What Students, Whose Success? Reimagining the Transformation of Higher Education Through Critically Engaged Student Success Initiatives

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INTRODUCTION

Today's college students face unique challenges to educational success and degree completion, including meeting their daily basic need of access to food and housing. At a time when colleges and universities are continually

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faced with competing urgent needs such as financial difficulties, declining student enrollment, decreased state funding, and now COVID-19, it can be challenging to build institutional support for new initiatives.

As vocational employment opportunities in fields that provide a living wage without a college degree decrease, it is clear a higher education degree continues to be crucial for long-term economic stability (Ma et al., 2016). However, alongside this opportunity is the colloquial but pervasive narrative of the "starving student" that is held and perpetuated by many. This largely engenders a vision of an 18-year-old student, supported by their parents, who might be mismanaging their money, and as a result, eat a lot of staple food to make ends meet. It suggests that struggle with economic stability is inherent in the college student experience. Contrary to this common notion, this traditional student is less and less represented in our campus communities and is quickly being outnumbered by students who are funding their own education, are returning to school from the workplace at older ages, are parents, and are marginalized in a variety of ways (Seftor & Turner, 2002; Spitzer, 2000). Empirical evidence suggests too often students do not have enough financial means to accommodate the cost of college and living expenses for a range of reasons, least common of these are personal budget mismanagement. Not having enough money contributes to heavy tolls on their well-being and ability to earn a higher education degree, and contributes to students' being considered *basic-needs insecure* (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018, 2019; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019).

Researchers and practitioners in higher education often defined basic needs as the conditions necessary for students to survive and thrive (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Trawver & Hedwig, 2019). This most often references safe, affordable, fixed, and habitable housing; the ability to acquire, prepare, and store nutritious food; and the financial well-being to ensure those needs are met. This definition has changed as research has progressed and in response to the disparities and challenges exacerbated and amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted elemental needs. Beyond food, housing, and financial security, basic needs for

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students can also be inclusive of *essential needs* for student well-being such as access to reliable broadband internet, spaces conducive to student learning and studying, support for mental and physical health, access to personal hygiene supplies and products, transportation, and childcare to attend educational opportunities and employment responsibilities (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018).

More specifically, research on basic needs has relied on a definition for homelessness given in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act, which defined homelessness for youth as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Hallett et al., 2019). This definition appears to best represent the experience of homelessness for college students, some of whom live in shelters, places not meant for human habitation like their cars, but are more likely to "couch surf" moving from place to place without a consistent place to live (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Hallett et al., 2019).

Community colleges have high prevalence of homelessness and housing insecurity than their four-year counterparts, ranging from 30% to 50% of students experiencing housing instability and 13% to 14% experiencing homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2016). A national study found 12% of community college students and 9% of university students experience homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). In a study of the California State University (CSU) system, a four-year institution that is the largest comprehensive post-secondary higher education institution in the country, 10.9% of students experienced homelessness in a 12-month period (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). Similarly, recent survey data from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) indicate 8.3% of student respondents experienced homelessness at some point in their college career, 30% reporting experiences with housing insecurity, and over 44% reporting experiences with food insecurity (Trawver & Hedwig, 2019).

The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (USDAERS) defines food insecurity as those who are low or very low food secure (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2017). *Low food security* indicates reduced quality of diet and *very low food security* indicates disrupted eating patterns, reduced food intake, both due to limited financial means. Studies have also shown high rates of students in colleges and universities experiencing food insecurity. Researchers have found between 21% and 52% of students experienced food insecurity including reduced intake of food, nutritional deficits, and worry or anxiety about having access to enough

food (Chaparro et al., 2009; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2011; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2016). Similar to rates of homelessness, community college students have higher rates of food insecurity than their four-year counterparts (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2018; Martinez et al., 2016).

Although policies and practices have been developed to address equity for and retention of low-income students in higher education, there are limited supports specifically for students who are unable to meet their basic needs. Research suggests students who experience homelessness and food insecurity struggle to meet a variety of competing needs, including management of personal and financial responsibilities and navigating college environments (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Gupton, 2017). The innumerable problems associated with basic need insecurity undoubtedly inhibit academic success. Students experiencing housing and food insecurities have higher levels of stress (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2014). Students are often in the precarious position of having to sacrifice their well-being in the pursuit of their education (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Cady, 2016; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018, 2019; Freudenberg et al., 2013).

Further, state and federal programs intended to support low-income individuals and families outside of higher education, like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), often fail to help struggling students because of restrictive eligibility requirements specifically for those in higher education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019). Many college students would qualify for public welfare support systems, but they become categorically ineligible for those services by virtue of the very fact they are college students. The gap between public service supports and the college environment leaves students struggling to earn a degree in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Although some campuses have developed official, institutionally supported efforts to research campus food- and housing-insecurity and student homelessness (Crutchfield, 2016) and others have developed coordinated resources and services to serve students (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015), many institutions have not. The advent of campus food pantries and emergency grant support to students who experience basic need insecurity has proven helpful for students in addressing short-term crises. However, rethinking these approaches to name the embedded inequalities in higher education and the policies and community institutions are situated in is necessary. Basic need insecurity is a manifestation of these

economic and social disparities, and institutions of higher education must avoid the recreation of charity systems that replicate inequities embedded in historical approaches to addressing poverty. Further, incorporating a paradigm and action-oriented position to address education in and out of the classroom with the intention to address racial and economic parity is required if student success is truly the mission of higher education.

Positionality of the Authors

The California State University (CSU): The authors come from two systems of higher education that address basic needs in a variety of ways. The California State University (CSU) has 23 campuses, more than 481,000 students, and is the largest, most ethnically and economically diverse public comprehensive higher education system in the US and offers undergraduate and graduate instruction leading to bachelor's and higher degrees. Twenty-one of CSU campuses are Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and 14 campuses are Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions. Spanning 800 miles across California, CSU campuses serve urban, suburban, and rural communities, and one-third of undergraduates are the first in their families to attend college.

In February 2015, Timothy P. White, then-Chancellor of the CSU, first commissioned Dr. Rashida Crutchfield, later adding Dr. Jennifer Maguire, to conduct the CSU Study of Student Basic Needs (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018) to explore the prevalence, scope, and health impacts for CSU students who experienced food and housing insecurity and to learn more about coping and supports students used. We found 41.6% experienced food insecurity. Almost 22% of those reported very low food security, meaning they were not getting enough food, linked with hunger, experiencing weakness, difficulty concentrating, and sickness and missing school. African American and first-generation students (68%) were far over-represented as basic needs insecure when compared with the CSU student average.

We found 10.9% of CSU students reported homelessness. Again, African American and first-generation students were disproportionately represented as almost 18% reported low or very low food security. We found the more food insecure or homeless a student, the lower their reported GPA and higher their level of academic concerns like anxiety about academics, work, trouble concentrating, and time management. Students who face these challenges had more symptoms of poor mental

and physical health and were more likely to miss days of school or work than their secure peers. Students describe a variety of ways in which housing insecurity or homelessness influences their educational outcomes. Unhoused students also experience the challenges of working multiple jobs to make ends meet, taking courses, and finding time and money to eat. Often, students report the ongoing need to find ever transitioning places to sleep as having an additional job. One student said, "It affects my studying if I don't know where I'm going to go, where am I studying or am I concentrating on studying because I'm not worried about where I'm going to go."

The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)

Located on Dena'ina Athabascan homelands in Alaska's most populated city, where more than half of the total state's population resides, the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) was created as a result of a 1970 merger between the Anchorage Community College and the Alaska Senior College (UAA, 2015). UAA is the largest campus within the University of Alaska system and includes five community campuses, all of which are designated as open-enrollment at the undergraduate level. The system as a whole was developed to increase access to higher education and meet the workforce needs of a growing state. UAA offers academic programs ranging from paraprofessional occupational endorsement certificates to doctoral degrees. On average, UAA enrolls nearly 15,000 students each academic year (UAA, 2020), serving a highly diverse and *new traditional* student body. Anchorage has some of the most diverse neighborhoods and public schools in the US, including three of the five most diverse public high schools (Farrell, 2018). Students represent broad and diverse social locations across race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, gender identity, first-language spoken, nation of birth, disability status, military- and/or veteran-status, marital status, first generation, and rural and small communities. Additionally, many students are working and caring for children or other dependents while attending the university (UAA, 2020).

As students respond to shifting and competing demands on their everyday lives, our institutions of higher education must also respond by listening to student voices and following through on commitments to put students first. Food and housing insecurity, like the institutions set up to address it, do not occur in isolation. Our campuses can learn from students and from each other to face emerging challenges and meet the

broader needs of our community, state, nation, and world. While UAA is still very much in the grassroots stages of campus and community activism around basic needs, our institutional journey, despite important political, economic, and sociocultural differences, mirrors other colleges and universities in the US, including the CSU. Preliminary research efforts at UAA were informed by the Basic Needs Initiative at CSU, and faculty, staff, and administrative collaborations between our institutions have increased awareness and expanded the reach of existing efforts. Further, despite the overwhelming perception California's liberal politic might nurture a basic needs movement unobstructed, the CSU begins its journey of development as a small group of people who found purchase in the passion of those committed to action and, even as that movement grows, continues to learn and endure despite odds that often seem unsurmountable. Though continued research is needed to clarify correlations between food insecurity and issues of housing insecurity, poverty, educational cost, living wage, and affordable living, it is clear students experience a multiplicity of hardships while striving to earn a university degree. We envision a future where all institutions see this need clearly and imbed strategic responses to these social issues as a part of their missions for student success.

Multi-dimensional Perspectives from Stakeholders

Addressing these complex and multifaceted social issues to ensure transformational change for students requires we work *with* students to ensure their voices are leading and directing the narrative of the challenges they face and the successes they achieve. Further, we are required to learn from them both in how they have responded as participants in research and in real time as advocates of their own change movements.

Collaborative work with students, staff of both on- and off-campus service providers, faculty, and administrators is fundamental in our role to amplify the voices of stakeholders. We define stakeholders as those who are affected by basic needs insecurity or are involved in support of solutions that work toward its amelioration. In this case, they are staff, faculty, students, administrators, community agencies, policy advocates, and legislators engaged in forward movement in this work. Without a community of talented individuals from diverse backgrounds who are working at a variety of touchpoints in the system, the research would not matter. We invited those who have experienced basic needs insecurity and those who have

worked closely with students to keep basic needs initiatives focused on ending hunger and homelessness in higher education. Each person provided rich narratives that root our recommendations for positive changes.

The authors are extremely appreciative of the students and staff who engage in this effort and who continue to support the ways their peers' basic needs are met. To further position the student narrative included in this chapter—and to further emphasize the importance of the student voice in research efforts such as this one that informs practice—it is important to *get to know* our students. The following are excerpts from narratives submitted by students. In these, the student voice is kept as originally submitted.

Li'Shae Childs, Undergraduate Student at California State University, Long Beach; pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Psychology; and served as an Undergraduate Research Assistant studying basic needs:

> While I was growing up, my mother always stressed the importance of getting an education, especially as a low-income first-generation biracial female. As I got older, I knew it was important for me to go to college, but I didn't have anyone in my family to look up to or ask questions about the college experience.

Aracely Guerrero, Graduate Student at California State University, Long Beach; pursuing a Master of Social Work; and served as a Graduate Research Assistant studying basic needs:

> In a family of six, with me as the oldest and the only daughter, my father is the head of the household, and my mother is a stay-at-home wife. We grew up in a low-income community and lived with the basics. I grew up thinking our lifestyle was normal and acceptable when it was the complete opposite.

Muhammad Khan, Undergraduate Student at University of Alaska, Anchorage; pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences; Secretary/Treasurer of the Health Professionals Student Organization (HPSO):

> My journey to higher education started far from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). It began as my father's dream that all of his kids would go on to get higher education one day. After graduating from high school in Pakistan, my father entered a green card lottery to enroll in college in the

United States. Against all odds, he did receive an immigration visa. […] My dad decided to support his family and live his dream of getting an education through his kids. I was ten years old when that dream was finally realized.

Ashley Hearn, Undergraduate Student at University of Alaska, Anchorage; pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences:

I'm currently going on my sixth year at UAA, and I've been a full-time student up until about 2 years ago. I'm now 27 and I've been independent and living on my own the entire time I've taken classes. Looking back on my time here, I can certainly say I had my fair share of struggles. I went through numerous job changes, my 5-year relationship ended, and I was in a toxic living situation until I was able to move. In addition to our global collective struggle with COVID, I also experienced the sudden death of my sister. Luckily, these things didn't happen all at once, but of course over the years each situation ended up occurring in the middle of the semester.

Vivian Hernandez, Alumna of California State University, Long Beach; Master of Science in Higher Education; served as CalFresh Outreach Coordinator for the Basic Needs Department:

In 2017, as an undergraduate transfer student I experienced transfer shock and difficulty managing family and relationship dynamics. Struggling to support my mental illness, I began skipping meals, unable to focus on course material, and eventually lost my stable housing. I reached out for support given, and as a non-traditional, first-generation, Latina with varying abilities, basic needs services were critical to persist in my education.

Institutional Gaps in Support and Transformative Possibilities

While student success continues to be a core value across institutions of higher education, the stories and experiences shared by our contributors highlight several areas where additional support is needed. Research on students' basic needs continues to evolve and explore ways students navigate the college environment and the ways they are supported in achieving their educational aspirations. This work did not happen overnight but rather was the result of years of action-oriented research, community engagement, and commitment to do better for students. However, there remain gaps in our understanding of the systems that impact college students' well-being, and additional research is needed in order to fully

understand the ways students' basic needs are challenged, to develop and implement program and service supports, and to evaluate those supports to ensure they are best addressing students' needs with a specific focus on those that need us the most. Addressing student basic need insecurity requires academic institutions to expand their view and see themselves in a larger ecosystem inclusive of government agencies, community service organizations, housing agencies and advocacy efforts. As such, the following is informed by practice in this work with the foundational knowledge that students' basic needs challenges often stem from limited financial assistance provided through the university's financial aid process.

At the Core: Financial Aid

For most students, financial aid is a necessity in their pursuit of a college degree. The financial aid award is just as important–and some may say more important–than the college acceptance itself, for it provides the resources needed to pay for the tuition and fees needed to attend college. However, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an intimidating standard application that assumes very traditional and standard family formations. By collecting the amount of money a family unit made, bank account information, and other personal and identifiable information each year before the priority deadline in March, the FAFSA then calculates one of the most important figures in a college student's life (beyond GPA and standardized test scores): the Expected Family Contribution, or EFC. It is this figure that determines a student's eligibility for federal student aid and available financial assistance at the college they will attend. Fundamentally, the EFC represents the amount of money a student's family is assumed— read "expected"—to be able to contribute toward the cost of the college education the year *prior* to their enrollment.

Through its series of questions, the FAFSA determines a student's dependency status in order to then apply the appropriate formula to determine the EFC. Unfortunately, though, the application takes a qualitative approach with all students regardless of a student's non-traditional circumstances. As Li'Shae explained:

> My mom and I hoped that financial aid would cover most of the cost, but it only covered a semester living in the dorms. I realized that going to a university was not an option for me; there was no way my mom and I could afford it.

More and more, this has become a common narrative: students and family units that assumed a college education would be possible *because* of financial aid, later discover financial aid will not be able to cover the true cost of attending college. It is this broken system that is often at the core of the basic needs conversation. If financial aid covered the true cost of attendance beyond tuition, books, and in some cases housing and covered other aspects of a students' college experience, including transportation, technology equipment, and care for children, the conversation regarding supporting students' basic needs would be very different.

One-Stop Shop: Meeting Students' Basic Needs

Beyond entry and responding to financial need, students who strive for graduation while being under-resourced require on- and off-campus supports that must be a coordinated effort. The challenges college students face does not automatically go away upon their enrollment in college. As Aracely wrote:

> As a graduate research assistant and student, I have seen a massive problem with students in higher education that needs to be examined. Learning about different experiences of students and statistics of those who suffer food and housing insecurity made me realize that I also identify as housing and food insecure myself. Knowing what I know now, I realize that there is not enough emphasis on the population trying to obtain higher education while juggling work, being parents, helping their family financially, and getting into debt. I had no idea that food and housing insecurity occurs in higher education and grows constantly. Even though we have resources in place, it is not sufficient.

Our students have multiple intersecting identities—identities that call upon colleges and universities to invest and support work to ensure all students have an equitable college experience. Parenting students, for example, are not only juggling the demands of college, but do so as they care for their children. As such, these students' basic needs now include the essentials needed to care for that young child—be it diapers, formula, and childcare all required and conducive to well-being.

In other cases, students' home lives are part of their college journey. For many students, attending a local community college provides the opportunity to continue to fulfill familial responsibilities, like caring for

elder parents or siblings. Doing this ensures students continue on their educational journey, but not without its challenges. As Muhammad shared:

> I had to support my family along with my dad. At the time, he was the sole breadwinner of our family. He battled several chronic diseases, including coronary artery disease and chronic kidney disease, while also being a type 1 diabetic. His illnesses have been very debilitating as he cannot work long hours. My dad drove a cab for most of his life. Being a cab driver allowed my dad to support his family with his medical history.

Like many students, Muhammad's role in the family was a pivotal one: helping fulfill his parents' desire of attaining the *American dream*. Having to navigate employment and care for a loved one with serious medical conditions is no easy feat for any individual, and clearly not for a college student also navigating coursework. As a member of a communal family, not only was Muhammad caring for his father at home, but was also emotionally invested in the well-being of his terminally ill grandma. As he explained:

> During the summer of 2019, my grandma was terminally ill in Pakistan, and I had not seen her in over five years. I chose to visit my grandma in Pakistan, which didn't sit well with the coaches as they had mandatory summer camps. When I communicated that to my coaches, I never got a response back, which only meant one thing[:] they were no longer interested in me. This was a hard pill to swallow as I had put in countless hours of hard work to improve my [college] football skills. Ultimately, I was okay with my decision. I chose my family over football.

Muhammad's story is a common one. A family emergency arises which calls upon family members to respond and support. However, other responsibilities—like work, school, and school activities—remain. This requires students make difficult decisions about their priorities and creates dissonance among the other facets of a student's sphere. In Muhammad's case, family was his top priority during a time of crisis. Unfortunately, this is a common narrative and colleges and universities are called to respond compassionately to a diverse student body.

Basic Needs Centers, *Basic Needs Hubs*, and campus units of similar names aim to offer students with a variety of resources aimed at supporting their basic needs. In terms of food insecurity, they often provide fresh produce and dairy as well as shelf-stable products. Leveraging community resources, these hubs also rely on referrals to local community organizations that can provide additional support to students and their unique

needs. In California, educating students about CalFresh—the California iteration of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides critical money to individuals and families so they can purchase food—is key to combating food insecurity. Developing these strategies requires creative and innovative thinking. CalFresh eligibility requires most students be work-study eligible or work 20 hours per week regardless of their course load. Vivian Hernandez modeled novel thinking in her role as a CalFresh campus coordinator in supporting students' access to CalFresh during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Students are often using their financial means to keep housing and internet paid to have housing and access to their education. Which has resulted in students not having enough money for monthly groceries. I advocated for increased staffing by inquiring to increase the CalFresh budget allocation. It is critical for program leaders to identify opportunities in increasing grant funding and use investments to create foundational staffing infrastructures. I identified opportunities that expand student eligibility for CalFresh by examining how to exempt campusbased educational programs that increase employability. CalFresh student eligibility is not inclusive of all students' demographics. It is a disservice to college students if educational leaders are not intentional in advocating for student's intellectual labor as a form of paid labor.

These hubs often also work with the campus' student housing facilities to provide emergency temporary housing to students, as well as hotel vouchers near the campus. Offering a variety of options ensures that students receive the support that would be most beneficial to meet their unique circumstances. As Justin Mendez, Basic Needs Program Manager at Long Beach City College, shared:

> While local, state, and national agencies seek the best funding solution to address homelessness, I believe the best approach includes diverse options to have the flexibility to meet the diverse needs and circumstances of our students.

Justin's community college campus developed a housing program in collaboration with a community-based agency that provides subsidized housing for students who experienced homelessness. Beyond that, he is aware not every student is going to want the same intervention:

> Informed by the needs of our students we implemented an on-campus, overnight, safe parking program to provide a student-centered model that offered a more familiar and convenient environment for our students to utilize during the semester while receiving our intentionally destigmatizing and holistic case management toward a path of long-term housing stability.

More important than ever, basic needs centers on college campuses must also offer case management through a trauma-informed practice (Hallett et al., 2019). Case managers are responsible for engaging with students and ensuring that they are supported via the multiple supports available on- and off-campus. This ensures students receive the appropriate level of care to ensure their overall well-being. However, for case managers to be successful, robust partnerships across and beyond the campus must exist in order to address the multiplicity of student needs. At a number of colleges and universities, the basic needs conversation is in its infancy stage and unfortunately contributes to students feeling left out of the well-being conversation. As Jennifer shared:

> College was a safety net when I first entered. However, the moment I couldn't financially sustain my cost of living and pursuit of education, I felt the net starting to unravel. At the end of my freshman year, I was faced with making the difficult decision to leave the university or stay and become homeless. I decided to stay. I truly believed the university would help me. I had hoped that after learning about my situation they would house me in the dorms or at least help me find a safe alternative. I was wrong. Leaving me to hang on to whatever was left of the unraveling net.

Narratives like Jennifer's highlight the importance of continuing to build campus infrastructure to meet students' basic needs, and the importance of ensuring students regularly help inform campus practice.

Basic Needs Support in the Fabric of the University

As college and university campuses evolve to address students' basic needs, it is important the student experience continue to shape and form the development and expansion of support systems. As research has shown (Crutchfield et al., 2020; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; Hallett et al., 2019) there continues to be significant stigma associated with accessing support on campuses. Assistant Coach of the Women's Basketball Team at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, Kiana

Robertson, shared the challenges she witnessed while facilitating a college exploration pilot program for underserved youth:

> During this program, it became very clear how much these kids needed support not only for their future[,] but for the present moment. It was at that moment that I realized the lack of awareness and compassion that our society has given to our underserved population, especially our youth. It saddened me, but assisted me to become more attentive that there are kids that struggle at home, but in public put on a front that everything is okay.

The existence of the federal SNAP program, homeless shelters, and food pantries in communities across the country is a result of the need for basic needs resources and support among many members of our communities. It is a need recognized by federal and local governments, to an extent. Shelters and pantries can be the critically necessary bridge for those who are precariously negotiating deep basic need insecurity, but they can also recreate a charity reaction to a poverty model that requires people prove their worth and perform their poverty. Colleges and universities can both recognize the needs of students and creatively and innovatively bypass existing structures, removing barriers to access to goods and services. It is in this recognition and acknowledgment we can destigmatize programs and services aimed at supporting our marginalized and disenfranchised community members. The reality is many of our college students "struggle at home," as Kiana writes, but they certainly should not be in environments where they are forced to "put on a front that everything is okay." In the same way we encourage our college students to seek our resources and support from college units designed to support them when they are struggling, so too colleges and universities must reach out and acknowledge limitations in their support of students in pursuit of *doing better*. And beyond *encouraging students*, we can actively outreach to students who we know need these services the most. We can *award* students who are most *at promise*, rather than *giving* to students *in need or at risk*.

As colleges and universities—and public benefits services as a whole—continue to work toward destigmatizing accessing services and reforming existing policies and practices to ensure availability, it is important to reengineer our ways of thinking and doing. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the need to ensure websites were up to date with relevant and accurate information to support students. It also pushed colleges and universities to engage with students via virtual modalities,

inclusive of social media platforms. During this time, virtual tours of basic needs hubs posted on Facebook and Instagram, among others, gave students the opportunity to explore and learn about available resources. In addition, live-streamed and recorded videos à la *Iron Chef* taught students nutritious and delicious meals could be made from food received from the food pantry. As Vivian, who was both a graduate student and CalFresh Outreach Coordinator at California State University, Long Beach, shared: "Program leaders must be purposeful in forming consistent partnerships that benefit student's ability to persevere in their education." These types of cooking shows that taught students how to prepare meals certainly relied on partnerships across campus, were incredibly creative, and continue to engage students and teach them critical life-skills that allow them to persist.

Working toward destigmatizing basic needs programs and services is key to ensuring students feel comfortable and safe in accessing services. However, how do we support students who feel safe, but may find that the services are insufficient to meet their needs? Ashley shares more about student agency and empowerment when faced with such a dilemma:

> My decision to stay [in college] made me wonder how many students were in a similar situation? How many were faced with deciding between food or books? It made me ask, how is my institution supporting students who lack basic needs when unexpected issues arise? At the time, my institution had a limited amount of resources available, and I knew this had to change. This was the beginning of a cultural shift on my campus. With the help of others, we created the Hunger and Homelessness Support Network (HHSN). HHSN is a working group of students, staff, faculty, and community members who all believe a college is a place that should be obtainable and sustainable for all who choose to attend. Students should not have to decide between food or books, a safe place to live, or attending college.

Decision making within institutions can be difficult given administrators, at times, are making these decisions with scarce resources and staff who are often working beyond their capacity. Private and public partnerships can be necessary to seek fiscal sustainability for programs not yet institutionalized as a part of the university investments. Brock Grubb, who had a history in philanthropy and now serves as Principal for Clear Moon Consulting and supports colleges, universities, and community-based foundations and agencies shared a major lesson learned, including

challenging major assumptions many people have about how *need* manifests in students and how presumption of those needs influences the perception of available solutions. He said:

> As a white, male, cis-gender, heterosexual, grant maker with an advanced degree, I held a lot of privilege operated on invisible assumptions that were shaped by my identity and life experiences. The first of these was the assumption that capitalism was a good thing. The endowment of the foundation where I worked, like nearly all foundation endowments in the country, came from the dividends of a capitalist enterprise. Though never advertised as such, the invisible assumption was that the system of capitalism "works" and that it should continue "working" in perpetuity. Sure, capitalism may have downsides (e.g., high tuition rates) and need regulation (e.g., accountability for price gouging for-profit colleges), but it was the system we had and should not be subjected to any significant changes in operation.

After attending a conference where students spoke about their college experience, he learned a different narrative:

> The students at this conference weren't asking for "acceleration" to "credentials with labor market value." They were talking about survival. They spoke about tradeoffs they were making between tuition and books and basic necessities like food, childcare, transportation and rent. As I listened to their stories, I slowly began to see the invisible assumptions that I had been holding for what they truly were: a story that was not grounded in lived experience.

As we continue to learn about the student experience from students themselves, we must ensure we continue to approach this work with the notion students are—and will remain—unique individuals with unique challenges and successes. As Justin shares: "Meeting our students where they are at means there is not a one-size-fits-all solution that works for all students experiencing homelessness and basic needs insecurities." Furthermore, this call to action requires us "to be creative and imaginative to develop strategies that have not been done before to address homelessness" and other basic needs insecurities on college campuses.

Reimagining the Transformative Possibility of Higher Education

Commitment to serve students and prepare them for the challenges of the world is the heart of our work. While there are many successes to celebrate and institutional awareness that simply did not exist a few years ago, threats remain. Shifting toward a culture of equity and inclusion in higher education requires transformational change to touch every aspect of our institutions. Doing anything less runs the risk of reinforcing barriers and perpetuating harms.

CSU campuses are responding to these unmet student basic needs. All 23 campuses have food-delivery services and linkages to basic needs resources. Twenty-one campuses have programs that provide support to address the needs of students with experience in foster care, including housing. However, addressing student homelessness has been a significant challenge. The primary response to this need has been on-campus emergency housing and hotel vouchers, which generally includes stays of up to 14 days. This approach may be sufficient for students with short-term needs, but research on youth homeless suggests crisis housing responses like these have little positive impact on long-term outcomes (Pollio et al., 2006). A more durable and far-reaching intervention is required to truly address the student homelessness crisis.

The CSU is breaking new ground with the development of *College Focused Rapid Rehousing* (RRH) to address student homelessness as a long-term commitment to address equity gaps for marginalized groups and increase graduation rates. In support of this effort, the State of California granted the CSU $6.5 million to develop and pilot a Rapid ReHousing (RRH) model that uses federal nomenclature of rapid rehousing, but removes many of the restrictive measures of the federal iteration. College-focused RRH provides sustainable solutions for student homelessness. Resources were allocated to campuses to develop and enhance programs and services for students who face challenges with housing instability and homelessness. RRH requires CSU campuses establish ongoing partnerships with community-based organizations that have a tradition of providing wraparound services and rental subsidies to those experiencing homelessness. The seven inaugural campuses selected for the program were awarded funding based on their demonstrated need, strength of their formalized partnership(s), campus readiness for program implementation, planned use of the funds in an efficient manner, and articulated method for evaluation of program impact. Resources were

allocated to the external partners identified by the awarded campuses to support homeless or housing insecure CSU students. Despite multiple challenges related to implementation during the pandemic, in its first full year the program served 1127 students of which 146 students enrolled in the RRH program.

At UAA, grassroots efforts from committed faculty, staff, and students have gained traction and institutional support. The Hunger and Homelessness Support Network (HHSN) is a loose network of university and community partners that meets monthly to share information and resources, assists with raising campus awareness and connecting students to resources, and coordinates events on campus and within the community. The network maintains an active social media presence and has played a key role in urging campus leadership to respond. Similarly, the Daily Den is a student-run kitchen offering UAA students a space to find and build community, connect with campus resources, and build a supportive environment for learning. The Den has become an essential lifeline for many students and is an engine for campus-wide grassroots advocacy efforts. With close collaboration with the student health and counseling center, campus food pantry, and the Union of Students (USUAA), existing systems of care within our institution are becoming more integrated. While still under-resourced, university leadership is paying attention and showing up to the conversation, which has forced broader consideration of what counts as "student success" and for whom.

While student success initiatives have become commonplace on campuses nationally, tensions remain in practice that leave the promise of higher education largely unfulfilled for many. Institutional commitments on paper often stand in stark contrast to the everyday lived realities of our students. Those most impacted are often the most invisible and many students discontinue their schooling out of necessity without outreach or follow up. How our institutions respond to these failures is just as important as how we lift up and celebrate successes. The stories highlighted in this chapter show creativity, humanity, and resilience in the face of adversity and hardship. What they do not show are the silences, erasures, and words not spoken. These stories are more important than ever as we co-design solutions to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations and reimagine the role of higher education in dismantling historically rooted, institutionally replicated inequalities in access, opportunity, and civic potential.

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