Cultivating Faculty Buy-In for
Basic Needs Efforts

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Faculty can—and should—be key allies and champions for your institution's basic needs efforts. Because of their student-facing role and the rapport they can develop with students, faculty are often in the best position to recognize when a student needs support and may be a student's first point of contact for help. This guide contains suggestions for understanding faculty members' priorities and challenges, meeting them where they are, and providing effective tools for them to join your institution's basic needs efforts.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Building more faculty buy-in for your institution's basic needs work starts with gathering information that will help you better understand who your faculty are, what motivates them, and what challenges they currently face. In some cases, you may be able to work from existing data (e.g., historical knowledge, current relationships) while in others, it may be important to collect new data through informal conversations, more formal interviews and/or focus groups, surveys, or other methods. When gathering information, focus on answering three main questions about faculty at your institution:

- **What do they know/think about student basic needs insecurity and your work?**
  For example, are they:
  - Already actively involved in the work and/or helping to build awareness of existing resources?
  - Interested in contributing, but lacking the time and/or direction to do so consistently?
  - Uninformed, but curious to learn about students' needs and how they may be able to help?
  - Uncertain about the importance of the work or why they should play a role in it?
  - Adamant that it isn't their job or responsibility to engage in or support this work?
  - Of the belief that this work should not be done by the college at all?
  - A bit of all of the above?
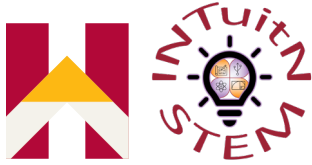
- **What are their priorities/goals?**
  For example, are they:
    - Focused on student learning and/or academic performance?
    - Seeking to bolster student development and overall well-being?
    - Invested in the institution's retention and completion numbers?
    - Driven by a need to safeguard their financial stability?
    - Concerned with multiple, sometimes competing priorities?
    - A bit of all of the above?

- **What are their challenges/stressors?**
  For example, are they:
    - At capacity with their teaching/student-facing workload?
    - Overburdened by their administrative/institution-facing workload?
    - Overwhelmed by other institutional and/or professional requirements?
    - Concerned about adapting to new/changing systems and technologies?
    - Burnt out by the seemingly ever-expanding scope of and/or unclear expectations for their role?
    - A bit of all of the above?

How faculty answer these questions will help you tailor what information you provide, how you provide it (both in terms of content and outreach method), and whom you prioritize in your outreach efforts. If, for example, a significant proportion of faculty name student learning and academic performance as their core priority, your outreach should focus on the negative effect that basic needs insecurities can have on students' ability to thrive in the classroom.

Regarding whom you prioritize, devoting substantial time trying to win over those who don't believe the college should be doing the work at all is not likely to be fruitful. At the same time, conducting significant outreach to existing basic needs champions may prove less helpful as they are already well-connected to the work and willing to jump in with minimal prompting.

That said, existing faculty champions can (and should) play an integral role in your faculty outreach efforts. For instance, see if faculty can be provided release time to co-create professional development materials about your institution's basic needs resources for their peers.
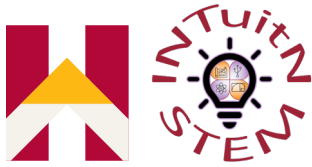
Minimizing Their Lift

While your approach will ultimately be guided by what you learn during the information gathering process, lack of capacity (e.g., time, availability, sufficient focus to learn and retain new information, etc.) is likely to emerge as a significant faculty concern. It is essential that you clearly communicate the role you expect faculty to play in your institution's basic needs work (or articulate multiple potential roles they could play, based on their capacity/workload).

Moreover, you should identify opportunities to provide resources that will ultimately minimize the time, effort, and cognitive load faculty must invest to fulfill that role successfully. Below is an overview of potential resources to consider that are in use at colleges and universities around the country:

- **A Red Folder or 411 Folder** is a resource to help faculty (and staff) identify and effectively respond to basic needs concerns among students. As this example from UC San Diego illustrates, a Red Folder should contain the following elements:
    - A list of physical, psychological, and/or behavioral signs that suggest a student may be in distress and in need of support;
    - Contact information for the designated campus response entity (e.g., a CARE or Behavioral Intervention team) and campus security if the student is an immediate danger to themselves or others;
    - Contact information for any additional support offices that may be available (e.g., counseling, health services, basic needs center)
        - Consider supplementing your folder with streamlined resource referral cards, or similar physical materials, to provide faculty with a comprehensive, easily accessible way to quickly provide students with relevant resources;
    - A Red Folder can also include additional guidance, including tips for effective, caring communication, and a decision tree that indicates the most appropriate contact for a given situation, as in this example from Stonehill College (under the Refer section).
        - While there will always be exceptional situations that don't fit neatly into any standardized process, creating and adhering to a formal decision tree will foster consistency in how an institution responds to similar situations, increasing the likelihood of the student successfully receiving the necessary support. Additionally, knowing that there is a process in place can help faculty feel more comfortable and confident that they are contributing to a positive result and not simply providing false hope or creating an additional burden on the student.

- **An online space** that faculty (and staff) can access for information about
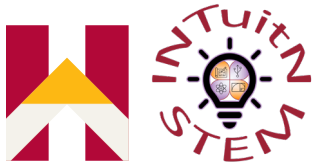
common signs of basic needs insecurity; caring, student-centered communication; and effective referral and follow-up techniques. For an example of what this space can look like, visit [San Diego State University's Basic Needs & Wellness Toolkit](#).

- **A basic needs syllabus statement** that communicates care and encourages students to reach out if they need assistance. To facilitate widespread adoption of such a statement, provide templates faculty can use on your institution's website or through a faculty portal. For example, Oregon State University provides [basic needs syllabus statement language for on-campus and online instructors](#). Meanwhile, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo frames its [syllabus statement template](#) with campus-specific data about student basic needs insecurity and a discussion of the role a syllabus statement can have in destigmatizing the act of asking for help. We also have a [guide](#) to creating an effective syllabus statement.

- **A Basic Needs PowerPoint slide** that faculty can incorporate into their course welcome presentation, [like this one from the University of Oregon](#), containing key information about available basic needs resources. A similar option is to create a standard basic needs resource page/section that is automatically included in each course shell created in the college's learning platform (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, D2L). Depending on your existing resource page infrastructure and knowledge of how students interact with their learning platform and/or other web resources, this could be as simple as a caring message [(such as this language used by the Minnesota State system)](#) with a link to your institution's basic needs page or help form, or as complex as a detailed resource guide with videos demonstrating how to access various campus supports.

Beyond the practical impact of easing the lift for faculty in supporting students' basic needs, creating these resources is likely to engender goodwill by demonstrating that you considered and sought solutions to accommodate their existing heavy workload instead of simply laying another burden at their feet. While the effects of this goodwill may not be immediately apparent, you may find that some of the more reluctant faculty are more willing to listen to your requests for assistance in the long run.
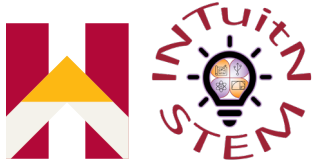
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