



California Community Colleges

SYSTEM WEBINAR SUMMARY (May 2023): CREATING UNCONDITIONAL BELONGING

The webinar focused on strengthening unconditional belonging for our students through the lens of trauma-informed design. Guest presenters included LaTonya Parker from the California Community Colleges Curriculum Committee (5C), Clemaus Tervalon and Marco Martinez from the Student Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC), Sang Leng Trieu of Ohlone College, and student panelists Gabriela Aguila and Eliseo Lopez.

Why is Unconditional Belonging Such a Critical Issue?

- In an environment of unconditional belonging, students have feelings of security, support, acceptance, and inclusion that allow them to bring their authentic selves to learn and interact with one another, increasing their likelihood of success.
- The Vision for Success makes clear that we as a system are committed to student-centered approaches and shifting burdens from students to institutions. This includes ensuring that our colleges provide a learning environment conducive to students' sense of unconditional belonging.
- Mental health is a social determinant of educational success, and unconditional belonging is key to supporting the mental health and well-being of underrepresented and underserved student populations. A trauma-informed approach to well-being focuses on providing a structure that supports students, faculty, and staff in creating a learning environment free of discrimination and reflecting awareness of the many adversities students may face, which fosters their resilience and success.

How is Ohlone College Improving Mental Health Services?

- Through a collaboration with Alameda County and other area community colleges, Ohlone College is spearheading the Alameda County Community College Mental Health Navigator [Program](#). The program trains students on community-based mental health and other services so they can serve as peer navigators.
- Due to limited capacity, campus mental health services provide only short-term counseling of 6-8 sessions. Prior to the new program, mental health staff would provide referral sheets to students listing area mental health resources for longer-term care, but students struggled with navigating off-campus services.
- Through the new program, campus mental health counselors can refer students who have reached the limit of campus mental health sessions to the trained student navigators, who help to connect students with community mental health

and basic needs services. Through phone calls and email communications, the navigators help students with numerous issues, such as getting an evaluation for diagnosis to allow access to campus disabled student services, accessing longer-term mental health counseling services, and applying for health insurance, CalFresh benefits, or other services to support their basic needs. The goal is to find a campus space to allow navigators to meet with students in person next year. The navigators also do presentations in classrooms and other settings aimed at reducing the stigma of accessing mental health services.

- The student navigators do not receive a certification related to the training, but they are paid for their work at the campus base minimum wage. They are supervised by campus mental health staff.
- Student navigators are pursuing career goals in mental health services and find serving as navigators to be a valuable experience that supports their educational goals. It gives them hands-on experience and deeper knowledge of the mental health infrastructure and the variety of agencies and services involved. They particularly noted the program's value in supporting students from underserved racial and ethnic populations to pursue careers that will improve the access to and quality of mental health services for people in their communities.

What Resources are Available at the Systemwide Level?

- A variety of mental health resources are available on the Chancellor's Office [website](#), including various [webinars](#) related to Mental Health Action Week.
- The Vision Resource Center includes a learning [module](#) on Trauma-Informed Care, a student support [guide](#) on trauma-informed practices to support student success, and other relevant resources (log-in required).
- The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum [framework](#) created by [5C](#) provides promising practices for curriculum committees, faculty, and other stakeholders to ensure that the curricula we use acknowledge the inequities experienced by historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Examples of the framework's content include selecting culturally responsive classroom materials and recognizing and addressing racial micro-aggressions. While it is not an exhaustive list of strategies, it can help colleges advance their work to create inclusive classrooms and college environments. An online toolkit with links to resources will soon be available on the Chancellor's website.
- The SCCC has developed student grievance policy [principles](#) that should be leveraged to develop student-centered student grievance policies and practices at our colleges. The principles were developed with students' mental health and well-being in mind, addressing the stress students often experience when they encounter micro-aggressions or otherwise navigate a negative campus climate that does not foster unconditional belonging.