

Staffing Student Basic Needs Centers

By: Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab (she/her), The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice



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Students often do not receive the support they need for basic needs. In the 2021 #RealCollege Survey, we found college students' basic needs' insecurities are as big a concern as ever with nearly 3 in 5 students experiencing food or housing insecurity. Despite these persistent needs, students reported that access to college supports was limited (e.g., 34% applied for emergency aid, 32% received such aid, and 18% received supplemental nutrition assistance program [SNAP] funds).

Overall, 52% of students surveyed did not apply for supports, because they did not know they were available. So, what can colleges do to improve

support of student basic needs? Certainly, technology prompts (i.e., text nudging and apps) can help, but ultimately nothing can replace the personal attention and empathy of actual people.

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student services on campus, they are not trained social workers. Check out what Becca, a student affairs professional, tweeted:

Becca (she/her/hers)

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Though social workers are becoming more common on higher education campuses, they often have scarce resources and ballooning caseloads. In addition, they make as much as \$65,000 annually. One-stop center concepts, like Amarillo College's transformation into an Advocacy and Resource Center, are ideal for dealing with student basic needs and include one primary social worker, who supervises Master of Social Work students-in-training. However, not all colleges can make this happen from a budgetary

and hiring standpoint. This is where the community healthcare worker could be the answer.

Not familiar with a community healthcare worker? They are community wellness educators that can bridge the gap between individuals and their healthcare providers, the government, or social services. In addition, they are a critical component of social work practice, as documented by research in empirical studies across various disciplines including public health, nursing, and biomedicine. Community healthcare workers often share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, or life experiences with the community that they serve. Also, they can work in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. Due to the pandemic, some of these individuals are already working to reduce food insecurity.

In terms of job requirements and job outlook, state requirements and pay can vary widely; however, current median pay is approximately \$42,000 and job requirements typically include a high school diploma, human skills (e.g., communication and interpersonal skills), and on-the-job training. Job outlook is supposed to grow 17% more than the average for all occupations from 2020–2030.

As we see it, there are opportunities here to benefit everyone involved: colleges, students, and community healthcare workers.

Colleges:

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, colleges have received Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) with few restrictions on use. This is a potential opportunity to use these funds to hire and train community healthcare workers, particularly in California, who just received

\$30 million to assist 114 community colleges with establishing basic needs centers.

Students:

Students often do not seek help due to a lack of information. It is critical that students are provided with basic needs resources prior to and during college. People that the students can relate to and identify with should provide this information often in addition to providing the information in innovative formats.

Community healthcare workers:

These individuals are disproportionately close to the issue of basic needs insecurity. There is a clear need for more community healthcare workers that can more closely relate to their clients. In addition, working at a college may create a new path in life (e.g., out of poverty, a career path, or path to pursue a college degree [via a tuition benefit offered by the college] should the individual choose to do so).

The need to increase support of student basic needs is clear, and the way to fulfill that need is to create a pathway for employing community healthcare workers in the higher education setting in this role. It is beneficial for all involved — colleges, students, and community healthcare workers. So, what are we waiting for?

Sara Goldrick-Rab is Professor of Sociology & Medicine at Temple University, and President and Founder of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice in Philadelphia. She is also the Chief Strategy Officer for Emergency Aid at Edquity, a student financial success and emergency aid company, and founded Believe in Students, a nonprofit distributing emergency aid.

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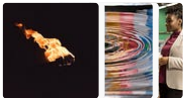
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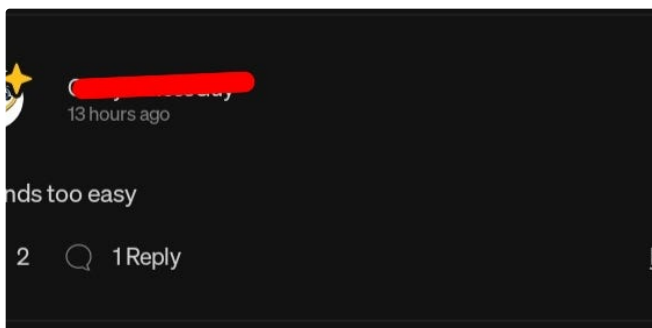
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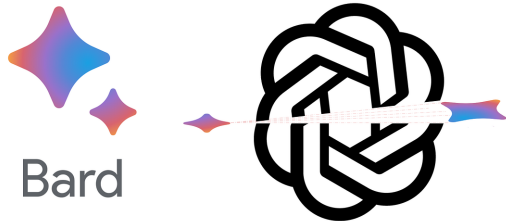
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
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