Orange Coast College Focuses on Student Success Through Caring Campus

LONG BEACH, CA – Orange Coast College (OCC) is enhancing its commitment to student wellbeing and success by embracing the principles of Caring Campus, empowering staff to foster a student-centric environment grounded in intentionality and care.

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change created Caring Campus as a way to increase college students' sense of belonging and connectedness with their institution, resulting in greater retention, persistence, and success rates for students of all demographics.

"Arriving on the campus of Orange Coast in 2019, I felt the caring nature of the institution through the words and actions of our college community," OCC President Dr. Angelica Suarez said. "Our collective charge became the intentional scaling of this culture in all aspects of our work. Integrating Caring Campus into our existing frameworks and structures signifies a dedication to living our values and embedding compassion into the very fabric of our institution."

Dr. Suarez brought Caring Campus to OCC in Fall 2022 after seeing its success at her previous institution, Southwestern Community College District. Since then, staff have developed numerous implementation strategies to capitalize on their caring culture, including personalized Coast Cares Cards and an internal directory of all employees to help with identification and warm referrals.

"I recently met with a student that only spoke Mandarin and needed help with an academic issue," OCC Human Resources Director Rebecca Morgan said. "Our directory allowed me to quickly find a fellow employee who spoke Mandarin and was able to translate the student's needs. We were then able to help the student resolve their issue together, and also learn about each other's unique expertise!"

Division Coordinator of Student Success and Support Services Jeanette Grimm has served as a Classified Senate leader in the implementation of Caring Campus. Grimm said one of OCC's goals for next year is to collect feedback from students on how they see a culture of care reflected on campus and how they have been impacted by OCC employees. Grimm also plans on hosting a Cares Conference at OCC to elevate the behavioral commitments that are part of Caring Campus.

"These implementation strategies will allow our incredible employees to be better recognized for their efforts, and also increase awareness of Caring Campus principles campus-wide," Grimm said.

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John Fawcett, Computing Center Coordinator and President of the OCC Classified Senate, said he has a chance to practice Caring Campus principles almost every day. As the computing building is adjacent to the largest parking lot on campus, he often interacts with students who come into the building looking for directions to another location on campus.

"I could just give these students verbal instructions directing them to the correct building, but what I've really enjoyed is walking with them to where they need to go and having a conversation with them," Fawcett said. "They open up about their lives and appreciate that I'm making real human contact with them. It's a really nice send-off, not just for them, but for me too, and is always one of the best parts of my day."

Through actions both big and small, OCC employees demonstrate how a supportive atmosphere can foster student success and create an environment where care and connection are genuinely felt.

"You can tell people you're a caring campus as much as you want, but unless the student experiences it for themselves, they won't really believe it," OCC Director of Marketing and Communications Juan Gutierrez said. "That's what Caring Campus is all about — educators working to create a supportive environment for students to connect and thrive."

Dr. Suarez cites Caring Campus as a contributing factor in re-engaging students after the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby increasing persistence and enrollment rates at OCC semester after semester.

"OCC's journey with Caring Campus epitomizes the transformative power of genuine care in education," IEBC CEO Dr. Brad Phillips said. "We encourage our Caring Campus colleges and universities to weave compassion into the very fabric of their institution to not only nurture student success, but also to create a community of care and support for every individual."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

IEBC_OCC1: An Orange Coast College (OCC) art teacher helps a student with his project. OCC brought Caring Campus to their college to empower staff to amplify their support by fostering a student-centric environment grounded in intentionality and care.

IEBC_OCC2: Orange Coast College (OCC) president Dr. Angelica Suarez interacts with students on campus to continue building a supportive and caring environment where all students can succeed. Dr. Suarez brought Caring Campus to OCC in Fall 2022 after seeing its success at her previous institution, Southwestern Community College.

IEBC_OCC3: Orange Coast College (OCC) president Dr. Angelica Suarez cites Caring Campus as a contributing factor in re-engaging students after the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby increasing persistence and enrollment rates at OCC semester after semester.

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