



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Building a Culturally-Based Contract for Student Success

Students thrive in environments that support them holistically. A holistic approach can be defined as an approach that activates all aspects of a student's personality, including their physical and mental health, to provide them with a more comprehensive and effective learning environment. To achieve this, institutions must implement programs and staffing that allow students to make connections to the campus and feel fully supported inside and outside of the classroom. Programs that support a holistic student approach are known to increase student performance and retention. These programs also help students feel like part of a family by forming solid relationships with the college and their colleagues that often continue post-graduation.

One way that Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College creates this kind of holistic environment is through the use of academic success coaches. The impact of academic success coaches was first discussed during a recent review of SCTC's developmental education program. Using some innovative revisions, the college decided to include academic success coaches in the student services program. These coaches are assigned to students who place at the developmental education level upon registration. The coaches attend all developmental courses with their students during the first semester, provide supplemental instruction, and host follow-up meetings at least once per week outside of the regular class time. The coaches provide academic support for their students and explore students' non-academic needs to learn how they can be best supported during their first year on campus.

To ensure academic coaches are meeting the holistic needs of our students, the student and coach complete a coach/student cultural-based contract. This contract is based on seven grandfather teachings that support the culture and values of the Anishinaabe ancestors, creating a connection between the student's past, present, and future.

BRAVERY, known in Anishinaabemowin language as "AAKODEWIN," allows coaches to help students explore the journey they will take in college. Discussing bravery allows the academic coach to affirm the courage it took for the student to enroll in college and

introduces the concept of growth mindset. Students and coaches discuss having the courage to do the right thing academically and non-academically, even in difficult circumstances. This may include discussing academic policies such as plagiarism students must be mindful of in order to keep their academic integrity intact.

HONESTY, also known as "GWEKOWAADIZIWIN" in Anishinaabemowin, allows academic coaches to have open conversations with students about being truthful in actions and deeds. These conversations may explore how students manage their current schedule and how they might make adjustments to accommodate their new academic responsibilities. Students need to be honest with themselves and others when determining what they can and cannot handle, and how to do their best in the academic and non-academic worlds. Many students face difficulties such as housing and food insecurity, childcare needs, lack of technology accessibility, and financial insecurity. The academic coaches help students find financial aid resources and other resources provided by the college's human resources department.

HUMILITY, known as "DIBAADENDIZOWIN" in Anishinaabemowin, helps students learn that everyone is equal; no one is more or less than another. Humility allows coaches to discuss the importance of having an open mind when entering academic studies and to encourage students to have empathy with one another inside and outside the classroom.

LOVE, also known as "ZAAGIDWIN" in Anishinaabemowin, encourages students to honor their personal experiences and stories and to recognize that these experiences can be used as the building blocks of academic and non-academic support. Students identify different sources of support that exist in their lives, and academic coaches document this information and use it to build a support system specific to that student's needs. Knowing they have a support system available encourages students to keep pushing forward on difficult days when they question their choice to pursue an academic career.

RESPECT, translated from the Anishinaabemowin word "MANAADJITOWAAWIN," can lead students down many different roads when building a coach/student contract. Respect is an important part of a

student's new academic goals and commitments. Students must respect themselves as a student and also respect the journey they are about to begin in college. During this discussion, students are encouraged to demonstrate regard for all beings, creatures, and creations within their academic and non-academic worlds.

TRUTH, known as "DEBWEWIN" in Anishinaabemowin, encourages students to discuss the need to be true to themselves and their people and to embrace the support the college can provide. This sometimes leads to a discussion about students' strengths and weaknesses. The ability to identify strengths and weaknesses from day one and understand how they impact students academically and non-academically are essential. Students who are unable to open up and share their truth with an academic coach have a harder time accepting support from the college.

WISDOM, known to the Anishinaabe as "NIBWAAKAAWIN," allows students to use their knowledge for the good of the people. This conversation allows coaches to discuss what a privilege it is for the college to have them as a student. The coach introduces biographies of alumni students may be familiar with, allowing them to see the accomplishments of individuals who have once been where they are now. This part of the contract is included in hopes it will encourage students to share their stories and accomplishments after graduation.

This cultural-based contract, along with the ability to match students with an academic coach who stays by their side during the first weeks of the term, allows the student services department to identify the academic and non-academic needs of its students. In doing so, students are given a base of support that is a unique gift from their tribal college family. The ability to provide this type of program to tribal college students is one reason why working at a tribal college is so rewarding. The rewards extend beyond completion and graduation rates; they encompass the individual successes of our students each and every day.

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