

Dr. Elena Favela Naca

A native San Antonian, Dr. Elena Favela Naca began her career at the SAC Women's Center and Palo Alto Counseling Center as a Counselor and Instructor beginning in 2006. These experiences provided the foundation for and inspired a passion for working with students in community colleges. For the last eleven years, Dr. Favela Naca has worked as an administrator in student and academic affairs in technical and community colleges in Minnesota. Her goals as a leader in higher education are summarized in the following:

- ⇒ Empower and educate communities most underserved in education systems.
- ⇒ Work with students and colleagues from an assets (rather than deficits) perspective.
- ⇒ Diligently work to remove barriers to success.

Most recently, As the Dean of Student Development at North Hennepin Community College (NHCC), Dr. Favela Naca led a team in organizing the college's first Lavender Graduation, authored a *Statement in Support of Transgender Students*, and formed a DACA Response Team to inform students, staff, and faculty on up-to-the minute changes in policy and how the campus community can best support students. She identified concerns of students with disabilities and brought resources from the Mayo Clinic to facilitate discussion on the changing workforce. She established the college's first Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) and opened the Community Connections Resource Center (CCRC) to support students' non-academic needs. The CCRC provided supports to over 500 students within its first year. Through a grant, she secured an AmeriCorp VISTA intern and College Social Worker to staff the CCRC. Twice per semester, a community partner organization brought fresh produce and meats to campus for students to take home at no cost.

As the policy committee chair, Dr. Favela Naca implemented a mandatory training for committee members to develop an "equity lens" for reviewing and drafting policies. She partnered with academic affairs to design and implement the Summer Institute, a weeklong workshop for Interdisciplinary Faculty teaching First-Year Experience Courses. Leaning on her years of classroom teaching, and leading contemplative workshops, Elena facilitated culturally relevant praxis and critique of student development theory. In collaboration with Human Resources, she implemented the Indigenous Employee and Employee of Color Affinity Group. She partnered with City of Brooklyn Park to advise UMN graduate students' feasibility studies for affordable housing on land adjacent to NHCC. She partnered with Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth, a coalition among public entities in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center to foster youth wellbeing, access to post-secondary education and internships. This collaboration led to original research, *Stop Drop Enroll*, which examined reasons students fail to complete their first year, as well as the assets that facilitate their success beyond the first year. Regarding strategic planning, Dr. Favela Naca led a team of students, faculty, and staff in developing strategic goals for the college for Equity and Inclusion.

Prior to her work at NHCC, in 2012 Dr. Favela Naca was appointed Interim College Dean at Rainy River Community College (RRCC) in International Falls. She was responsible for overseeing all operations of the college as the chief academic and student affairs officer. In close collaboration with faculty, she expanded concurrent enrollment options to area high schools to ensure course rigor and quality mentorship to high school teachers. She also served as the Accreditation Liaison for RRCC.

In 2013, while at RRCC Boise paper mill closed, dislocating one-third of its workforce. Dr. Favela Naca partnered with city planners and council members, local businesses, and high schools to align college goals with community needs, heal from job loss, and spark economic regrowth. She researched and proposed to city officials, the development of an Aquaponics facility along with a for credit technical program. Additionally, with the help of local business owners, donors, and the diligence of faculty and staff, she revamped technical programming in machining and welding and tripled enrollment in these career-track programs.

After working as a Counselor and Access Services Coordinator at Anoka Technical College, in 2010, Dr. Favela Naca was asked to serve as the Interim Dean of Student Success, overseeing all student affairs departments as well as academic computing. She led a team in creating the college's first Student Success Center, and collaborated campus-wide, to establish Anoka Tech as a Strengths-based campus (using the Gallup's Organization's framework). She and a faculty member designed and delivered a course, *Strengths and Wellness*, that is still offered today. Dr. Favela Naca led strategic planning activities across two aligned campuses, Anoka Technical College and Anoka Ramsey Community College.

Beginning her college career at Loyola University Chicago, as a Division I Women's Basketball student athlete, Dr. Favela Naca earned her B.A. at the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio. She earned her M.A. in Counseling from UTSA (2005), and her Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. Her dissertation research examined African American student persistence in community colleges, using an assets-based framework. In her spare time, she is a community organizer, she enjoys traveling, spending time with her family, and teaching and practicing yoga.