



MEMBERS OF MINNESOTA STATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 11, 2018

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How we can all support students through a stressful time of year

We all know that the holidays can be stressful. Winter travel, family responsibilities, holiday preparations, short days, and long nights can leave us feeling a bit overwhelmed.

College students, including our students at Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College, have the additional stress of completing their courses and getting ready for next term. This time of year hits some of our learners especially hard because they are already dealing with insecurities in food, housing, clothing, child care, and transportation.

We are the community in our state's community colleges. We can honor the season by encouraging these learners to persist and to use the colleges' and communities' support services.

The University of Minnesota's 2018 College Student Health Survey found that 73 percent of college students reported that stress was an issue. 40.5 percent also reported managing mental health issues, with anxiety and depression being the most common. These statistics are concerning. We want to do everything we can to help students feel supported, so they can thrive in our Dakota County learning environments.

At Inver Hills and DCTC, we provide holistic support services that include career development and academic planning. These services help students stay on a path to learning and completion of their programs of study.

Our colleges work proactively with students to identify potential barriers to their success – from health issues and lack of housing to food insecurity. Our staff meet with students regularly to assess their situation, recommend possible solutions, and refer them to additional resources or services as appropriate.

For example, we provide access to a mobile pantry, connect students to affordable housing options, and help them find temporary transportation solutions. We also provide resources for students who have mental health challenges, including self-care resources, workshops, and referrals to professional mental health service providers. Our Financial Aid office and Foundation also provide emergency grants to students in need.



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At Inver Hills and DCTC, we provide additional assistance to veterans through our Veterans Service Centers, which provide space for fostering comradery, studying, volunteering, and accessing support services. Both colleges have been nationally recognized for our support of veterans and their families.

Sometimes students have a challenging first semester, but this does not mean they will be unsuccessful in college. Students can meet with our counselors and advisors to develop a success plan for the following term, which can include regular check-ins and academic tutoring. We also provide peer mentoring opportunities, especially for students who are the first in their families to go to college.

If we don't have needed resources at DCTC or Inver Hills, we can connect learners to local agencies like the Lewis House, the Community Action Partnership, or 360 Communities. We also collaborate with outreach agencies to support veterans, including the VA Medical Center, St. Paul Vet Center, and the Family Assistance Center. We are fortunate to have committed public and private organizations in Dakota and Scott Counties and greater metropolitan community to support our learners.

By pursuing a degree, our students are investing in themselves and in their community. I encourage you to support them in that investment. Please take time this holiday season to check in with the learners around you—whether in your own family, neighborhood, place of worship, or workplace. Ask them how things are going, and let them know you are cheering for them. It can make a significant difference.

Michael Berndt, Interim President of Dakota County Technical College & Inver Hills Community College

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