Texas Success Center

Building Faculty and Student Relationships

Problem Statement: Strong faculty-student relationships are foundational to student success, fostering persistence, academic engagement, and a sense of belonging. Faculty, especially adjuncts and online instructors, face challenges in establishing meaningful connections due to unclear expectations, lack of support, and lingering disengagement in the post-pandemic educational landscape. These gaps are linked to lower student retention, completion, and transfer rates.

We propose the development and implementation of a structured **Faculty Training Toolkit** that equips instructors with the tools, strategies, and resources to build impactful relationships with students.

Drawing on research, national data, institutional data, and faculty survey feedback from Blinn College, Central Texas College, and Southwest Texas College, this initiative addresses gaps in faculty preparedness and institutional alignment.

Key National Data Points

50% of students nationwide feel disengaged with their college experience.

70% of college graduates from 2- and 4-year institutions who report that their faculty cared about them also strongly agree that they were challenged academically.

75% of graduating white students say their mentor was a faculty member, only **47%** of minority graduates and **39%** of first-generation college students say their mentor was a faculty member.

KPI	Blinn College	CTC	SWTC
Term to term Persistence (2022)	82%	56%	78%
Earned 30+ Credits in Year 1	9.6%	7.9%	9.2%
Credential in 3 Years (2020)	9.6%	13%	33.5%
University Transfer in 3 Years	23%	9%	19.7%

Faculty Survey Feedback

Importance of Faculty-Student Relationships

Strong agreement that building relationships with students improves student engagement, motivation, and success

Current Practices

Learning student names, prompt feedback, holding regular office hours, encouraging open communication, discussion boards

Challenges Faced

Time constraints, student disengagement, online barriers

Desired Support & Training

Learning student names, prompt feedback, holding regular office hours, encouraging open communication, discussion boards

Initial Support

More encouragement from senior leadership, recognition

Proposed Solution: Objectives of the Training Toolkit
"Relationship building is very important. I believe people do not connect with an institution; they connect with the people." Central Texas College Faculty

- Train faculty on relationship-building with students when hired and via professional development.
- Equip faculty with tools to foster meaningful relationships with students.
- Enhance understanding of faculty's role in student retention and success.
- Provide strategies for fostering belonging in diverse student populations.
- Address specific challenges faced by adjunct and online faculty in building connections.

Key Modules of the Training Toolkit:

"It should include strategies for fostering active participation, tools for incorporating technology effectively in the classroom, and methods for creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments." Southwest Texas College faculty

1 Data Points & Insights:

"For years, I held the attitude of 'I'm the teacher, not their friend.' I learned relationships were the missing link." Southwest Texas College faculty
- Student Profiles: Demographics, challenges, and strengths.
- Retention Metrics: Correlation between relationships and retention.

2 Onboarding Strategies for Faculty:

"I have an onboarding process that includes a video training that I have created. Students can see my face and hear my expectations. Onboarding sets the tone and expectations for engagement. I think this is a very important step." Central Texas College faculty
- Institutional Mission & Values: Align strategies with student success goals.
- Expectations for Engagement: Clear guidelines for fostering belonging.
- Resource Awareness: Introduce campus support services.

3 Key Student Touchpoints:

"I email my students a welcome letter before class starts to introduce myself. I feel if students see me as an engaged professor from the start, they are more likely to respond to my Blackboard messages and engage in the course." Central Texas College faculty
- Early Interaction: Connect with students during the first week.
- Mid-Semester Check-ins: Tools for progress assessments.
- End-of-Term Reflection: Prepare students for future courses.
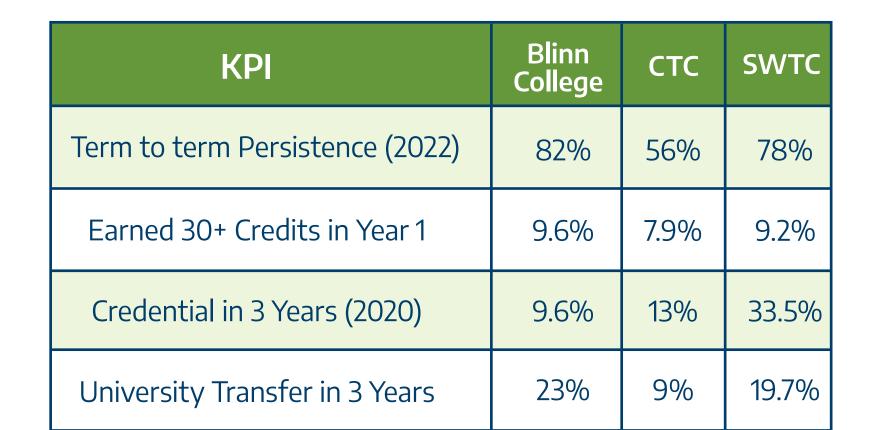
4 Best Practices for Communication:

"I feel that it all depends on how accessible you make yourself, how authentic you are, and if you continually communicate with your students." Blinn College faculty
- Tone & Approach: Foster trust and openness.
- Timeliness: Respond promptly to inquiries.
- Feedback Delivery: Provide constructive and motivating feedback.

5 Engagement Strategies:

"Teach faculty to use viable technology to be available beyond the classic 'I am in my office these limited hours' paradigm." Blinn College faculty
- Interactive Online Tools: Discussion boards, video messages, live sessions.
- Cultural Competency: Enhance sensitivity to diversity.
- Active Learning Techniques: Collaborative and participatory activities.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Improve faculty confidence and consistency in engaging students
- Increase student retention and term-to-term persistence
- Boost completion and transfer outcomes
- Foster a stronger sense of belonging among underrepresented student populations
- Align faculty practices with institutional student success goals

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:

- Faculty Buy-In
- Resource Constraints
- Adjunct Faculty Engagement
- Student-Faculty Disconnect
- Policy and Governance