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Caring Campus

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Stark State College Champions Leadership Buy-In to Caring Campus, Strengthening Student Success

LONG BEACH, CA – Stark State College President Dr. Para Jones is modeling what it means to lead with care, demonstrating the importance of leadership buy-in to Caring Campus by connecting with students, empowering staff and faculty, and embodying the college’s mission of student success.

By embracing and modeling Caring Campus principles, Jones has helped reinforce a culture where meaningful connections and student-centered support are woven into the Stark State experience.

“Our mission has always been about our students succeeding,” Jones said. “We recognize that success is about academics, but also about helping students feel they belong. Caring Campus aligns perfectly with those values and ensures we are focused on intentional behaviors that strengthen connections with students.”

Jones is committed to approaching and connecting with students she encounters on campus, learning about their goals, challenges, and aspirations. One recent conversation was with a student who shared her journey of working full-time as a meat cutter at a local grocery store while pursuing her goal of becoming an accountant.

Through that conversation, Jones connected the student with the head of Stark State’s accounting department, introduced her to employment opportunities with a community partner, and helped her identify a degree pathway that would save her time and money while building valuable professional connections.

“In my many years of doing this, connecting with students, hearing their stories, and helping them in whatever way I can is still the highlight of my job,” Jones said. “I think it’s imperative that all faculty, staff, and students see the president engaging in these same caring commitments and embracing the values of Caring Campus.”

In recent years, Stark State has seen improvements in course completion, retention, and graduation rates, including a three-year graduation rate of 31%, up from less than 10% when Jones became president in 2012. Jones said she predicts the graduation rate will continue rising as the college builds on its current goals and initiatives.

“I attribute that progress to putting our students first in every way, shape, and form,” Jones said. “That’s what Caring Campus is all about – helping students do the best they possibly can.”

MORE

Jones' leadership recently earned regional recognition when she was selected as the inaugural recipient of the Greater Akron Chamber Chairman's Award for Community Leadership, which honors leaders who transform vision into action through innovation, collaboration, and community impact.

"Caring Campus is just part of the way we operate and do business at Stark State," Jones said. "It really resonated with me because Caring Campus is all about people, and education is really about people too. It takes all of us working together to deliver the best we can."

At Stark State, care is institutionalized through hiring and onboarding processes, ensuring new employees understand the college's commitment to students from day one. The focus on student success is embedded in the college's strategic plan, institutional metrics, and individual performance goals, creating alignment across the campus community.

"Dr. Jones' leadership at Stark State is an incredible example of what can be accomplished when leaders fully embrace the importance and impact of Caring Campus," Caring Campus CEO/President Dr. Brad Phillips said. "We are honored to partner with Dr. Jones and Stark State in this vital work to create environments where every student feels cared about and empowered to succeed."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

IEBC_STARKSTATE1: Stark State College President Dr. Para Jones is modeling what it means to lead with care, demonstrating the importance of leadership buy-in to Caring Campus.

IEBC_STARKSTATE2: In recent years, Stark State has seen improvements in course completion, retention, and graduation rates, including a three-year graduation rate of 31%.

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