

## A relationship road map

Connecting with peers, professors, and staff members is a fundamental part of having a good college experience. But students don't always know how important those relationships are — or how to form them.

A new book is here to help. *Connections Are Everything: A College Student's Guide to Relationship-Rich Education* is the student-facing follow-up to *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College*. The first book's authors, Peter Felten and Leo M. Lambert, have added two more for the second: Isis Artze-Vega and Oscar R. Miranda Tapia.

While steeped in research, *Connections Are Everything* is accessible. It's a quick read, and its tone is friendly and practical — each chapter ends with a few reflection questions and a few concrete actions students can take to reach out to other people on campus. It has a helpful glossary of college terms and takes care not to assume lots of prior knowledge. Like *Relationship-Rich Education* before it, the book draws on a large body of student interviews, and it features stories from a diverse group of students attending all sorts of colleges.

And in another move toward accessibility, the book can be [read free online](#) because of support from the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education.

The book's release feels timely: The pandemic has frayed students' connections to campus in ways that colleges are still struggling to understand, much less repair.

After reading the book, I'm confident it could be enormously helpful to just about any student who reads it. But, I asked several of the authors in a recent interview, doesn't the need for such a book suggest that colleges haven't done a very good job of explaining themselves to their own students?

Many colleges do talk about connecting during orientation, Felten pointed out, and many professors do on the first day of class. "So it's not like institutions don't do anything around this," he said.

But sometimes, Felten added, those messages get lost, especially in the initial, busy adjustment to college. "A faculty member might say, 'I'm available, and I'm here to support you,' and all this, but the student is still trying to figure out how the online platform works, or whatever it is. So sometimes we do a great job of orienting, without recognizing that these are humans we're dealing with, and they're really getting bombarded."

Welcoming students at the beginning isn't enough, Felten said. That welcome and expression of care need to be sustained.

Another challenge, Felten said: "Students don't always recognize that this is the heart of college."

Students might expect relationships they form in college to matter, but not see how those ties can support their learning. They are often teed up to see college as transactional, not relational, and professors as distant and unhelpful. Felten described how his son had been told in high school not to expect professors to care about him; Artze-Vega said her high-school-age kids had heard the same thing — and she pushes back on it. Those messages are much harder to counter for students who don't have a parent working in higher ed and writing books about how it can best support them.

While the book emphasizes the many people on a campus who can help students, it also makes clear that a college education isn't something that happens to you, but something you build.

For about a decade, Artze-Vega said, there's been a lot of emphasis on how professors can better support their students in the classroom. The book, in contrast, "says it's a shared responsibility."

The book encourages students to "use their agency and to take initiative," she said. That is something Artze-Vega thinks will appeal to professors, who, after all, are tired.

When students are empowered to take charge of their own education, the authors emphasized, not everything falls to faculty members. And besides, students who are empowered are simply more fun to teach.

Beckie Supiano writes about teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them.

## Sarah Anderegg

---

**From:** Jonathan Eldridge  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 5, 2023 9:53 AM  
**To:** Jonathan Eldridge  
**Subject:** Fall 2023 Faculty Information & Updates, Volume V  
**Attachments:** A relationship road map.pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear College of Marin Faculty:

I hope you had a good long weekend. This week's message provides both an update on fall enrollment and an article about how developing a relationship of care with students throughout the semester is a cornerstone to their success. The article includes a link to a free online version of a recent book which you may also find of interest, *Connections Are Everything: A College Student's Guide to Relationship-Rich Education*.

Regarding our enrollment, after moderate enrollment declines through much of the pandemic, followed by a flattening as we transitioned from fully online back to face-to-face, this fall's enrollment is up significantly. Credit student enrollment is up nearly 9%, recouping a significant amount of lost enrollment from the pandemic. Non-credit enrollment is up 62%, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Overall, enrollment is up 19.5% from last fall. Both getting new students AND retaining them are keys to a full enrollment recovery. I look forward to working with you as we collectively continue to improve all aspects of the student experience.

Thank you for all you do.

Jonathan



**Jonathan Eldridge, Ed.D**  
*Assistant Superintendent/  
Vice President of Student Learning & Success*  
College of Marin  
Office: 415-485-9618  
[jeldridge@marin.edu](mailto:jeldridge@marin.edu)