
PRINCIPLES OF HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORT

Gateway to College National Network believes that every student has the capacity to *become* a successful college student. In addition to effective teaching practices in the classroom, GtCNN students receive holistic support rooted in an ecological framework and developmental approach *from their entire program team*. The ecological frameworkⁱ posits that growth is influenced by the variety of contexts individuals experience and the strength of the connections between those contexts. For GtCNN students, this may include school experiences, peers, family responsibilities, cultural heritage, work experiences of parents and guardians and, more broadly, neighborhoods, communities, and the economic health of those places. In turn, the developmental approachⁱⁱ asserts that success in learning comes from mastery of incremental steps. For GtCNN students these are specifically the steps needed to be a successful college student. These five principles are the foundation of GtCNN's philosophy on supporting students in their individual growth and success:

Caring Relationships
Safe Environments
Strengths-Based Mindset
Solution-Focused Approach
Community Connections

Caring Relationships

Interactions with adults who respond in a caring, honest, respectful, and attentive manner provide the ground work for the development of trusting, genuine relationships and create the potential for dynamic change. Team members use an intrusive advising approach, regularly and proactively reaching out to students in order to provide support and guidance. With the foundation of strong, caring relationships, team members are able to empower students to become academically successful.

Safe Environments

Safety, including physical, emotional, cultural, and identity exploration, is important to adolescent (and human) development. A sense of belonging, strong relationships with adults and peers, and physically safe environments all contribute to creating an optimal learning experience. Team members foster a learning community where students feel safe expressing themselves, taking risks, making mistakes, and supporting each other. Providing a space where students can take risks and learn about themselves and others is core to providing a successful learning environment.

Strengths-Based Mindset

Students' individual strengths are deeply rooted in their culture and past experiences and are nurtured, built on, and used as the basis for working toward future successes. Students are taught to recognize both internal and external strengths and understand such traits are not fixed; rather, they can be developed and built on with a growth mindset. Team members not only focus on students' assets, but empower students to recognize their own strengths and build on them for future successes. Furthermore, they understand the challenges students have overcome and, more importantly, the resilient characteristics they possess.

Solution-Focused Approach

Relationships with students are grounded in respect, hope, and empowerment. Team members use a scaffolded learning approach where incremental steps to reach goals or solutions are actively taught and celebrated. Student-driven solutions are encouraged. Instead of "fixing problems," team members collaborate and facilitate conversations that help students construct solutions. Students are recognized as experts in their own lives and the drivers of change. GtCNN students understand there is no one correct course of action toward building a solution and small changes matter; they are encouraged to focus on the future.

Community Connections

Community support refers to all of the support systems available to students. This includes, but is not limited to, family, friends, religious and cultural organizations, and campus and social service resources.

Faculty and staff welcome students' existing systems, including family (however *students* define their families) and other caring adults, to support, encourage, and empower students to succeed. Team members assist students in effectively engaging with on campus opportunities and resources, as well as community support services, creating comprehensive wrap around services.

Students learn to build relationships and access the resources and opportunities available to them to help them be successful. They are also provided with opportunities to give back to their communities through volunteer work and service learning. In this way, they are encouraged to see themselves as having a valuable and necessary role to play in the community at large as well as an active and necessary role to play in their own educational success.

ⁱ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1970); Biesta, G. & Tedder, M. (2007); You, S. & Sharkey, J. (2009); Arana, R., Castaneda-Sound, C., Blanchard, S. & Aguilar, T.E. (2011).

ⁱⁱ Chickering, A.W. & Reisser, L. (1993); Boylan, H.R. & Saxon, D.P. (1998); Higbee, J.L., Arendale, D.R., & Lundell, D. B. (2005)