

COVID-19 Response: Supporting Students In Times of Crisis

Guidance for Administrators

It is in times of challenge and stress that the words and actions of front-line staff -- such as academic advisers, student success practitioners, and administrators -- can have their biggest impact on students' outcomes, including on their well-being and academic success. In focus groups, student surveys, and countless conversations with staff, students, and instructors at dozens of universities, we at the College Transition Collaborative have observed that **it is when students are going through transitions and/or adversity that their interactions with the staff have the biggest impact on their well-being and academic success** - whether negative, or positive.

Here, we draw on our experience to suggest some ways that front-line staff and administrators can support students' well-being and academic success during the unprecedented challenges created by the novel coronavirus global pandemic.

1. **Check in.** The simple act of reaching out to students in an email asking how they are doing can send a powerful signal that people at the college care about them and want them to succeed. Checking in on students is particularly powerful now, as the current health situation causes instability in students' lives and exacerbates the challenges that they already face in pursuing their education.
2. **Show that you see them as a whole person.** Acknowledge that students have other roles, besides being students, and that these roles also require a great deal of time and attention amid this public health emergency. Encourage self-care, and note that you are aware that students are facing a variety of changes in their living situations, financial statuses, health statuses, and social networks, and that the college is working on how to help address students' needs.
3. **Convey that overwhelming emotions are common.** Let them know that most people feel anxious, frustrated, and uncertain in this circumstance, and that is understandable and normal and not a sign that they do not belong or cannot persist through this period, and succeed in their educational goals long term.
4. **Update them on available resources.** Share any resources on campus and how their operations might have changed given the crisis. These may include resources for adjusting to online learning, accessing academic supports like tutoring in a virtual environment, or basic-needs resources like food pantries and housing services. Even if students do not use those resources, or even if the resources are complicated to access as campuses adapt to the new situation, students will know that people at the college are aware of students' needs and making efforts to meet them. Resources may also be available to students through community, state, and federal programs. [This resource](#) from The Hope Center at Temple University provides information on programs that can help ensure basic-needs are met.

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5. **Encourage social connectedness (virtually):** Convey to students that despite the physical distancing happening on campus, they are still a part of a campus community, and offer strategies about how to stay connected virtually if they can.
6. **Assure them that concrete information on administrative processes will be coming soon.** Many colleges are working on how to adapt bureaucratic processes such as drop deadlines and registration windows. Students who were already contending with concerns about their academic standing, whether to withdraw from courses, financial aid, or other administrative concerns will be especially worried about what these changes mean for their situations. Proactively letting them know that administrators are working on adapting these processes will help allow them to concentrate on their coursework while they wait for information.

About the CTC

The College Transition Collaborative applies social psychology knowledge and methods to contribute to systemic equity in college completion outcomes, particularly for students of color, first-generation college students, and women in male-dominated fields across the US and Canada. CTC's work helps schools understand how their students experience moments of transition or difficulty, and how psychologically attuned practices—messages, policies, behaviors, and programs—can convey to all students they are valued, respected, and can excel. For more information, visit us online at collegetransitioncollaborative.org.

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