

By Symone C. Skrzycki

COUNSELING AND COACHING

Ivy Tech Adds to High School Efforts

"It's been a pleasure working with (students) because they have so many questions," remarks Ivy Tech College Connection Coach Carrie Feltis. "It's nice that they trust you to find the right answers for them."



"A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step."

Example: a young person's journey through high school and beyond. An Ivy Tech Community College program is helping youth navigate educational and career paths – one step at a time.

The College Connection Coach initiative places Ivy Tech employees in high schools to promote a culture of college attainment and to provide career counseling and advisement. Launched last fall, it stresses collaboration with guidance counselors, administrators and teachers.

Carrie Feltis is a College Connection Coach in the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation. She spends two days each week at both Central High School and Harrison High School.

"I've always been fascinated by – and dedicated to – helping folks find their mission, their purpose," she reflects. "It seemed like a really nice transition (from her most recent role at Ivy Tech working in career services) to ... help students who have the world ahead of them and have so much potential, but maybe get confused about the direction or how to navigate the process."

Andrea Campbell, assistant principal for programming at Central High School, welcomes the addition.

"What I've appreciated so much is that Carrie has jumped in and become part of our team," she comments during a weekly meeting with Feltis and Central High School's four counselors. "She has a different perspective coming from the postsecondary area and it's helped give us another layer of knowledge."

In a later visit to the office of Jonathan Weinzapfel, he reviews Indiana Department of Education data about high school graduates who didn't continue their education. Weinzapfel is a former state legislator and Evansville mayor and current chancellor of the Ivy Tech Community College-Southwest/Wabash Valley Region

He considers the College Connection Coach program "part of a much bigger vision for the state of Indiana."

"By 2018, we expect that 90% of all jobs are going to require some type of postsecondary credential. It seems to me that it's imperative that we as a society – and we feel that it's Ivy Tech's mission specifically – make sure these young people have every opportunity to succeed. And for them to succeed in today's economy, that means earning some type of postsecondary credential."

When this story went to press, Ivy Tech employed four College Connection Coaches (in Vanderburgh, Clay, Parke and Perry counties)



Central High School senior Lindsey, who has teamed with Feltis on a variety of college preparation activities, will be the first member of her family to graduate from high school.

and planned to hire two additional people to cover the rest of the Evansville high schools.

'An extension of the hand'

In May 2014, the *Indiana School Counseling Research Review* – commissioned by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation – found that school counselors are not meeting the postsecondary and career needs of students, due in large part to a stagnant system and a variety of situations often out of their control.

The majority of school counselors surveyed (a total of 426, with 73% representing high schools) indicated a desire to spend more time providing college and career guidance.

The crux of the report: The state has a counseling issue – not an issue with the counselors.

College Connection Coaches can help address the challenge.

“We work together to try to increase college and career readiness, and to try to increase the aspirations of our students and make sure they’re setting some goals for after high school,” Campbell remarks.

Adds Central High School counselor Kim McWilliams, “It’s all about setting goals: everything we do. When they (students) actually have to put it down on paper, it holds them more accountable – when you’re going to do it and how you’re going to get there.”

Reflecting on the value Feltis brings to the counseling team, he asserts, “It’s an extension of the hand and it’s right in our own building.”

Finding their way

During her first 90 days at the high schools, Feltis had more than 100 face-to-face meetings with students. Topics encompassed career opportunities, the importance of academics, earning dual credit, completing financial aid forms and more.

Tapping the palm of her hand for emphasis, she shares that the activities are intended to help them “stay on point, and make sure we’re moving forward and have some goals set.”

“I do a lot of follow up with them by email and phone,” she explains from her office, which is just a few steps away from Campbell’s. “Some of the things we work on most often are career-exploration related, so we’ll do online assessments and help connect those results to possible career options and perhaps some college majors to consider.

“By the time I meet with the juniors and seniors, some of them feel like they have an idea (of their desired career), but sometimes we do additional research to make sure their path is a good fit for what they have to offer academically and for what they have to offer in terms of their interests.”

Pointing to the medical field as an example, she quips with a laugh, “It’s a little hard to say, ‘I want to be a nurse, but I hate blood.’”

Feltis promotes the College Connection Coach initiative through enrollment events, Parents’ Nights, classroom presentations and career workshops.

Weinzapfel stresses the significance.

“I get the sense that there are a lot of young people and their parents who need help setting that vision for what they do beyond high school. It’s challenging for folks to fully understand the range of opportunities that exist,” he observes.

“This type of work is critical to the state of Indiana because the more young people that are moving on beyond high school to earn some kind of credential – their associate’s, their bachelor’s, technical certifications – increases our college attainment rate. It makes us more attractive for further economic development.”

RESOURCES: Jonathan Weinzapfel and Carrie Feltis, Ivy Tech Community College-Southwest/Wabash Valley Region, at www.ivytech.edu/southwest | Andrea Campbell and Kim McWilliams, Central High School, at www.edlinesites.net/pages/EVSC_CentralHS



“It’s important for students to see, ‘Did they reach their goals?’ and if they didn’t, ‘Why is that?’” emphasizes Andrea Campbell, assistant principal for programming.



The Central High School counseling team works closely with Feltis to help students develop and meet their objectives.

Big goals, small steps

A short chat between Feltis and a student with whom she’s worked closely reveals a unique rapport.

“I had no clue what college I was going to and didn’t know how to fill out (admissions forms and other paperwork),” recalls Lindsey, a senior. “I talked to her and got everything on track. It made a big difference.”

Feltis jumps in.

“That motivation is there!” she declares, praising Lindsey for recent accomplishments (which include earning higher grades than ever before). “Sometimes it’s just nice to have someone to talk to. Own your motivation.”

Feltis has some goals of her own.

“The position is evolving and we’re figuring out how I best fit and complement what they’re doing at this high school versus that high school,” she remarks. “We know the goal is the same – to promote a culture of college and career readiness – but how we go about doing it, I’m flexible.”