



APLU

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE
STUDY
2018

ABOUT CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

Campus Connections (CC) is a powerful campus-based, therapeutic mentoring program that partners at-risk youth and families in Larimer County with Colorado State University (CSU) student mentors in a service learning experience.

Students from over 90 majors work one-on-one with youth ranging from 11-18 years old over a 12-week period to tackle a broad range of challenges and reach their full potential. At CSU, the program engages 224 youth and 224 mentors each year.

In this win-win situation, CC achieves its goals to: (a) promote the resilience and life success of at-risk youth; (b) prepare university students to become highly skilled, civically engaged professionals; and (c) strengthen community systems to better serve disadvantaged youth and their families.

Youth are referred to CC from a variety of agencies, including the juvenile justice system, school districts, human services, and other agencies. As 94% of the families served are below 250% of the federal poverty level, the program is offered free of charge and therefore, accessible to youth in need.

INNOVATIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED MENTORING MODEL

Owing to the partnership between CSU and the Northern Colorado community, mentoring occurs in a uniquely structured and intentional multi-level mentoring community that allows mentors and mentees to develop meaningful relationships.

CSU student mentors enroll in a three-credit hour course that involves pre- and post-lab planning, as well as a deep dive into mentoring literature. Several levels of the course are available to support student leadership in moving from mentors, to mentor coaches, to research assistants.

Student mentors spend four hours each week with their mentee in a group setting to provide academic support and career planning, encourage positive social skills development, assist with goal setting, and implement wellness programming. Because Campus Connections is located entirely on a college campus, youth experience firsthand the possibilities of education and the importance of learning.

CC creates an environment in which each mentor-mentee pair is nested within a small mentoring group, known as a Mentor Family, where the youth are of similar ages. This unique feature of the



Figure 1: Two participants of Campus Connections

program allows youth to positively interact with their peers while benefiting from interactions with their primary adult mentor and the community of caring adults within their Mentor Family (Figure 2).

Doctoral-level licensed marriage and family therapists direct and supervise the program along with Masters-level family therapist instructors. In this way, highly-trained experts collaborate with students to serve youth effectively and in response to their unique circumstance and needs.

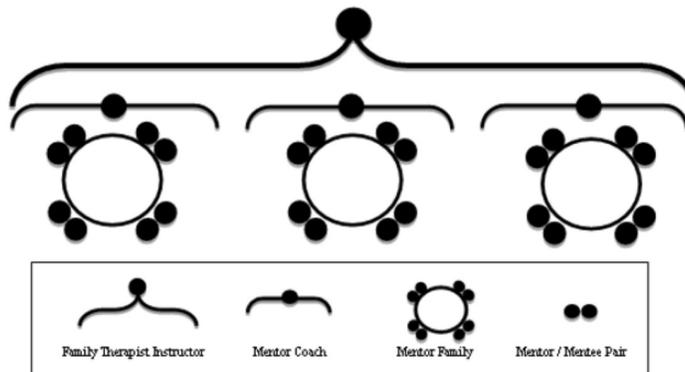


Figure 2: Family Systems Approach to Mentoring Community

PROGRAM HISTORY

Campus Connections is a nine-year partnership between CSU and a wide array of community partners. It was developed at the request of the juvenile justice system in response to the discontinuation of youth mental health services due to the financial recession. The innovative design was recognized by the Corporation for National & Community Service, which provided funding for the initial development and pilot of the program.

CC quickly became a core service in Northern Colorado for disadvantaged youth and their families. Since its inception, the program has served over 2,250 youth and 2,700 students.

Reciprocity with community systems is a hallmark of the program, which maintains productive relationships with the juvenile magistrate, the district attorney, the Probation department, local school districts, the Department of Human Services, and many others. Stakeholders meet throughout the year to receive ongoing training and address issues related to at-risk youth, programming, and funding. Solutions and innovations are generated collectively.

The program has gained [international attention and media coverage](#) because its unique design solves significant challenges that have plagued traditional mentoring programs. In response to this interest, the CC leadership team has partnered with CSU Ventures, the university's technology transfer and commercialization office, to trademark and license the program to other university campuses. The curriculum now operates at the University of Northern Colorado and the [University of Auckland in New Zealand](#), and will be launched at the [University of Colorado-Colorado Springs in Fall 2018](#).

Campus Connections would not exist without a fully engaged partnership between the community and the university. Indeed, when CC is exported to other universities, a significant portion of the training CSU provides is about community engagement and the importance of university-community collaboration to program sustainability.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Campus Connections is grounded in evidence-based practices for youth mentoring while also

conducting rigorous research to maximize the intervention effects. This research program enables the development, testing, and dissemination of CC's unique contributions to youth mentoring nationally and internationally.

Results of a quasi-experimental [evaluation of youth outcomes](#) published in Applied Developmental Science in 2015 indicated that CC participants reported less truancy, less engagement in delinquency, less use of substances, lower acceptance of delinquency and substance use, and a greater sense of autonomy from marijuana use postintervention than participants in the comparison condition. CC participants also report higher levels of emotional wellbeing than youth in the comparison condition.

A 2013 American Journal of Community Psychology [publication](#) examined the civic-related benefits that college students derive from mentoring youth within CC. The results indicated that, in comparison to college students who did not participate in the course, CC students had significantly higher scores at post-intervention regarding mentors' civic attitudes, community service self-efficacy, self-esteem, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, political awareness, and civic action.

Studies conducted by CSU's Office of Institutional Research in 2013 and 2015 have found that students who participate in the CC program have a 127% higher chance of graduating and 63% lower odds of dropping out in any given year. These higher odds translate to 27 more students graduating within four years from each cohort, contributing a half percentage point towards CSU's overall 4-year graduation rate, a key metric among the university's student success goals.

Program leaders have begun incorporating economic modeling into their research by estimating the cost of high-school drop-out and associated community costs related to problem behavior, relative to the cost of CC and associated benefits of high-school graduation and inspiration for further education and job attainment.

Both CSU and community partners see significant value in these youth and student outcomes (Figure 3) and have continued to enthusiastically support Campus Connections. The program is currently funded by the prestigious William T. Grant Foundation to empirically evaluate a unique component of the program that is hypothesized to strengthen outcomes. Results of this study will have implications for mentoring programs internationally.



Figure 3: Mutual Benefits for Mentees and Mentors

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its **Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)** established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP designation program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP awards program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP