

College Campus Examples of S.C.A.R.F. Model

The SCARF model, developed by David Rock, identifies five key domains that influence social behavior: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness. These domains either trigger threat or reward responses in the brain, impacting an individual's ability to engage, learn, and succeed. Below are examples of possible classified professionals' actions that may lead to a student experiencing threat in each of the domains, along with possible responses to minimize threat and enhance a student's sense of reward which can lead to a greater sense of well-being, positive interactions, and improved overall learning and retention.

As you read the examples below, consider what resonates with your experience and observations? What concerns or questions do you have? What can you do or say to better serve students and work more effectively with those around you?

STATUS: How "important" you feel in relation to others

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Financial aid staff seems to judge a student's financial situation.	"I feel like I'm being judged just because I need financial help. Why can't they just treat me like everyone else?"	Approach the conversation with empathy, acknowledging the student's efforts and focusing on supporting their educational goals without judgment.
Library staff dismisses a student's question as trivial.	"I guess my question wasn't important enough. Maybe I shouldn't bother asking next time."	Treat every question with respect, affirming the student's inquiry. Praise them for taking the initiative to seek help and guide them toward the right resources.
Campus security enforces rules in a way that feels authoritative.	"Why are they always watching me? I feel like I'm being targeted just because of how I look."	Engage students with respect and approachability. Explain rules in a way that emphasizes student safety and well-being rather than authority.
Tutoring staff focuses only on students with higher grades.	"I guess if you're not already doing well, they don't care as much about helping you."	Provide equal support to all students, regardless of their academic performance, and recognize effort and improvement, not just success.
Maintenance staff ignores student concerns about campus facilities.	"No one seems to care if things aren't working. Why should I even bother reporting anything?"	Address concerns promptly and thank students for bringing issues to attention. Ensure they feel that their input helps improve the campus experience.

1 NeuroLeadership Institute. <https://neuroleadership.com/>

College Campus Examples of SCARF Model (Valmonte, 2024) with guidance from CA Community Colleges Classified Professionals Alliance-Region 9. 2024. Adapted from [David Rock's \(2008\) SCARF Model](#) [Rock, D. (2008) SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. NeuroLeadership Journal.] and National Equity Project's "Classroom Examples of SCARF."

CERTAINTY: How clear you are on things and your ability to predict the future

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Student services provide unclear instructions for accessing services.	"I'm so confused about what I'm supposed to do. Why is everything so complicated here?"	Leverage your expertise and student feedback to advocate for improved processes. Use clear, step-by-step guidance, offering multiple formats for instructions to ensure that students can easily follow the process.
Administration fails to communicate clear document submission deadlines.	"I didn't even know when the deadline was. How am I supposed to keep up with all this?"	Leverage your expertise and student feedback to advocate for clearer deadlines and document requirements across multiple channels. Suggest reminders and checklists to reinforce certainty and organization.
Facilities management does not inform students about repair timelines.	"When is this going to get fixed? I don't even know where to go study now."	Work with college to communicate repair schedules clearly and provide students with regular updates. Let them know when they can expect facilities to return to normal.
Food services change operating hours without notice.	"Why didn't anyone tell me the dining hall would be closed? Now I'm stuck without a meal."	Advocate that food service hours are consistent, and if changes are necessary, communicate them well in advance. Advocate to offer flexible dining options for students who rely on campus meals, if needed.

AUTONOMY: Your sense of control over events or outcome of a situation.

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Tutoring services require students to adhere to rigid schedules.	"I can't fit any of their times into my schedule. How am I supposed to get the help I need?"	Leverage your expertise and student feedback to advocate for flexible tutoring options with varied session times and formats, allowing students to choose what best fits their schedule and learning style.
Administrative processes are overly bureaucratic with little room for student input.	"It feels like they're just making us jump through hoops. Why can't it be easier?"	Based on your observations and student feedback, advocate to streamline processes and offer multiple options for completing administrative tasks (online, in-person), giving students more control over how they engage.

AUTONOMY (continued)

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Library enforces strict rules about resource usage.	"I can only study when the library's open? What if I need to work late at night?"	Inform administrators of student needs and advocate to provide flexibility in access to resources, such as extended library hours or online materials, enabling students to choose when and how they study.
Campus security enforces overly restrictive policies without student input.	"Why do they make all these rules without asking us? It feels like we're not trusted at all."	Recommend involving students in discussions about campus safety policies and encourage their input, giving them a voice in shaping a secure and supportive environment.
Food services limit meal options without consideration for student needs.	"Why aren't there more options? I can't eat anything here."	Advocate to offer a variety of meal choices and allow students to customize their meal plans, accommodating different dietary needs and preferences.

RELATEDNESS: How connected and secure you feel with another person

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Interactions with students are conducted in a transactional manner.	"It feels like they're just going through the motions. Do they even care about helping us?"	Create a welcoming atmosphere by greeting students warmly, showing genuine interest in their well-being, and building personal connections during interactions.
Student interactions in library focus on study space enforcement, not student engagement.	"I feel like I'm just another number. No one even notices if I'm here or not."	Create opportunities for students to engage with staff and peers in the library, such as through study groups or community-building events, making the space more personal.
Maintenance staff hesitate to interact with students.	"I don't even know who the maintenance staff are. They just come and go without a word."	Engage with students during routine tasks, offering a smile and a brief conversation, making the campus feel more like a connected community rather than a transactional space.
Engagement with campus security is limited to rule enforcement.	"They're only around when someone's in trouble. I never see them just being friendly."	Build relationships with students by participating in campus activities and engaging in non-enforcement interactions, fostering trust and a sense of safety in the community.

FAIRNESS: Your perception of how just and non-biased things are

College Action	What the Student May Say	Possible Responses to Reduce Threat
Financial aid is distributed in a way that seems inconsistent or unclear.	"Why did they get more aid than I did? It doesn't seem fair at all."	Recommend increased transparency in financial aid decisions so that criteria is clearly explained and offer students opportunities to ask questions and appeal decisions.
Tutoring resources seem to be allocated preferentially to certain students.	"It feels like the tutors only help the students who are already doing well."	Commit to providing equitable distribution of tutoring resources, with clear communication about how services are provided based on individual needs, not just performance.
Security personnel appear to enforce rules inconsistently across campus.	"Why do they let some people off easy, but come down hard on others? It's not fair."	Regularly review security policies to ensure consistent enforcement, and communicate the reasoning behind actions to students, promoting transparency and fairness.
Basic Needs Resource Centers provide food assistance selectively, without clear criteria.	"How come they got food help, but I didn't? What's the criteria here?"	Advocate that assistance programs are accessible to all eligible students and clearly communicate the eligibility criteria to ensure fairness and understanding among students.
Maintenance for certain areas of campus are prioritized over others.	"Why do some buildings get all the attention? Our area is always the last to get fixed."	Communicate to managers the need to rotate maintenance efforts fairly across campus, and communicate the schedule transparently so that all students feel their environment is equally important.

For more information on

- David Rock and the SCARF Model, visit neuroleadership.com
- [National Equity Project](https://www.nationalequityproject.org/scarf) and their resources on SCARF, visit <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/scarf>