



# **WORKSHOP SUMMARY: HOUSING & FOOD INSECURITY AMONG UNDERGRADUATES**

Monday June 23, 2014  
9:00 am – 3:00 pm  
Madison College Truax Campus  
Room C1435  
1701 Wright Street  
Madison, WI 53704



## OVERVIEW

On June 23, 2014 the Wisconsin HOPE Lab hosted a workshop for educators, practitioners, community leaders, and students to discuss issues of food and housing insecurity among undergraduates in southeastern Wisconsin. People from across the state came together at Madison College to consider how poverty affects student success in college, share what is currently being done to address students' basic needs, and discuss where new efforts are needed and might be developed.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Founding Director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, launched the conference by welcoming participants and making introductions. Dr. Jack Daniels, President of Madison College, followed with opening remarks describing the relationships between family poverty level, food insecurity and academic achievement that have been exhibited in K-12 education and addressed through the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

In order to promote a practical and policy-focused discussion, workshop participants engaged in small and large group discussions to react and respond to speakers and the issues they raised. A student panel that included three college students shared personal stories about their food and housing insecurity experiences and offered thoughts for what colleges might do to address those needs.

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FOOD/HOUSING INSECURITY

Dr. Goldrick-Rab opened with a presentation that provided an overview of the national context of college affordability and the extent to which unmet financial need is rising among low, moderate, and even middle-income students. She discussed research uncovering the difficulties students are facing in making ends meet in college and evidence indicating that some are forgoing safe and secure housing and even food, in order to try and stay enrolled.

Dr. Sadhana Dharmapuri, M.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Division of Adolescent Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, followed with a talk about the relationship between health and educational outcomes. She explained the detrimental impacts of stress on academic performance, and how food scarcity can affect brain functioning. She then discussed existing research on food insecurity among college students, and noted that survey evidence is scarce and often quite flawed, missing many important populations.

## DOCUMENTARY

Workshop participants then viewed an excerpt from *A Place at the Table*, a documentary about food insecurity in America. The excerpt focused on the limited support for the federal school lunch program and efforts to improve that support. It included testimony from numerous advocates and policymakers about the importance of ensuring that students are healthy so that they can learn.

## STUDENT PANEL

Next, a panel of students shared their personal experiences with food insecurity, answered questions from workshop participants and made recommendations. The students were candid and open with the audience. For example, one student expressed the frustration he felt when seeing the wasted food in a university's dining hall, wondering why it could not be put to better use. Another student spoke about the experience of losing financial aid due to academic probation, the resulting lack of money for food,

and the subsequent choice to attend a class just because the professor provided dinner. Students shared their reluctance to disclose their challenges to academic or financial aid advisors, and suggested that greater attention and investment in available counseling for students would be a positive resource, as would revisiting financial aid policies that remove financial support suddenly during school. Some students also reported being sensitive to cultural stereotypes associated with seeking some types of assistance, such as food stamps, and said that they were reluctant to investigate off-campus food pantries because of stigma and a lack of transportation. They pointed to a need for on-campus food pantries that provide food to students in a more discrete fashion, such as the “Cupboard” located at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

## RESOURCES AND PRACTICES

Clare Cady, Director of the Human Services Resource Center at Oregon State University, then shared resources and practices in place on that campus to address students’ housing and food insecurity. In this keynote address, she described the creation of an on-campus food pantry, a program to offer “meal bucks” (a type of campus food stamps), and the provision of short-term emergency housing. She explained that these support services are funded through student fees, making them possible. In order to reach more students, Ms. Cady forges partnerships with other campus organizations and uses spaces where students are more comfortable. She is pursuing initiatives that will expand emergency housing resources to students with families, and hoping to augment the first-year experience course to include more about “living skills” and “how to get help.” She also co-founded the College and University Food Bank Alliance, a network of campus-based food pantries which now includes 75 members nationwide (<http://www.cufba.org>).

## GROUP DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

Participants discussed what they learned from the day and what they would like to do as next steps. One common theme that emerged centered on the need to change the dialogue about housing and food insecurity, as an important first step to creating an environment in which college practitioners can learn about the issues and engage students in conversation about their needs. It seems that students in distress can be reached and helped, but only if the messaging is compassionate and supportive.

Many people also noted the need to collect more data on the incidence of food and housing insecurity, in order to identify points of intervention and ways to help. Several participants expressed a desire to collect data on their own campuses and to have assistance from the HOPE Lab in doing this.

Other key recommendations for next steps included:

- Develop a list of questions that advisors and staff can use to assess students’ needs and point them toward local resources.
- Identify one or two schools that might want to create a new model based on the Oregon program and study its implementation and outcomes. Alternatively, explore approaches to support such as Single Stop USA.
- Discuss the future of emergency financial aid programs such as Dreamkeepers after philanthropic support ends. How will students be affected?

Sara Goldrick-Rab concluded the workshop by thanking all participants for taking the time to attend, and for devoting serious thought and effort to addressing the challenges facing students throughout Wisconsin.

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Bethany Anderson, Legislative Aide, Office of State Representative Joan Ballweg  
Ann Biese, Community Research Liaison, Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
Alison Bowman, Associate Director, Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
Katie Broton, Doctoral Student, UW-Madison  
Emily Brunjes, Data Manager/Analyst, Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
Kaitlyn Cooper, Academic Advisor, UW-Oshkosh  
Meghan Conlin, Senior Advisor, Madison College  
Jacqueline Dewalt, Director, PEOPLE Program  
Sadhana Dharmapuri, Assistant Professor Pediatrics/Adolescent Medicine, Medical College of Wisconsin  
Joselyn Diaz-Valdes, Senior Financial Aid Advisor, UW-Madison  
Kristina Dux, Manager of Family Development, Community Action Coalition of South Central Wisconsin  
Fei Men, Doctoral Student, UW-Madison  
Cindy Graham, Community Member  
Sara Goldrick-Rab, Professor, UW-Madison and Director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab  
Preetha Kurudiyara, MD, Medical College of Wisconsin  
Jason Lee, Outreach Programs Manager, WISCAPE  
Brittany Lueth, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, UW-Marshfield  
Jose Madera, Assistant Dean, College of Letters and Sciences, UW-Madison  
Minhtuyen Mai, Masters Degree Candidate, UW-Madison  
Viola Miller, Senior Advisor, Turning Point  
Monique Minkens, Life Services Coordinator, Madison Media Institute  
Christine Navia, Senior Academic Planner, University of Wisconsin System  
Tracy Nielsen, CEO, United Way of Kenosha County  
Mariam Sedighi, UW-Madison  
Kara Weber, Financial Aid Advisor, UW-Madison  
Tricia Wessel-Blaski, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin Colleges  
Tom Heffron, Education Director - Disability Services/Financial Aid, Wisconsin Technical College System