

International association honors BC3 vice president

“Our students benefit most from his expertise,” president says

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(Columbus, Ohio) An international association has recognized Dr. Case Willoughby, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management at Butler County Community College, for his outstanding and sustained contributions to higher education and to student affairs.

Willoughby is among 17 educators from across the country selected as a Diamond Honoree by the Educational Leadership Foundation of ACPA: College Student Educator’s International.

A member of ACPA since 1993, Willoughby was nominated as a Diamond Honoree by Dr. Laura Bayless, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

His nomination reflects his efforts with ACPA, which states its mission is “to support and foster college student learning through the generation and dissemination of knowledge,” and with BC3, Willoughby said.

Willoughby, who has worked in student affairs for more than 20 years, the past five at BC3, counts reshaping “the entire orientation process” among the successes in his division at BC3.

That involved coordinating, publicizing and tracking expectations of students “so that they are ready on Day One to be in a college-level classroom,” Willoughby said.

The effort has been tailored toward “not meeting where you think students should be,” Willoughby said, “but meeting them where they are.”

A “huge impact on students and institutions alike”

A number of BC3 students are first-generation collegians, Willoughby said. And while their parents may be “incredibly supportive in doing everything they can to help their child,” they may not know what questions to ask or what to expect on behalf of the student.



Dr. Case Willoughby, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management at Butler County Community College.

“So it becomes all the more important that we are more proactive and outreach more in setting up this onboarding program,” said Willoughby, who previously served as director of advising at Hunter College, Manhattan; director of academic achievement at Hostos Community College, Bronx; and as class dean at Columbia University, Manhattan.

That proactive approach and continual outreach is among the reasons Bayless nominated Willoughby.

“In Case’s distinguished career, there are many examples of the difference he has made in individual students’ lives – in designing policies, processes and systems so that students are set up for success; in creating dynamic, talented and supported teams; and in contributing to the field in significant ways,” Bayless said.

Willoughby, Bayless said, “has made a huge impact on students and institutions alike.”

Dialogue with students begins earlier

That would include BC3 and its orientation process, which has been enhanced with the establishment of continual communication with high school seniors as early as October, when many applicants receive their BC3 admission letter. That dialogue includes activating a springtime blog in which BC3 starts “pulsing out pieces of information every couple of weeks,” Willoughby said.

Blog posts include topics such as “Have you thought about what career you want?” Willoughby said. “Here is a TED talk about how to think about careers. Here are some resources that we have that you can access. Here are some questions you want to consider. Have you thought about how you are going to pay for college? We have scholarships. We have financial aid. We have a payment plan. These are some things to consider.”

Another blog post might introduce students to how they can become involved in BC3 athletics, clubs and organizations. “There are benefits in that you will enjoy college more, and you will also learn skills you might actually need in your job like leadership and working on a team,” Willoughby said.

Additional orientation changes in his division include scheduling placement tests on a different day from when students meet with advisers about majors and register for classes.

“But we don’t just have you test,” Willoughby said of the changes. “In advance we tell you how to prep for it.”

“A multi-pronged effort”

BC3 now steers students toward resources should they want to retake their placement tests, score higher in subjects such as English and mathematics “and save three credits of tuition,” Willoughby said. “They will save time and get further into their major.”

Some students retake the placement tests, Willoughby said. Some don't.

"But either way," Willoughby said, "when they get to advising and registration, they are not fried from just having spent two hours on a fairly grueling test."

Students are now taught how to avoid long lines by registering for classes online, Willoughby said, adding that advising has been broadened to engage students on their career choices.

"I pushed these. I had a great team. It was not like I was in isolation," Willoughby said. "It was the student affairs team. We worked together to figure out what would be most effective. This is a multi-pronged effort to try to make BC3 a better place."

Statistics: Efforts successful

Among the results of the efforts has been an increase in fall-to-fall student retention rates, from 53 percent to three consecutive years of 60 percent; and a "massive jump" in Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory results from 2011 to 2014, Willoughby said.

BC3 students reported higher levels of satisfaction in 12 of 12 categories, including registration effectiveness and academic advising and counseling.

"But the best compliment is that faculty members are saying, 'My students came to class having an idea of what they had to do,'" Willoughby said.

Willoughby brings "a global perspective to BC3," said Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 president. "He is well-known as an expert scholar, superb presenter and an excellent practitioner in his field. And we have him at Butler County Community College, thankfully. In the end, it is our students who benefit most from his expertise."

Willoughby holds doctorate and master's degrees in higher education from Columbia University, a master's degree in Hispanic civilization from New York University; and a bachelor's degree in Hispanic studies from Connecticut College.

He has also consulted on the creation of Columbia University's student affairs division, bringing it into alignment with student affairs research and best practices, according to ACPA. He has also served on the ACPA-National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' Joint Task Force on Student Affairs Professional Competencies, the ACPA Senior Student Affairs Officer Advisory Board, and the Directorate of the ACPA Commission on Two Year Colleges. He has also presented at numerous national conferences and authored book reviews in leading journals, according to ACPA.

Willoughby was recognized as a member of the Diamond Honoree Class of 2017 on March 28 in Columbus, Ohio.