A Conversation with Peter Felten and Leo Lambert
Facilitated by: Isis Artze-Vega

In our forthcoming book Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College (Johns Hopkins University Press), we offer a new vision for student learning and success in college. Drawing on decades of research and nearly 400 interviews with students, faculty, and staff at higher education institutions across the country, we make the case that human connections are crucial for all students and are particularly important for first-generation and new majority students who bring significant capacities to college, but also often face long-standing inequities and barriers to attaining their educational aspirations. Our research underscores: the centrality of the classroom experience to fostering quality relationships; the intentionality required to shape institutional cultures where all faculty and staff see themselves as potential mentors, advisors, and supporters of students; the impact students have on shaping the learning environment for their peers; and, the key difference a single, well-timed conversation can make in a student’s life. Although relationship-rich education may seem accessible only to traditional students at wealthy residential campuses, our interviews document exemplary programs and inspiring stories from across the spectrum of American higher education, from community colleges and institutions with large on-line enrollments to major research universities. By looking at undergraduate education through the lens of relationships, we suggest that individual faculty and staff—and of all institutions—have the capacity to make a critical difference in learning and success for every student.