

WISCONSIN
**HOPE
LAB**

#RealCollege

A National Convening on Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates

April 28 and 29, 2016 | Milwaukee Area Technical College
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

CONVENING SUMMARY



At the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, we study the challenges that students from low- and moderate-income households face in attaining a college degree. Chief among these are the many hurdles created by the high price of college. Paying the price of attending college, we find, changes who attends and for how long, as well as the college experience itself – what classes students take, the grades they earn, the activities in which they engage and even with whom they interact.

Our recent research shows an alarming trend on college campuses: an increasing number of students tell us that they are struggling in college, sometimes even dropping out, because they can't afford a consistent roof over their heads and enough food to eat. In December we published a report, [Hungry to Learn](#),¹ which draws on a survey conducted at ten community colleges around the nation. We revealed the findings in the [New York Times](#)² – one in five of the more than 4,000 students who answered our survey said that they were hungry and 13% were homeless.

How can higher education leaders and policymakers effectively address food and housing insecurity among undergraduates in order to help them complete degrees? Right now, the field has few answers. Unlike in K-12 education, there is no USDA-backed free lunch program in the nation's colleges and universities, and oftentimes college students are ineligible for subsidized housing or even food stamps. There is very little research on the efficacy of interventions addressing these challenges, and the colleges and universities and nonprofits crafting their own strategies are largely disconnected from one another.

Our aim in creating and hosting #RealCollege, a national convening on food and housing insecurity among undergraduates, was to catalyze changes in the field in order to bring help to students more quickly. We sought to bridge the gap between action-oriented practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and philanthropists, bringing them together to find solutions, unearth unasked questions, and set agendas. We wanted participants to learn from one another about current and potential reforms to federal and state policy, innovations led by food banks and housing authorities around the country, and creative approaches developed by individual faculty, students, alumni, and other campus leaders. We hoped that they would make connections and develop the relationships needed to effectively collaborate. In our vision, the convening would be a first step in a national movement to ensure that no undergraduate goes hungry or homeless while pursuing higher education.

¹ Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., & Eisenberg, D. 2015. *Hungry to Learn: Addressing Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates*. Wisconsin HOPE Lab Report.

² Goldrick-Rab, S. & Broton, K. 2015. "Hungry, Homeless and in College." *The New York Times*, December 4, 2015.



Practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and students gathered at Milwaukee Area Technical College to hear creative approaches to addressing undergraduate food and housing insecurity.

Location

#RealCollege took place over two days, April 28 and 29, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milwaukee is one of the nation's most impoverished and racially segregated cities, and home to two major public institutions of higher education. The convening was held at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), a public two-year comprehensive college where 65% of students are eligible for the Pell Grant and Wisconsin HOPE Lab researchers have identified that food and housing insecurity is a serious concern. President Vicki Martin recently announced the MATC Promise, an initiative that will offer tuition-free college to recent graduates of Milwaukee-area high schools.

Participants noted that MATC was an ideal home for this event. As Kirstin Siemering of the American Heart Association put it, "I appreciated the diversity of speakers and participants, and that the culture was one of "keeping it real." The location was fantastic. The setting was comfortable but not posh. It would have been very strange to have such a convening in a more typical venue such as a hotel conference area. I think similar gatherings should follow suit, taking advantage of and supporting mission-oriented, public spaces like MATC."

Funders

#RealCollege was made possible by the support of the William T. Grant Foundation, the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation, Scholarship America, the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), and the American Federation of Teachers Local 212 at MATC. Through the generous support of these funders, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab was able to provide travel scholarships for speakers, open the conference to MATC faculty, staff, and students, provide meeting materials and meals for participants, and produce and distribute this convening summary. MATC provided in-kind donations of outstanding meeting facilities and convening support.

Participants

The people who attended #RealCollege included approximately 150 service providers, policymakers, philanthropists, students, faculty, and researchers from across the nation, all of whom are engaged in addressing food and housing insecurity among undergraduates.

Among the participants were prominent policymakers such as Deputy Under Secretary of Education Kim Hunter Reed, Ajita Talwalker, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education at the White House Domestic Policy Council, Katherine Sydor of the U.S. Department of Education, and Chase Sackett of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



U.S. Department of Education Deputy Under Secretary Kim Hunter Reed during a roundtable on food and housing insecurity with Milwaukee Area Technical College students.

Practitioners and advocates from around the country came from organizations like the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY), Houston Food Bank, Swipe Out Hunger, the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA), Scholarship America, the Center for Law and Social Policy, and the ACCT. College administrators, staff, faculty, and students represented numerous colleges and universities. Thanks to generous sponsors, we were able to provide travel scholarships to support the participation of 25 individuals from 20 organizations. For a full list of participants, please see p. 28.

Our Goals for the Convening

The overarching goal of the #RealCollege convening was to facilitate connections between service providers, policymakers, and researchers to reduce food and housing insecurity among undergraduates to improve their odds of college completion, in turn reducing inequality. In particular, we sought to accomplish the following:

- 1. Bridge action-oriented programs that can coordinate their work and learn from other programs' successes and failures.**

Across the nation, organizations both in and outside institutions of higher education exist to help college students find affordable housing, access adequate, nutritious food, address mental health issues, and access government assistance. While a few networks are developing to connect these organizations, these are typically limited to a particular issue or strategy, such as the College and University Food Bank Alliance. We wanted to connect providers serving similar populations so that they can coordinate, learn from one another, and establish networks.

- 2. Connect policymakers to service providers and researchers whose experiences and knowledge can point the way toward an effective policy agenda.**

Connecting service providers and researchers with policymakers can lead to more effective policy to address material hardship. For example, government food and housing assistance are often inaccessible to college students due to program rules. Simple changes in eligibility formulae can transform the experiences of students who would otherwise struggle to find housing and food. While these solutions are clear to those who work with students or study these issues, policymakers must be connected to this experience and knowledge. We wanted to provide opportunities for policymakers to interact with service providers and researchers to craft a policy agenda that can effectively address economic precarity among college students.

3. Identify current areas of knowledge and gaps in research.

Service providers and policymakers can benefit from existing research to guide their interventions. For example, there are studies of best practices for addressing food insecurity that can be incorporated into work on college campuses. Likewise, researchers can benefit from practitioner and policymaker perspectives on research priorities. Their work can be informed by the latest interventions and they can think about the best ways to conduct evaluations. By bringing these groups together, the convening aimed to both inform current policy and practice and set a research agenda that can address gaps in that research that must be filled by the next generation of interventions.



Katharine Broton of the University of Wisconsin-Madison spoke on setting the research and evaluation agenda around undergraduate food and housing insecurity.

4. Connect researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to galvanize new data collection and research in this field.

Gaps in research often persist due to lack of data. Our report, *Hungry to Learn*, was shocking to many because national data on food and housing insecurity among undergraduates had never before been collected. Similarly, data collected at the program, institution, state, and federal levels will be essential for producing research on undergraduate material hardship that can in turn inform policy and practice. The convening put researchers in direct contact with service providers and policymakers who can collect and provide this data. Likewise, we wanted to facilitate important evaluations of current services and policies, and emphasize the importance of evaluation for future practice and policy responses. There are hundreds of programs and policies nationwide aimed at helping students struggling with material hardship, but few of these programs have evaluated the effectiveness of their services for providing relief or for improving academic outcomes. These evaluations are essential for identifying successful and cost-effective practice and policies.

Agenda

To accomplish these goals, we set an ambitious agenda, which appears on pp. 8-9. The convening began with two panels that described the nature of the problem. Academic and policy experts examined the nature, sources, and consequences of hunger and homelessness in the United States, and then discussed these challenges among undergraduates. A panel of local students shared their personal struggles with hunger and homelessness while attending college.

The convening agenda created multiple opportunities for service providers, policymakers, and researchers to share their perspectives on addressing food and housing insecurity among college students. These opportunities included several sessions focused on policy, not only to provide information to attendees, but to put policymakers in direct contact with service providers and researchers who bring their unique perspectives to how policy can best help students in need. The agenda also featured several panels on actions that communities and institutions of higher education are taking to address food and housing insecurity. This included panels on emergency financial aid, strategies for addressing food insecurity, and strategies for addressing housing insecurity. These panels created opportunities for service providers to gather information on best practices, for policymakers to learn about innovative strategies and how government can assist with or adopt similar strategies, and for researchers to identify topics for evaluation. Breakout sessions following panels gave people an opportunity to dig deeper into specific interventions, with researchers acting as discussants to talk about potential evaluations. Finally, the convening included multiple opportunities for networking, including a poster fair, a dinner, and breakfast and lunches, giving attendees the chance to build networks.



#RealCollege Convening

April 28-29th, 2016

Milwaukee Area Technical College (Downtown Campus)
1015 N. 6th Street | Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53233

*All sessions located in the Cooley Auditorium are open to the public.
All other sessions including meals, breakout sessions, and the poster fair require paid registration.*

AGENDA: APRIL 28

7:45 am- 8:30 am	Breakfast available <i>M605 Main Building</i>	2:00 pm- 3:15 pm	Action: Federal Role in Addressing Food & Housing Insecurity <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, Center for Law & Social Policy Chase Sackett, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Alan Shannon, U.S. Department of Agriculture Katherine Sydor, U.S. Department of Education Chair: Jed Richardson, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
8:30 am- 9:00 am	Welcome and Introductions <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> Sara Goldrick-Rab, Wisconsin HOPE Lab Greg Lampe, University of Wisconsin Colleges Vicki Martin, Milwaukee Area Technical College	3:30 pm- 4:30 pm	Breakout Session #1 • Foster Care Youth: Marla Seay, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership <i>S120 S Building</i> • Veterans: Joe Rasmussen, UW-Madison Veteran Services <i>M612-14 Main Building</i> • Mental Health and Disability: Susan Warfield, University of Minnesota <i>M605 Main Building</i> • LGBTQ: Ryan Adserias, Wisconsin Equity & Inclusion Lab <i>M616 Main Building</i> • DREAMers: Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Voces de la Frontera <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
9:00 am- 10:00 am	Hunger and Homelessness in 21st Century America <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> Judith Bartfield, University of Wisconsin-Madison Cyekeia Lee, Nat'l Assoc. for Education of Homeless Children & Youth Sherrie Tussler, Hunger Task Force Chair: Anthony Hernandez, Wisconsin HOPE Lab	4:45 pm	Hunger Task Force's Fresh Picks Mobile Market visit <i>BMO Valet Parking Lot</i> <i>Outside 6th Street Entrance to MATC M Building</i>
10:00 am- 11:00 am	Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> Sara Goldrick-Rab, Wisconsin HOPE Lab In conversation with Wisconsin undergraduates	5:00 pm- 6:30 pm	Poster Fair and Networking <i>M605 Main Building</i>
11:15 am- -12:30pm	Panel on Action: Emergency Financial Aid (Lunch) <i>M605 Main Building</i> Sarah Bauder, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Despina Costopoulos, Scholarship America Amy Kerwin, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates Amber Michaels Schmitt, Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College Chair: Andrew Howe, Kansas State University		
12:45 pm- 2:00 pm	Keynote Address: The Federal College Affordability Agenda <i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education In conversation with Sara Goldrick-Rab, Wisconsin HOPE Lab		

AGENDA: APRIL 29

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| <p>7:45 am-
8:30 am Breakfast available
<i>S Building Cafeteria</i></p> <p>8:30 am-
9:30 am Setting the Research and Evaluation Agenda
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
Katharine Broton, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
Rashida Crutchfield, Cal State-Long Beach
Daphne Hernandez, University of Houston
Chair: Vivian Louie, William T. Grant Foundation</p> <p>9:30 am-
11:00 am Action: Addressing Undergraduate Food Insecurity
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
Clare Cady, College & University Food Bank Alliance and Single Stop
Ruben Canedo & Tim Galarneau, University of California Global Food Initiative
Jennifer Maguire, Oh SNAP, Cal State-Humboldt
Maryiam Saifuddin, Houston Food Bank
Rachel Sumekh, Swipe Hunger
Chair: Minhtuyen Mai, Wisconsin HOPE Lab</p> <p>11:15 am-
12:30 pm Action: Addressing Undergraduate Housing Insecurity (Lunch)
<i>M605 Main Building</i>
Robert Arca, University of San Diego
Shirley Fan-Chan, U-ACCESS at UMass Boston
Shema Hanebutte, Tacoma Community College
Nicole Hindes, Oregon State University
Louis Tse, UCLA Bruin Shelter
Chair: David Monaghan, Wisconsin HOPE Lab</p> | <p>12:45 pm-
2:00 pm Breakout Session #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Pantries: Clare Cady
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i> • Benefits Access: Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, Nicole Hindes & Jennifer Maguire
<i>S120 S Building</i> • Food Bank Innovations: Sherrie Tussler & Maryiam Saifuddin
<i>M612-14 Main Building</i> • Housing Innovations: Chase Sackett & Shema Hanebutte
<i>M616 Main Building</i> • Institutional Innovations: Ruben Canedo, Shirley Fan-Chan & Tim Galarneau
<i>M605 Main Building</i> <p>2:15 pm-
3:15 pm We Can and Must Do More
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
Ajita Talwaker Menon, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, White House Domestic Policy Council
Introduction: Phyllis King, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee</p> <p>3:15 pm-
4:30 pm Looking to the Future
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
Jee Hang Lee, Association of Community College Trustees
Tom Mortenson, Pell Institute
Wick Sloane, Bunker Hill Community College and Inside Higher Ed
Michael Sorrell, Paul Quinn College</p> <p>4:30 pm-
4:45 pm Closing Remarks
<i>M203 Main Building (Cooley Auditorium)</i>
Sara Goldrick-Rab, Wisconsin HOPE Lab</p> |
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EVENT SPONSORS



Outcomes

An analysis of quantitative and qualitative measures of #RealCollege's outcomes point to several signs of success. Our data come from three sources: a post-convening survey that garnered responses from 79 participants, tweets offered publicly by participants during and following the event, and follow-up notes we received from individual participants. Of course, an underlying goal of the entire event was to ensure that participants continued their efforts to support students. We are therefore especially heartened that 96% of them said that because of #RealCollege "I was inspired to act."

Goal 1: Bridge action-oriented programs that can coordinate their work and learn from other programs' successes and failures.

- 91% of participants "developed new or improved ideas about how to help college students facing material hardships."
- 79% of participants said that they "made new connections with other people working on issues they care about."

"The convening was such a transformative experience and reaffirmed the imperative need for doing this work." – Vanessa Mercado, San Francisco State University

"I filled 3 full pages of notes of ideas to take back to my university and questions we should be asking/exploring. I felt like there were concrete actions that I could take back to my institution and research ideas sparked from what other researchers are finding." – Noreen Siddiqui, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Goal 2: Connect policymakers to service providers and researchers whose experiences and knowledge can point the way toward an effective policy agenda.

We asked participants to indicate from whom they learned new information at #RealCollege. Here is how they responded:

- 100% said that they learned from a practitioner
- 97% learned from a researcher
- 95% learned from a student
- 91% learned from a policymaker

"We thought we were alone. We have discovered we were just disconnected." – Ruben Canedo, University of California's Global Food Initiative

"There are very few spaces where everyone can be in the room learning from each other in this way. It was absolutely invaluable." – Nicole Hindes, Oregon State University

"I found the testimonies of practitioners and of the students the most inspiring of all the parts of the Convening that I experienced. I was truly impressed by their persistence and dedication to supporting students facing housing and food insecurity (practitioners) and to continuing in college despite hardships and difficult choices (students)." – Greg Lampe, University of Wisconsin Colleges and Wisconsin HOPE Lab Advisory Board Chair

“Connecting with those who care about similar issues and have taken action is inspirational.”
– Christina Hubbard, Northern Virginia Community College

“I’ve been saying this nonstop since I left: I’ve never been to a conference where I felt so much that I needed to be there to hear from others and to share our work.” – Rachel Sumekh, Swipe Out Hunger

Goal 3: Identify current areas of knowledge and gaps in research.

- 91% of participants said “I learned about aspects of material hardship that I did not know before.”
“I came to an understanding of how fundamental food and housing insecurity is to college retention and completion. This is not something that is generally understood or talked about in the higher education community. We talk about using technology, creating programs, etc., but it is more basic than that. Higher education has not adapted to the changing needs of its students.” – Diane O’Connor, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Goal 4: Connect researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to galvanize new data collection and research in this field.

- 95% of participants agreed that because of #RealCollege “I became a part of a community of practice that I wish to continue to be a part of.”
- Almost 50% of participants also indicated that they met a philanthropist who supports work like theirs.

“AWESOME information and sharing! I was so inspired to know more and do more for students on my campus, in my own work, and in the broader conversation. I left with excitement and energy and more questions. I can’t wait for the next step in this work.”
– Kelly Ratliff from Waukesha County Technical College

“There are no other convenings like this one, and having the space to talk about issues we see at our colleges each day made it worth it!” – Rachele Thompson, Northern Virginia Community College

“What made this convening most worthwhile was first, having time to step back, reflect and hear from others who are like me, working non-stop to move past solely increasing access to a higher ed. degree and are instead working towards creating equity across student groups in regards to who, at the end of the day, has a college degree in hand. Second, was hearing from leaders, students, and innovators across disciplines on the topic and having time to have meaningful discussions that I hope will lead to social change during and between break out sessions.” – Jen Maguire, Humboldt State University

“Congratulations on pulling off an “Avengers-style” event – lots of energy, passion and great breadth of spotlighting this issue!” – Mimi Larson, Scholarship America

Key Learnings from #RealCollege

What is Food Insecurity? What is Housing Insecurity?

People facing food insecurity cannot consistently access healthy food due to a lack of money or resources. Food insecurity ranges from low, which the United States Department of Agriculture defines as “reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet” to very low, defined as “multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.”³ It affects approximately 14% of households and 20% of children. It is strongly related to poverty but varies widely depending on local employment conditions, cost-of-living, and state policies governing the social safety net, reported presenter Judith Bartfeld of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The prevalence of both low and very low food insecurity has increased over time, especially since the Great Recession. Moreover, access to food has not improved even as other financial indicators have improved. In the past, rates of food insecurity have closely tracked unemployment rates, but since 2010, the rate has remained high even as unemployment has decreased.

Today, almost 19 million American households are considered housing insecure.⁴ In 2013-14, 1.3 million American youth were homeless, a 100% increase since 2006-07, according to presenter Cykeia Lee of [NAEHCY](#). The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators reports that 56,000 students who filed the FAFSA indicated that they were homeless, a statistic that is widely considered to understate the true extent of the problem.⁵ Indeed, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab’s recent survey of ten community colleges nationwide revealed that 13% of students reported being homeless during the past year.⁶ These students temporarily stay with others, live in motels, camping grounds, or homeless shelters, or sleep in cars, parks, and abandoned buildings.

Problems with food and housing insecurity are particularly dire among students whose access to aid is less stable or who have strained relationships with their families. For example, veterans depend heavily on the GI Bill and face enormous challenges when they encounter difficulties accessing that aid. Likewise, undocumented students are ineligible for most government aid and must find colleges that offer institutional aid with less stringent residency requirements. Youth in foster care lose access to their support systems just as they graduate high school and enter college. These youth often become homeless. Similarly, LGBTQ students and students with mental health issues are more likely to experience homelessness.

³ United States Department of Agriculture. 2016. “Definitions of Food Security.” <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>. Accessed May 6, 2016.

⁴ Enterprise Community Partners. 2016. “Housing Insecurity Dashboard.” <http://www.housinginsecurity.org>. Accessed May 6, 2016.

⁵ Saccaro, Matt. 2014. “College Kids’ Homeless Hell: Why a Secret, Massive Crisis is Getting Even Worse.” *Salon*.

⁶ Goldrick-Rab, S., and Broton, K. 2016. Hungry to Learn: Addressing Food and Housing Insecurity among Undergraduates.” Wisconsin HOPE Lab Report.

How Do Students Experience Food and Housing Insecurity?

As presenter Sara Goldrick-Rab of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab noted, some students experience food and/or housing insecurity during college as a continuation of a lifetime of scarcity. These students speak of an ongoing challenge to have their basic needs met. On the other hand, other students who grew up relatively comfortable fall into hard times during college either because the price of college is too high, or other supports from parents and family became unavailable.

At the convening, three Wisconsin technical college students shared their personal struggles with economic precarity and its impacts on their ability to succeed academically. Angel became the primary caretaker for his three younger sisters and elderly grandmother when his mother was deported. His world changed with his mother's absence. He left school to work, but returned when his younger sister offered to postpone her own college plans in order to allow him to finish. His college has provided many of the supports he requires to finish school while working to provide for his family. He was fortunate to find a professor who referred him to many resources, including an emergency grant to cover a large utility bill. Without that grant he says that he would have dropped out to earn more money. He will receive his associate degree this spring and hopes to become a high school history teacher. His next challenge is to find a four-year college or university where he can transfer while continuing to meet his family responsibilities.

Jenna is a thirty-year-old mother of two young children who decided to return to school to provide a good example to her boys. She manages school responsibilities along with parenting and multiple jobs, using SNAP to provide food for herself and her children. She is now in her fourth year of college, because she rarely has time to take more than a few courses at a time. As a first-generation college student from a low-income family, she doesn't have anyone in her personal life who can provide college finances or advice. Her college's TRIO program has been indispensable, providing both academic and counseling support. When she recently took a semester off, TRIO staff called her daily to be sure she was coming back.

Sam described a difficult childhood attending different schools every year and surviving violence in the neighborhoods of north Milwaukee. He is also a first-generation student from a low-income family who has been in and out of college while struggling with bills. He currently survives on federal Pell grant and work-study funds. Although his financial aid package assumes that his mother can contribute to his education expenses, she is single and supports five children, and cannot spare the money. He is succeeding in school despite frequent spells of homelessness when he has lived in shelters or in his truck, parking at abandoned homes at night. His mentor in college has frequently provided help and is part of the reason Sam continues to succeed despite adversity.



Sara Goldrick-Rab
@saragoldrickrab

Follow

We came to [#RealCollege](#) for the students. It is ALL for the students. And these 3 made me so proud.



RETWEETS 4
LIKES 10



8:45 PM - 29 Apr 2016



Institutional and Community Responses

Emergency Aid

In response to growing evidence of material hardship among college students, institutions and communities nationwide have begun creating innovative services for students in need. These programs range from growing startups to campus- or system-wide comprehensive initiatives. Despite the programmatic and geographic diversity of these services, however, practitioners have faced similar challenges in their work. Initial pushback from those who doubt the presence of hunger and homelessness on their campuses, creating buy-in, erasing stigma and reaching students in need, and finally, sustainability and scale up, were common themes from practitioners presenting their work at #RealCollege. These practitioners' hard-won experience is a useful guide for anyone building student support infrastructure at their own institutions.

Emergency aid programs aim to deliver financial support to students just in time to affect their decisions. Campus-based programs providing emergency financial assistance are springing up, there are at least 100 programs operating nationwide,⁷ in response to growing financial distress among undergraduates. However, identifying adequate, reliable funding for these programs can be difficult, and colleges often avoid promoting emergency grants for fear of running out of funds. Despite these challenges, there is strong support for these programs, based in part on preliminary evidence of effectiveness. To further expand emergency aid funding, legislators and institutions must be convinced that they will receive returns on their investments. Impact evaluations and cost-effectiveness studies will be essential in making this case.

Sarah Bauder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, described "[Keep Me Maryland](#)," an emergency aid program that she helped create during her tenure in the Office of Financial Aid at the University of Maryland. The program was created in 2007, at the beginning of the Great Recession, when there were lines of students asking for additional aid because their parents had lost jobs. To provide that aid, the university asked for donations from alumni, telling students' stories and explaining the potential return on investment. Scholarship America's Despina Costopoulos spoke about [Dreamkeepers](#) which provides emergency financial aid at over forty campuses nationwide. The program began with a funder who remembered his own college experience of sitting in a parking lot eating peanut butter and jelly because he couldn't afford to eat on campus. Dreamkeepers has produced promising evidence of the potential impacts of emergency aid. Overall, 90% of students receiving aid are completing their current terms and 88% are re-enrolling.

⁷ Dachelet, K., and Goldrick-Rab, S. 2016. "Investing in Student Completion: Overcoming Financial Barriers to Retention through Small-Dollar Grants and Emergency Aid Programs." Wisconsin HOPE Lab report.

There are many challenges to implementing emergency aid programs. To help colleges and funders, the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation has released a [report](#).⁸ on lessons learned from an emergency aid pilot that began in 2012 at 16 Wisconsin technical colleges. Amy Kerwin of Great Lakes described the two most difficult challenges. First, emergency aid requires coordination between financial aid offices, where emergency aid is distributed, and business offices, who issue checks. This process often takes weeks. Students who need aid are often in crises that require immediate relief. The colleges involved in the Great Lakes program were eventually able to reduce the time between a student's application and receiving funds to 48 hours. The second challenge is promoting and advertising the program. A number of schools were unable to disperse all their emergency funds because they were afraid to advertise and risk being inundated with requests or running out of funds.

When effectively implemented, emergency aid programs can help colleges to identify students in need and connect those students to other support services. Amber Michaels Schmitt, of Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College, described how her institution used the Great Lakes funding to scaffold other services. The emergency aid program is housed in student support services where it is administered with one-on-one attention. Students applying for emergency aid are offered access to the campus food pantry, where they can receive a bag of food twice a week, and two clothes closets, one for business clothes and the other for medical scrubs.

An ongoing challenge is to identify sufficient, reliable funding. To date, funding for emergency aid programs has come mostly through foundations and donations. Alumni can be important contributors, but colleges also support programs through student tuition or other creative strategies. At the University of Maryland, for example, students sell their dining points back to the university, raising \$40,000 to \$50,000 annually. In rare cases, legislatures have funded programs. Wisconsin recently passed legislation making new state money available for emergency grants, and California is developing a proposal to use student success and support funds to alleviate hunger and homelessness among college students. These proposals could greatly benefit from rigorous, independent evaluations of current programs, including cost-effectiveness analysis focused on the return on investment, both in terms of additional student tuition gained through increased retention and societal returns from increasing completion.

⁸ Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation. 2016. *2012-2015 Emergency Grant Closing Report and Best Practices*.

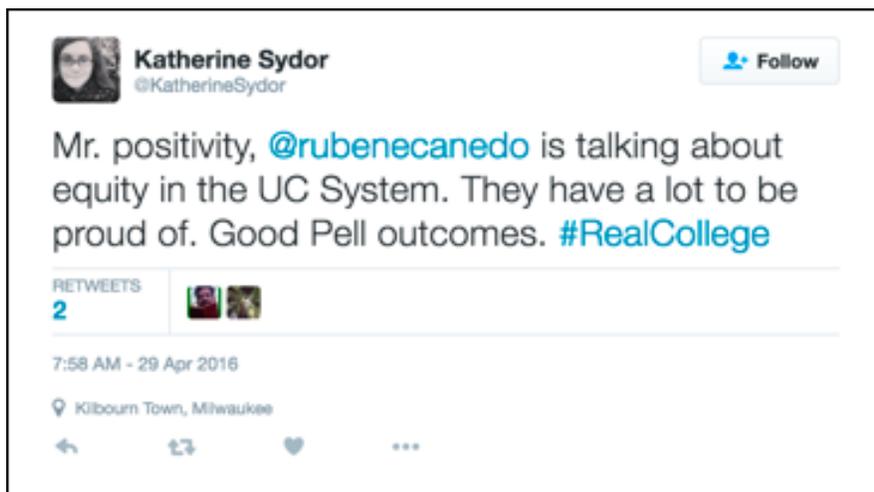


Other Campus-Based Efforts

Institutional efforts to address food and housing insecurity arise from students, support services, and faculty. They often begin as simple, grass roots efforts that grow into more established services. Food pantries are a common response to student hunger. [CUFBA](#) is a national network of college food pantries that helps support both emerging and existing campus efforts. CUFBA co-Director and co-Founder Clare Cady helped establish the network to stimulate conversation on the topic of student hunger. She and her partners faced pushback from those who questioned the existence of hunger among college students or who saw hunger as a rite of passage. Despite that, the organization has grown from just 15 schools in 2012 to over 300 nationwide, including institutions as diverse as MATC and Cornell.

[Oh SNAP! Campus Food Programs](#) at Humboldt University offers a food pantry as well as other food-related services. It began as outreach for CalFresh, California's SNAP program, and has expanded to include a weekly farm stand, community gardens, and cooking classes. This array of services, says faculty member and Oh SNAP! advisor Jennifer Maguire, is motivated by the idea that college is a transitional environment where students develop lifelong eating habits. Oh SNAP! has developed several innovative strategies for reaching hungry students and overcoming social stigma associated with public benefits, including an "Out With Stigma" campaign that featured students self-identifying as SNAP recipients on social media campaigns and peer-to-peer assistance with SNAP applications.

The [Global Food Initiative](#) (GFI) is a University of California System effort to address the provision of sustainable and nutritious food throughout the world. The GFI aligns UC's research and operations to find solutions for food security and export those solutions worldwide. Ruben Canedo and Tim Galarneau are part of a working group devoted to developing best practices for addressing student food security, hunger and equity in California. In their work they have encountered pushback within the UC System. In addition to having the backing of the UC President in their efforts, they have developed an inclusive pitch that asks people, particularly administrators, to become part of an ambitious effort, rather than calling out those people for inaction.



Similarly, several institutional housing interventions have sprung up around the country. At Tacoma Community College, Shema Hannebutte, Dean of Counseling, Advising, Access & Career Services, has created the [College Housing Assistance Program](#) to provide homeless and nearly homeless students with housing vouchers. Students commit to case management to ensure that they have a champion and aren't bounced around between campus offices. Students at the University of San Diego have responded to student housing insecurity by creating the Homeless Outreach Student Transition (HOST) program. Robert Arca and a team of students provide emergency shelter and hotel vouchers, case management, and other resources to help students continue in college. Long-term, they are pursuing several strategies to increase the availability of affordable housing near campus. Like Shema, Robert emphasized the need for creative campus-community partnerships to overcome homelessness, particularly for colleges that don't offer on-campus housing.

Some institutions have successfully developed offices that specialize in helping materially disadvantaged students. The [Human Resources Service Center](#) (HRSC) at Oregon State University and [U-ACCESS](#) at the University of Massachusetts Boston aim to improve student persistence and completion by helping students access food, housing, transportation, employment, and mental health services. HRSC, led by Nicole Hindes, helps students with applications for housing, food, and health benefits. U-ACCESS has a case management approach led by Shirley Fan Chan, who brought a non-profit service management background to her work. She and others saw that college students were often overlooked by social services and also encountered resistance from school administrators who had difficulty believing that hungry and homeless students attended their institution. Nevertheless, the office served 120 students during its first year of operation and has grown since.

Community-Based Efforts

Other efforts to combat student food and housing insecurity have arisen outside of institutions. These programs are able to offer services that would be difficult to implement in a college environment. Typically undertaken in partnership with colleges, community interventions represent a substantial portion of services available to students. For example, [Single Stop](#) has effectively partnered with colleges across the country to help students access public benefits. Clare Cady, Senior Program Officer, described Single Stop's one-stop-shop model. At each campus, Single Stop representatives quickly screen students for benefits eligibility and help those students submit applications for housing, food, and health benefits, among others.

Many community services help provide food to college students, and many have developed innovative models tailored specifically to the higher education environment. The [Houston Food Bank](#), represented by Food for Change Coordinator Maryiam Saifuddin, has created food scholarships that offer students up to 120 pounds of food each month through a "client choice" model that allows each student to choose the foods that they enjoy and know how to prepare. The [Hunger Task Force's](#) Mobile Market is a traveling grocery store that parks in strategic locations around Milwaukee where people have difficulty accessing affordable, nutritious food, including local colleges. Executive Director Sherrie Tussler described how her team was able to secure low-price, nutritious food through a partnership with Pick 'N Save and secure grants to discount that food by an additional 25%. [Swipe Out Hunger](#) (SOH) began at UCLA as a student-directed effort to take advantage of the money students wasted on unused meal plans. Rachel Sumekh, co-founder and Executive Director, described SOH's evolution from that simple idea to a multi-campus effort that has received donations from over 22,000 students nationwide. SOH offers a decentralized model that allows each college to be successful by adapting SOH to its own students and campus environment.



Katharine Broton and Sherrie Tussler inside the Hunger Tasks Force's Mobile Market.

Several community housing interventions were also represented at #RealCollege. [NAEHCY](#) exists to serve all young people struggling with housing insecurity and is a resource for schools nationwide. Cykeia Lee, Director of Higher Education Initiatives, shared NAEHCY's innovations aimed at college students. NAEHCY offers the [Higher Education Helpline](#). Students can call or text to receive one-on-one help finding local resources. In addition, NAEHCY promotes the single point of contact model (SPOC), a single individual on each campus who helps homeless students navigate local resources. The [Bruin Shelter](#) in Los Angeles is the second student-run shelter in the nation ([Harvard Y2Y](#) was the first). Students run every aspect of the shelter and have done so on a small budget – they currently house eight residents for just \$25,000 each year. Louis Tse, one of the founders and President, has three goals for the Bruin Shelter: 1) creating a safe, supportive space for youth, 2) empowering UCLA students to be social justice leaders, and 3) acting as an open-source model for others.



Milwaukee Area Technical College students met with U.S. Department of Education Staff, including Deputy Under Secretary Kim Hunter Reed.

Challenges Facing Institutional and Community Efforts

The traditional picture of college students is of recent high school graduates from middle- and high-income families. While that may once have been true, today 36% of undergraduates are 25 or older, 47% are independent, and 23% have children of their own.⁹ Despite this evidence, however, many continue to view college students through the old lens. It should come as no surprise then, that practitioners at #RealCollege frequently experience resistance when trying to address their students' needs. One speaker said that even county SNAP administrators were surprised that college students need assistance. While emerging data on college students' material hardship can help convince the skeptical, the most effective strategy is to use the power of student voice – inviting students to participate in meetings and tell their stories.

⁹ Center for Law and Social Policy. 2011. "Yesterday's Nontraditional Student is Today's Traditional Student." <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Nontraditional-Students-Facts-2011.pdf>. Retrieved May 17, 2016.

Most efforts require institutional support at startup – permission to operate, access to students, facilities, or funding. Achieving buy-in is also essential to sustainability services. Panelists offered three suggestions:

1. Let students speak for themselves. NAEHCY brings students to Capitol Hill and holds an annual Scholar Summit for students to share their experiences. Sherrie Tussler of the Hunger Task Force recommends taking people to places where they can see and experience the challenges – a soup kitchen or shelter that students frequent.
2. Speak the language of retention and completion. Framing services as necessary and effective supports for student academic success can be an effective tool for convincing administration.
3. Bring people in. Louis Tse of the Bruin Shelter encountered many who were unable to give requested support due to policies, funding, or liability concerns. Louis reframed his ask to focus on what institutions could do as a starting point for serving students. As Ruben Canedo noted, this may require “calling people in instead of calling them out.”

Another challenge is that despite the prevalence of food and housing insecurity, service providers often have difficulty reaching students in need. Many students don't see themselves as hungry or homeless. Others don't want to identify themselves due to stigma often associated with material need. Useful strategies for reaching students, offered by participants, included:

1. Use appropriate language. Instead of asking “Are you hungry or homeless?” try asking “When did you last eat?” or “Do you have a safe and reliable place to sleep at night?”
2. Remove the stigma. Outreach and education, particularly about the prevalence of hunger and homelessness among college students, can remove the shame that inhibits some students from seeking help. Humboldt State University launched an “Out with Stigma” social media campaign that featured students identifying themselves as SNAP recipients.
3. Offer services that students are more willing to accept. Panelists found that students gravitate toward food pantries, hygiene drives, and peer-to-peer mentors. Offering these services as first points of contact gives providers an opportunity to identify students in need and offer extended services.

Policy Responses

Federal, state, and local governments are an important source of support for Americans facing food and housing insecurity. For many reasons, however, college students are often ineligible for public benefits or are unaware of the benefits that they can access. #RealCollege featured many speakers who pointed out holes in the social safety net and simple policy solutions that can help ensure that low-income college students are able to graduate and break the cycle of poverty. Others described notable policy experiments currently being piloted around the country and the need for effective strategies to evaluate and scale those programs to create a support structure for students, rather than the patchwork quilt that students currently rely on.

College Affordability

One reason that low-income college students differ from other struggling Americans is that students must cover large expenses for tuition and living costs while limiting work hours to focus on academics. Any discussion of undergraduate struggles with food and housing must include a discussion of the well-documented increase in college costs and government efforts to reverse this trend. To that end, Kim Hunter Reed, Deputy Under Secretary of Education, and Ajita Talwalker, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education at the White House Domestic Policy Council, each provided keynote speeches and answered questions on the federal role in improving college affordability and strategies that #RealCollege participants can employ to advance a policy agenda supporting the neediest students.



White House Domestic Policy Council Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Ajita Talwalker Menon addressed the federal agenda around undergraduate food and housing.

The goal of federal higher education policy, as Ajita Talwalker articulated, should be that all hardworking students are able to attend college and have the supports they need to succeed. A recent history of achievement trends presented by Dr. Reed, however, shows that this goal has yet to be attained. Geography and income continue to be determinants of college success. The purchasing power of the Pell Grant has eroded. There is not enough aid to meet student needs. The growing prevalence of non-traditional students has not yet been met by new education and funding models that those students need to succeed.

In the last seven years, the federal government has made some strides in advancing the affordability agenda. The American Opportunity Tax Credit provided 10 million families with \$18 billion in 2016. The Department of Education has simplified the FAFSA, enabled direct transfer of IRS tax return information into the FAFSA form, and allowed families to use tax information from two years prior. Both speakers cited America's College Promise (ACP), the President's plan to make the first two years of college free. Although the ACP has stalled in Congress, it has articulated a vision and begun a national conversation about college tuition. To date, multiple state and local free college programs have arisen, providing \$70 million to help 40,000 students. In addition, the President's current budget calls for increasing Pell Grants, brings back summer Pell, and creates a second chance Pell for previously incarcerated individuals.

Political and budgetary realities have constrained progress for those hoping to expand postsecondary opportunities for lower-income families. This is true both at the federal level and at the state level, where disinvestment in higher education has run in tandem with rising college prices. In order to move forward, researchers and practitioners must partner to demonstrate cost-effective solutions. For example, despite the high per student costs of the [Accelerated Study in Associate Programs \(ASAP\)](#) at the City University of New York, it has become a model for others due to its demonstrated effectiveness. Making policymakers aware of these programs is essential, particularly for food and housing insecurity work that is just now gaining visibility. Katherine Sydor, Senior Policy Advisor at the U.S Department of Education, echoed these words, pointing to the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. She sees the reauthorization as an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to make their cases supported by the data, focusing on facilitating completion as one of the best ways to address policymakers' concerns about student loan debt and repayment.

Improving Student Access to Public Benefits

Although the rising price of college grabs headlines, living expenses are often what cause students to drop out, says Amy Ellen Duke of the [Center for Law and Social Policy](#). There are several social safety net programs that provide food and housing, but college students are either ineligible for these programs or lack the information to access them.

Many benefits programs were designed in an era when students typically joined the workforce after high school. At that time, a low- or middle-income worker with a high school diploma could earn enough to support a family. Today, employers increasingly require postsecondary training, and students from all income levels are increasingly attending college. Rules concerning food and housing benefits, however, remain rooted in the past – often requiring that the recipient work or have children. Moreover, responsibility for public benefits shifts to students at a critical time of transition. Upon high school graduation, students who were once covered by their parents' SNAP or housing benefits may find themselves no longer eligible, or having to procure benefits on their own.

A related issue is that, when public benefits are available, students do not access them due to lack of information, misinformation, or perceived social stigma. Often, students are unaware that they are eligible for benefits. For example, while college students are often ineligible for SNAP, students who receive federal work-study or meet other requirements may receive benefits. Oh SNAP! at Humboldt State University works with students to establish SNAP eligibility and offers free assistance with applications several times a week. Misinformation is also a problem. Several practitioners at #RealCollege noted that students are afraid that receiving SNAP will reduce their eligibility for financial aid. Finally, many students refuse to apply for benefits due to perceived stigma, not realizing that many of their peers share similar experiences. Oh SNAP! went a step further, creating an “Out With Stigma” social media campaign that featured students identifying themselves, both in words and pictures, as SNAP users.

Promising Policy Experiments

Similar to food and housing initiatives developing both on campuses and in communities, several innovative policy initiatives provide examples of what can be accomplished. As previously mentioned, Tacoma Community College and the Tacoma Housing Authority have partnered to create the [College Housing Assistance Program](#), which provides rental assistance to students at risk of homelessness. Alan Shannon of the U.S. Department of Agriculture described Washington State's [Basic Food Employment and Training Program](#), which helps community college students participate in SNAP. And Single Stop currently operates on over 20 community college campuses providing public benefits screening and application assistance for students. As these programs mature, it will be necessary for researchers to evaluate them both for impact and cost-effectiveness. These evaluations are essential for showing policymakers what works.

Next Steps

Following the event, we asked participants what they would like to do in order to follow-up on the work begun at #RealCollege. Nearly one in three volunteered to take on a leadership role in developing and designing next steps. Half of the participants said that they would participate in efforts led by others. And 78% said that they would like to attend future events on similar topics.

At the Wisconsin HOPE Lab we are moving forward with several concrete initiatives to build on the momentum created by the Convening, and will also pursue further initiatives spearheaded by participants:

(1) Chase Sackett of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development noted that he is spearheading the construction of a guidebook for use by colleges and universities. We are partnering with HUD to complete this guidebook and disseminate it.

(2) The Wisconsin HOPE Lab's [policy proposal](#) to expand to expand the National School Lunch Program to higher education was discussed at the convening, and then introduced by Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) as an amendment to the Child Nutrition Act.¹⁰ We will conduct further research and policy analysis to build out this proposal, educate legislators on it, and seek to advance it during the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

(3) There were many calls for more information on the contours of food and housing insecurity among undergraduates. With the Association of Community College Trustees, we are pursuing funding to field a new survey of community colleges around the nation in Fall 2016, with a targeted sample of at least 50 institutions. We are also continuing to interview housing and food insecure students, and working on evaluating programs that attempt to alleviate these issues.

We are interested in support—from participants and others—to pursue initiatives in these areas, and in particular to engage two target groups—(1) higher education executive leadership and (2) public health experts and the health sector.

¹⁰ Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., & Colo, E. 2016. "Expanding the National School Lunch Program to Higher Education." Wisconsin HOPE Lab Policy Brief 16-02.

For More Information

[This is #RealCollege: Some Students Struggle to Pay for Food, Housing](#)

Sara Goldrick-Rab, *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2016

[A Successful Conference on Hunger?](#)

Wick Sloane, *Inside Higher Ed*, April 29, 2016

#RealCollege Convening Attendees

Ryan Adserias, Wei Lab
Robert Arca, University of San Diego
Gwen Bankston, Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation
Kenneth Barbeau, Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee
Judi Bartfeld, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Sarah Bauder, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Bonnie Bauer, Moraine Park Technical College
Jacob Bernier, Century College Resource and Support Center
Melanie Bivens, Waukesha County Technical College
Alison Bowman, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
Aaron Braverman, Single Stop - Borough of Manhattan Community College
Katharine Broton, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Clare Cady, College and University Food Bank Alliance & Single Stop
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Wayne Taliaferro, Center for Law and Social Policy
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