



Supporting Students from a Distance

West Hills College Lemoore

Their Approach

While West Hills College Lemoore (WHCL) is determined to stay focused on increasing student completion, their “North Star,” the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift in how WHCL will get there. The crisis opened a window into students’ basic needs. WHCL modified its student-success team structure, increasing non-academic support and assuming new responsibilities to address students’ food, housing, and healthcare needs—while continuing to carefully analyze and share student early alert data.

What They Did

With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, WHCL reorganized their Student Success Teams into “CARE” teams to connect students to resources for housing, food, or mental and physical health care; and to solve problems like ensuring that students have instructional packets when there’s no internet access. For each learning area (WHCL’s meta-majors) CARE teams are made up of the Vice President of Student Services and one other administrator, an advisor, and a counselor. They reach out to students, hear concerns identified in weekly CARE Team meetings, and address red flags raised by faculty through WHCL’s student of concern and early alert system, Civitas.

CARE teams benefit from WHCL’s ongoing data democratization efforts. Having immediate, comprehensive access to student data via Civitas allows for more time dedicated to problem solving. In addition to viewing red flags, teams can perform Canvas data analytics and access each other’s case management notes in Civitas.

What They Learned

“We had started our case management approach to counseling before, but COVID-19 was a rallying call,” observed VPSS Val Martinez Garcia. “We asked ourselves, when were our students never in crisis?” Prior to COVID-19, prioritizing basic needs was not considered the Student Success Teams main focus. Students “in crisis” were assumed to be “students who were already at high risk.” Crisis was now being experienced universally, making it critical that WHCL respond to students’ needs and scale up their case management efforts overnight.

With collective empathy, came a shift in perception. More people opened up to seeing their role as a care provider. “We used to think: that would be nice but we can’t do that,” Garcia said. “It took a pandemic to realize we can do this.” WHCL’s long-term goal is to continue CARE teams, encourage counselors to be more proactive in providing non-academic supports, and continue remote access to counselors via ConferZoom.

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