



**#RealCollege**

**A National Convening on Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates**

April 28-29, 2016

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 enough a consistent roof over their heads and enough food to eat. In December we published a report, [Hungry to Learn](#), which draws on a survey conducted at ten community colleges around the nation. We revealed the findings in the [New York Times](#) – 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.

The #RealCollege national convening aims to catalyze changes in the field in order to bring help to students more quickly. We seek to bridge the gap between action-oriented practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and philanthropists, bringing them together to find solutions, unearth unasked questions, and set agendas. Participants will 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. They will make connections and develop the relationships needed to effectively collaborate. Program leaders will connect with funders and evaluators, and policymakers will connect with researchers and students. The convening will be a first step in a national movement to ensure that no undergraduate goes hungry or homeless while pursuing higher education.

## Context and Participants

In 2015, as the Wisconsin HOPE Lab released research demonstrating the prevalence of food and housing insecurity on college campuses, the Center for Law and Social Policy published a major [report](#) on the need to bridge higher education and social policy, the Department of Housing and Urban Development hosted a meeting to discuss solutions, and newspapers across the nation carried stories about struggling students and nascent efforts such as food pantries and student-led organizations created to help. Major foundations including Lumina, Gates, and Great Lakes began investing in approaches to complement financial aid, including benefits access and emergency aid, and the nonprofit Single Stop expanded its work to additional community colleges and even four-year institutions. With so many promising starts around the nation, it is time to bring people together and set an agenda for moving forward.

#RealCollege will take 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 will be held at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), a public two-year comprehensive college where 65% of students are eligible for the Pell Grant and the 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 Public Schools.

Participants will include approximately 250 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. We have confirmed participation from key individuals such as Bryce McKibben of the U.S. Senate H.E.L.P Committee and Katherine Sydor of the U.S. Department of Education, and have preliminary confirmation from Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell, and Ajita Talwaker of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin. In addition, here are examples of other organizations that will attend: National Association for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth, Houston Food Bank, Swipe Hunger, College and University Food Bank Alliance, Scholarship America, Center for Law and Social Policy, and the Association of Community College Trustees.

In addition, we will seek to engage the larger public in the conversation. Scott Carlson of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has committed to cover the convening, we will utilize Twitter to share the ongoing discussion, and if resources permit we will webcast key sessions.

## Goals, Agenda, and Expected Outcomes

The overarching goal of the #RealCollege convening is to create 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. Therefore, we have the following goals for the event:

**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. One goal of this convening is to connect providers serving similar populations so that they can coordinate, thereby improving accessibility and knowledge of their services. The convening can also play an important role in connecting similar organizations that can learn from their colleagues and establish networks that persist after the convening.

**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 the 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. The convening will provide numerous 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 many studies of best practices to addressing food insecurity that can be incorporated into work on college campuses. Researcher Daphne Hernandez of the University of Houston will share her work in this area. Similarly, scholars like Rashida Crutchfield of the California State University at Long Beach has expertise studying homeless undergraduates and can advise practitioners on effective ways to approach interactions with this group. 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 can 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.

#### **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. *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 will put researchers in direct contact with service providers and policymakers who can collect and provide this data. Likewise, connecting these groups can initiate 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.

To accomplish these goals, we have set an ambitious agenda (see below) The convening will begin with two panels that describe the nature of the problem. Academic and policy experts will overview the nature, sources, and consequences of hunger and homelessness in the United States, and then they will discuss these challenges among undergraduates. A panel of local students will share their personal struggles with hunger and homelessness while attending college. While these panels are important for establishing the problem, the foci of the convening are responses, both current and future, and how researchers can team with providers and policymakers to help students.

The convening agenda creates multiple opportunities for service providers, policymakers, and researchers to share their perspectives on addressing food and housing insecurity among college students. These opportunities include several sessions focused on policy, including a keynote address by Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary of Education, on the federal college affordability agenda, a panel on the federal role in addressing food and housing insecurity, and a presentation by Senator Tammy Baldwin on what Congress can do to address these issues. The intent of these sessions is 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 features several panels on action that communities and institutions of higher education are taking to address food and housing insecurity. This includes panels on emergency financial aid, strategies for addressing food insecurity, and strategies for addressing housing insecurity. These panels will allow 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 will give people an opportunity to dig deeper into specific interventions, with researchers acting as discussants to talk about potential evaluations. Finally, the convening will include multiple opportunities for networking, including a poster fair, a dinner, lunches, and numerous breaks between sessions, giving attendees a place and time to post ideas for partnerships, request meetings, and build networks.

Preliminary Agenda: April 28

Events are open to public unless marked with \* -- these require registration

- 7:45-8:30 am           **Breakfast available\***
- 8:30-9:00 am           **Welcome and Introductions**  
Greg Lampe, Provost of UW Colleges & Chair of HOPE Lab Board  
Dr. Vicki Martin, President of Milwaukee Area Technical College  
Richard George, CEO of Great Lakes Higher Education
- 9:00-10:00 am         **Hunger and Homelessness in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America**  
Judi Bartfield, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Cykeia Lee, Nat'l Assoc. for Education of Homeless Children & Youth  
David Pate, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Chaired by Anthony Hernandez, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- 10:00-11:00am         **Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates**  
Sara Goldrick-Rab, Founding Director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
with Milwaukee Area Technical College Students
- 11:15 am-12:30pm     **Lunch and Panel on Action: Emergency Financial Aid\***  
Karole Dacholet, Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
Amy Kerwin, Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation  
Representative, Scholarship America  
Chaired by David Monaghan, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- 12:45-2:00pm         **Keynote Address: The Federal College Affordability Agenda**  
Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary of Education  
In conversation with Sara Goldrick-Rab
- 2:00-3:15 pm           **Action: Federal Role in Addressing Food & Housing Insecurity**  
Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, Center for Law and Social Policy  
Bryce McKibben, Senate HELP Committee  
Chase Sackett, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development  
Katherine Sydor, U.S. Department of Education  
Chaired by Jed Richardson, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- 3:30-4:15 pm           **Breakout Session #1\***  
Smaller group discussions on the following populations/issues:  
1. Foster Care Youth (Jacob Gross)  
2. Veterans (TBD)  
3. Mental health and disability (Erin Witterowd)  
4. LGBTQ (TBD)  
5. Undocumented students (TBD)

- 4:30-5:00 pm      **Action: What Congress Can Do**  
 Senator Tammy Baldwin  
 Introduced by Sara Goldrick-Rab
- 5:00-7:00 pm      **Poster Fair and Networking\***  
 All participants invited to bring posters highlighting their work to share

Preliminary Agenda: April 29

- 7:45-8:30 am      **Breakfast available\***
- 8:30-9:30 am      **Setting the Research and Evaluation Agenda**  
 Katharine Broton, University of Wisconsin  
 Rashida Crutchfield, Cal State- Long Beach  
 Daphne Hernandez, University of Houston
- 9:30-11:00 am      **Action: Addressing Undergraduate Food Insecurity**  
 Clare Cady, College and University Food Bank Alliance  
 Brian Greene, Houston Food Bank  
 Jennifer Maguire, Oh SNAP, Cal State-Humboldt  
 Rachel Sumekh, Swipe Hunger  
 Tara Sanders, Oregon State University SNAP  
 Laura Toscano, Campus Kitchens  
 Chaired by Minh Mai, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- 11:15 am-12:30pm      **Lunch and Panel on Action: Addressing Undergraduate Housing Insecurity\***  
 Tacoma Housing Authority  
 Oregon State Emergency Housing Director  
 Louis Tse, UCLA Bruin Shelter  
 Rep from Single Stop USA  
 Chaired by Emily Brunjes, Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- 12:45pm-2:00 pm      **Breakout Session #2\***  
 Smaller group discussions on the following topics:  
 1. Campus food pantries (Clare Cady)  
 2. Benefits Access (CLASP, Single Stop, Oh SNAP, OSU)  
 3. Food Bank Innovations (Brian Greene)  
 4. Housing Authority Innovations (Tacoma)  
 5. Institutional Innovations (Rachel, Oregon, UCLA)
- 2:15-3:15 pm      **We Can and Must Do More**  
 Ajita Talwaker Menon, White House  
*Backup: Wick Sloane, Bunker Hill Community College*  
 Introduced by Sara Goldrick-Rab

3:15-4:30 pm

**Looking to the Future**

Barbara Duffield, Nat'l Assoc. for Educ. of Homeless Children & Youth  
Jee Hang Lee, Association of Community College Trustees  
Christopher Nellum, American Council on Education  
Wick Sloane, Bunker Hill Community College  
Student representative

We expect the convening's outcomes to be consistent with its goals – to create connections among service providers, policymakers, and researchers that can lead to interventions, policies, and research that improves the lives of undergraduates struggling with material hardship.

Anticipated outcomes include:

- **For service providers**

The convening will give service providers the opportunity to connect with and learn from other, similar providers and will bridge the gaps between disparate services working with the same populations of students. We hope that the convening helps service providers develop networks that lead to improved services for students. In addition, service providers will inform both a policy agenda and a research agenda that assists them in their mission.

- **For policymakers**

Policymakers will leave the convening with a better understanding of the many innovative strategies service providers and institutions of higher education are undertaking to help students overcome food and housing insecurity and how policy changes can complement these efforts. Policymakers will inform a research agenda to ensure that research and evaluation answer their most pressing policy questions, and recognize their role in collecting data and making it accessible for research efforts.

- **For researchers**

At the convening, researchers will learn from service providers and policymakers about the most pressing gaps in affordability and food and housing insecurity research. The convening will plant seeds for collaborations that can fill these gaps. Researchers will also have the opportunity to inform current interventions and policies with their findings.

## Cost and Price

The costs associated with the convening have been kept to a minimum as MATC is not charging the Wisconsin HOPE Lab for space, and HOPE Lab staff time is being donated. The main costs are associated with paying for the travel of some speakers, providing food and beverage during the event, facilitating webcasting and recording of the sessions, crafting materials for distribution at the event, and creating follow-up such as a website and reporting.

Given the topic and the limited resources available to service providers and researchers working in this area, we seek to keep the price for participants as low as possible. We plan to charge a \$100 registration fee to ensure that interested parties attend, but wish to have the ability to waive that fee for students and faculty, and others without resources.

Participants will need pay for their own travel and accommodations and we have made arrangements for low-cost lodging. But we would like to sponsor key individuals who could not otherwise afford to attend.

***We are therefore seeking financial support from organizations that would like to co-sponsor the #RealCollege convening. If your organization is interested, we would be happy to discuss co-sponsorship arrangements, with a minimum contribution of \$5,000. Please contact Sara Goldrick-Rab, Founding Director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, at [srab@education.wisc.edu](mailto:srab@education.wisc.edu)***