swag such as t-shirts and banners, etc.—so colleges can build on what others already have successfully implemented.

**For more information, contact IEBC at [info@iebcnow.org](mailto:info@iebcnow.org) or visit our website at [www.iebcnow.org](http://www.iebcnow.org).**

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