

Brock S.: Hi there, Brock Schermerhorn and Martin Welc here from the California Community College's Real Estate Education Center. We are here today with Dr. Juan Avalos, who is the VP of Student Services at Saddleback College. He's going to talk to us about some student services issues that may arise in your daily workings at your college, what resources you might have, and some protocols that you might want to follow. Juan, could you take it away?

Juan A.: Absolutely. Thank you for this opportunity. As I thought about your question in preparation for this podcast, the thing that comes to my mind has been a challenge throughout my entire career is awareness of services. Students knowing what services are available on and off campus, faculty knowing what services are available on campus, and then just employees in general has always been the challenge. We only have so much capacity to know what's there, and when students are unaware of it, they don't always get all of the support that they need.

Juan A.: One of the things that I've always noticed when we talk to students, they'll tell you, students that have been successful on your campuses, will tell you that once they became aware of that service or the people providing the specific needs, they knew that it was available, their entire lives on the campus has changed. They've always asked, if only students knew. That's been the single most challenge, is how do we make sure that everyone is aware of what's available?

Juan A.: There's a couple of things that we've tried to do to answer those questions and I'm sure it's the kinds of things that folks at all the colleges across the California community college system are doing. We tried to inform students through orientations. We have websites that provide some descriptions on what's available. We have posters, we use marquees, we do everything that we can to do that. And that's helpful. But it's still not enough.

Juan A.: We tried to do trainings for faculty and staff doing professional development sessions. Some attend, not everyone that needs to know shows up. So we try to communicate. Some folks are aware and they're able to triage, but the challenge continues and so for us the idea is how do we continue to get better at that? And then more importantly, are there some very specific tips that any of your listeners could utilize to really be able to support the students that they serve?

Juan A.: Let me talk about some of the things we're doing and then I'll end with I think the silver ticket when it comes to supports. On our campus there's a number of things we do and we're going to continue to find ways to leverage marquees, how to get that communication out. We're currently in a project where we're going to basically take the student's lifecycle throughout the entire year and begin to send messages to students via their marquee about what key services are available when they need them, and in the hopes that our students will see them, in the hopes that our employees will see them as well.

Juan A.: In our district we also have the advantage of triaging students very specifically, where we send them specific messages based on particular needs and so we will continue to

do that. You will I'm sure on the college campuses, you'll hear colleges beginning to use analytics to identify students and their needs to triage. We will continue to do all of that.

Juan A.: We'll continue the trainings, inform people as best we can, and our hope is that more of our students and our employees will know about it.

Juan A.: The piece that's available perhaps right now, both on this campus and across the various campuses that you may not be aware of is most campuses currently, will probably have a team, an administrative team, that has been created to provide triage supports for students. They may call it something differently at your college, but some of the names to look for are early alert programs, early alert teams, care teams, care reports, and on some campuses, if they're using a very specific software, they'll call it Starfish, which is a platform where employees could go in and identify students that have various needs.

Juan A.: Regardless of what it's called, it probably exists on your campuses today. If you're a campus that has a student health center, it's probably linked to your student health center. So if you're not sure, I invite you to go visit the website of your health center, look around it, you'll probably find some of the words that I've identified.

Juan A.: If you don't have a student health center, there may be links to these things out of your counseling department. It depends on the extent to which you have the full range of student support services.

Juan A.: Knowing that that's available, the cool thing about something like that is that as a faculty member, all you need to know is that a student of yours is in need and you refer that person to this team with the specifics about what is it that the student is going through.

Juan A.: Is this student seems to be suffering from food insecurities? Do they have housing insecurities? Do they have some sort of medical condition that needs some additional support? Are they suffering from mental health or addiction? Are they struggling to make ends meet? Are they in under a lot of stress? Whatever the issue is, the awesome thing about some of these teams and these current protocols is that you don't have to know the on campus or off campus resources for all of those things that are going on with your student. All you need to know is that your student needs this and then you're handing them off to the people on your campus who can help them.

Juan A.: Now an important piece about that is that once the handoff is done, you will probably not get a lot of details about what the specific situation is with the student and what's been able to be found.

Juan A.: Someone will probably double back with you to say, we've met with your student. Things are coming under control. Things are moving forward. The student is in a good place. Or you may then hear from your students saying, thank you for making that referral. You all are wonderful. I'm in a better place. I feel great. I think I could succeed. But all of that is available now.

Juan A.: One of the things I find is that a tremendous amount of frustration, sometimes even guilt, on the part of faculty who feel disempowered because they don't know how best to help a student. They're trying to figure out trying to do it on their own.

Juan A.: My advice to your listeners is that you don't have to do it on your own. You don't need to know all these things. You just need to reach out to whoever that group is on your campus that could help.

Juan A.: If you go and you look and you find out that your college doesn't have one of those groups, I'd say have a conversation with your Vice President of Student Services and find out what can be done to create one. I would be pretty shocked if the vast majority of our California community colleges do not have one of these teams. They're pretty common. That would be the golden ticket that I would offer you on how best to support your students.

Brock S.: I have a question for you.

Juan A.: Sure.

Brock S.: It can be a delicate subject. Let's say you're a new part time faculty member teaching a class for the first time and you hear through the grapevine or somebody in the class mentions that somebody else in the class is struggling with homelessness. What's the protocol on that? Do you approach the student? Do you immediately go to the referral? What's the right way to do that gingerly without being upsetting to anybody?

Juan A.: Yeah, it's a common thing. I think with something like homelessness, I think people are a little more comfortable maybe having a conversation because a conversation typically comes from a place of humanity, a place of concern, and most students are warmed to that idea.

Juan A.: But there are times where the topic is a little more sensitive and there may be some fear associated with it. The person bringing it forward doesn't want to be identified.

Juan A.: When we first launched this a few years ago, we were mimicking the protocols that we would do for student discipline. In student discipline, nothing could be sent forward anonymously because you have to go through due process and people need to know who's involved. We had a situation where someone, through the care report, because for us it's called care, who wanted to be anonymous because it was related to mental health and they were concerned that if somehow they brought this forward, it could have some triggering effect, find themselves on the retaliatory side of that.

Juan A.: The concession we've made in our process is that someone could bring it forward, either just identifying themselves, or bring it forward, asking for confidentiality when it comes to that. We've done that. We've honored it. Because in the end it's the student hasn't done anything wrong. So it's not punitive. It's not mandatory that the student follow anything that we ask.

Juan A.: In those cases, typically what happens is, student's invited and then we have a conversation with the student, and we tell them, one of your instructors, or someone, has informed us that you may have this need. They care about you. They're concerned. And we're here to help. Do you want to talk about that?

Juan A.: In almost every single case, the very first reaction from the student was, wow, my instructor cared about me so much that they brought it to your attention and you're here to help me.

Juan A.: That's one way in which it happens. But I think if you initiate a conversation with someone from a genuine place of concern, I see this is happening. I see the effect that it's happening on you. I care about you as a person. I care about you as a student. We have resources on campus. Would you like me to forward your name to a team of people who are really wonderful at helping our students out?

Juan A.: You give the student the option to say, yeah, that would be awesome. Please do that on my behalf. Or if they really have an issue with it, they say, really no, I'm not interested. And then you just say, okay, when you are let me know. We have the team ready for you. It's one of those where it's not a mandatory thing, so I think the conversation could be maybe an easier one to have.

Juan A.: But we always begin with, we care about you and we want to help. I think we've had a pretty strong track record of being able to find ways to support students both from a combination of what's available on the campus, but also what's available in the community because our team is knowledgeable at both.

Brock S.: Those are some great suggested responses.

Martin W.: Absolutely.

Brock S.: We had a situation that came up recently and the first thing we did was asked permission to forward that particular concern and then it went into our pipeline.

Brock S.: Having said that, if you're a part time faculty that may be comes in for an assignment once every two years, or even that full-timer that is hired, and on the first day they talk about their retirement benefits that are maybe 30 years down the road, how do you keep this information in front of people? Can you think of any creative or fun ways to have this less than sexy information, if you will, at the forefront?

Juan A.: I think in terms of the creative and fun ways I may need to depend on you all to give me those ideas. I think what we've gone to has been more structured events. Like I mentioned, we've had presentations at professional development, but there's a lot of things that people want to do during those times and it isn't always raised to the level.

Juan A.: Sometimes folks that do show up are those that either are in something, have been in something, in something very real, and so they feel compelled to go. We've extended it to division meetings, things of that nature. But most of what we've done has been in

those structures. I'm open to any suggestions that you may have on how to find additional ways of getting the information out. This is why I appreciated this opportunity to do this podcast. This is fun and creative. I hope.

Juan A.: But if you have specific ideas, that'd be helpful because in the end, what really matters is that those who are working closest with our students are aware of what's available and that our students get the help that they need, is ultimately what's most important.

Juan A.: If you have ideas, if your listeners have ideas, I'd love to have the podcast help in both ways. Ways to get this information out to others. I thought where you were headed with the question, the creative fun part threw me a little bit, but one of the things that I would advise folks to do, if you're brand new, whether you're a brand new full-timer, or a brand new part-timer, I would welcome the opportunity for any new person to schedule a 30 minute thing with me.

Juan A.: I'm a new adjunct. I'm a new full-timer. You're the VP of Student Services. Can you tell me what's available on your camp? Just to make a connection so that they could feel comfortable when something does come up to touch base. Because then we have the ability to take corrective action and be of support.

Juan A.: I think it's it's basically the same thing that we tell our students. The value of being engaged on campus, interacting with people, building relationships is that when some things happen, your network of resources expands when you have people you could go to. Like many of our students, many of our employees are afraid to ask that question, are afraid to reach out, have other things to do, and want to get to it and don't quite get to it.

Juan A.: But when that initial ice is broken, I've found people feeling really comfortable asking those questions, which is part of the reason why every time we've had part time orientations in the evenings, it's really important for me to be there. It's really important for them to see a name and a face. Hopefully they feel more comfortable.

Juan A.: Those are the kinds of things. The VP of student services may not be reaching out to your listeners, but if your listeners want to reach out to them, I know we know that we're partners in this work and I would speak for all of my colleagues to say that they would welcome that.

Martin W.: I would say that as initial response that all the above. We have found that it's a case of whether it be faculty, students and so forth, tell them what you just told him and tell them again. I'm seeing the division meetings working. I'm seeing in service as another option is working. The other events that you mentioned earlier are all winning solutions.

Brock S.: This is some great info. If you're a part timer or somebody who just doesn't have a chance to get out to maybe that flex week presentation on this stuff. We're trying to bring it to you here and we think Juan's a great advocate for this stuff. We really thank you for chatting with us today about this.

Juan A.: My pleasure.

Martin W.: Yeah. Thank you very much. On a quick personal note. An event happened recently with us that sparked this whole idea of creating this particular podcast. It took an event for us to really delve into what's the response, how do we handle it, what's the best way to do it? So we're hoping to save you that step that you can dial directly.

Brock S.: Good point. All right. Signing off.