



INSTITUTE *for* EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE  
Informing Decisions · Improving Practice · Increasing Student Success

## Caring Campuses are Equitable Campuses

America's colleges are struggling to build equity on their campuses. According to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Blog, "While equality means treating everyone the same, equity means 'making appropriate accommodations for people from underserved or historically marginalized groups to allow them full access to the rights and privileges enjoyed by the majority.' Unlike equality, equity focuses on removing the structural barriers that prevent non-dominant groups from excelling."<sup>1</sup>

The *Caring Campus* initiative of the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) supports college equity efforts by creating campuses where all students—including non-majority students—feel connected and cared for. The core of this work is understanding students' perspectives when interacting with them in the classroom, in an office, or anywhere on campus.

IEBC uses a facilitated coaching model to 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 develop a strategy, grounded in behavioral commitments, that they can easily implement campus-wide at little to no cost. Faculty and staff identify and commit to simple behaviors that remove barriers to student success: wearing nametags, approaching students who seem lost on campus, referring to a person in another department and not simply a location in a building, changing from "office hours" to "student hours."

Throughout our community college work, students tell us they want to feel connected. They want a faculty or staff member who "gets" them. This is particularly salient as community college students are more diverse than ever and our current ranks of faculty and staff have yet to catch up.<sup>2</sup> Many students coming to community colleges also have a history of poor educational experiences. They are not prepared for higher education and benefit significantly when there is an adult in authority who cares about their success. 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.

Additionally, today's students have far more challenges than previous generations of students. Lack of resources, family obligations, employment and other pressures make it difficult for students to both enroll and stay in college. We need to understand and accept the lives students lead and not pigeonhole them into the lives we expect them to lead.

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<sup>1</sup> DeEtta Jones Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Blog <https://www.deettajones.com/equity-inclusion-diversity-in-higher-education/> September 26, 2018.

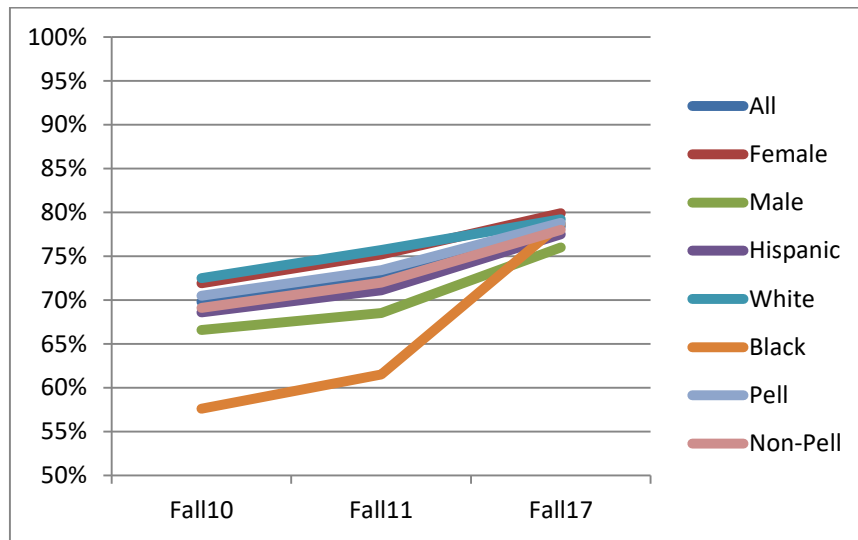
<sup>2</sup> According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1976 students of color comprised 15.7% of the college population and in 2015 the proportion was 42.4%. Yet, according to NCES, in 2016 26.8% of faculty were non-white.

The American Association of College and Universities (AAC&U) is one of many organizations concerned about equity issues and their impact on student success. In their guide *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* (2015), they exhort colleges to “Commit to frank, hard dialogues about the climate for underserved students on your campus, with the goal of effecting a paradigm shift in language and actions.” IEBC’s *Caring Campus* addresses this commitment in numerous positive ways, avoiding deficit-based approaches.

In fact, IEBC’s *Caring Campus* is demonstrating real changes in student outcomes. At colleges implementing *Caring Campus*, the course success gap is almost closed among all populations. Data from two colleges documents such results, as seen below (Figure One and Table One).

**Figure One**

*Course success achievement gaps narrow after College A implements Caring Campus*



**Table One**

*Course success achievement gaps narrow after College B implements Caring Campus*

Ethnicity	2014-16 (two year average; prior to implementation)	2016-17
Asian	92%	93%
Black	71%	90%
Latinx	86%	91%
White	91%	94%
All students (including multiethnic and unknown)	87%	89%

As we work to improve equity on college campuses, we must go beyond the academic focus to include the human need for connectedness. Students who feel connected to their college are more likely to succeed, persist, and complete.

For more information, please contact Brad Phillips, IEBC President/CEO, at (619) 252-8503 (bphillips@iebcnow.org) or Jordan Horowitz, IEBC Vice President, at 562-743-7920 (jhorowitz@iebcnow.org).

*IEBC is a nationally-recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders — K-12 school systems, community colleges, universities, employers and others — use data, collaboration and coaching to make informed decisions and craft solutions that improve practice and dramatically increase student success.*

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