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Food and housing insecurity and homelessness among students in an open-enrollment university*

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on survey findings assessing the extent of food and housing insecurity and homelessness at an open enrollment institution of higher learning in the U.S. A random sample of 3000 degree-seeking students were e-mailed a link to an electronic survey with assistance and institutional support from the Office of Student Affairs. A total of 193 students completed a survey. Over 44% reported experiencing some type of food insecurity and more than 30% reported being unsure of their ability to pay rent. In the current study, 8.3% of students had experienced homelessness since beginning college. Results showed that food and housing insecurity and homelessness were a reality on the study site campus. As a result, greater awareness has developed surrounding college students' vulnerabilities to food and housing insecurity and homelessness and efforts are underway to identify ways to best support students through degree completion and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Homeless youth; homeless students; homeless college students; homelessness; postsecondary education

Introduction

Today's college students balance multiple roles and responsibilities that increase stress and vulnerabilities, including being less likely to persist through degree completion (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Across college campuses, an estimated 74% of enrolled students currently defined as "nontraditional," characterized by the need to fulfill multiple life roles and are typically characterized by being older; attending school part-time; employed full-time; having dependents other than their spouse; being financially independent of their parents or a single caregiver; and not having a high school diploma (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). Poverty rates of college students who are not living on campus or with their parents are estimated at 52% (Bishaw, 2013). Further, students who are enrolled part-time receive little or no financial aid and may face additional economic-related stressors compared to full-time financially resourced students (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Students who have more nontraditional characteristics and experience poverty have significantly lower degree completion rates (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Hoyt, Howell, Touchet, Young, & Wygant, 2010). As more non-traditional students seek higher education, poverty related impacts such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness must be considered.

Food insecurity

As college tuition continues to rise and access to safe and affordable housing declines, one by-product becoming increasingly recognized across campuses is student *food insecurity*. Food insecurity can be understood as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner" (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017, p. 3). The body of evidence regarding food insecurity and its impacts on college students is significantly more advanced than the research assessing housing insecurity and homelessness among college students (Cady, 2014; Nazmi et al., 2018), which is just developing. Several studies estimating food insecurity among college students cite rates ranging from 27% to 67% (Chaparro, Zaghloul, Holck, & Dobbs, 2009; Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Elensberg, 2015; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Mirabitur, Peterson, Rathz, Matlen, & Kasper, 2016; Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, & Arria, 2018). A recent systematic review conducted by Bruening, Argo, Payne-Sturges, and Laska (2017) found that the average rate of food insecurity among college students to be 35% in the gray literature (41 sources) and estimated at 42% in peer reviewed literature (17 sources).

Food insecurity appears to disproportionately impact college students of color (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2015; Martinez, Brown, & Ritchie, 2016; Vang, Garcia, Vasquez, Harris, & Wood, 2017; Wood, Harris, & Delgado, 2016). Researchers have also found disparate impacts to first generation students, former foster youth, and students with disabilities (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Maroto

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et al., 2015). Further, food insecurity has been shown to seriously impact student success (Henry, 2017; Maroto et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2016; Wood & Harris, 2017). Wood et al. (2016) found that community college students who experienced food insecurity were less likely to engage with faculty, utilize campus resources, or report a feeling of belonging. Further, Henry (2017) found that food insecurity influences student motivation and perceptions of success. Students experiencing food insecurity have been shown to be less likely to be on track to meet educational goals, confident in their academic abilities, perceive college as worthwhile, feel in control of their education, to be focused in school, or be interested in their classes than other students (Dubick et al., 2016). These researchers also found that food insecurity was not only limited to unemployed or unsupported students as 56% of food insecure students were employed, 43% had some sort of meal plan, and 75% had some type of financial aid. Food insecure students have also been found more likely to experience housing insecurity (Payne-Sturges et al., 2018).

Housing insecurity

Housing is a key social determinant of individual's physical and socioeconomic health (Vásquez-Vera et al., 2019). Housing insecurity has been shown to negatively impact mental health, general health, and the ability to maintain healthy behaviors (Tsai, 2015; Vásquez-Vera et al., 2017). Although housing insecurity is not consistently defined, housing is considered insecure when a person has an inability to afford his or her housing or is spending more than 50% of household income on housing, is living in poor quality, unsafe, or overcrowded conditions, is experiencing frequent moves, and/or is doubling up with friends or relatives (Cox, Rodnyansky, Henwood, & Wenzel, 2017; Kushel, Gupta, Gee, & Haas, 2006; Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.).

Recognizing housing insecurity among college students can be difficult as there is typically not a systematic means for identifying students who experience housing insecurity on college campuses. Estimating the need is made further difficult because there typically is not a designated "home" for students to bring concerns specific to poverty and housing-related issues to, like other and specific college programs providing health, mental health, and educational supports (Paden, 2012). Recent research estimates housing insecurity among community college students to be between 31% and 52% (Cruchfield et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017; Tsui et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2016). Further, housing insecurity has been more likely in traditionally marginalized students. For example, in Goldrick-Rab and colleague's 2015 survey of 4312 community college students, 52% of the responding African American students experienced housing insecurity compared to 35% of the White students. Similarly, first generation students are also over represented in housing insecurity and homelessness on studied campuses. An estimated 44% of first generation students compared to 37% of students who had at least one parent who attended college reported housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). Food insecurity and housing insecurity appear to be closely linked among college students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). For example, Dubick et al. (2016) found that 64% of food insecure students also reported some form of housing insecurity.

Homelessness

In addition to aforementioned reasons making it difficult to fully grasp the extent of student food insecurity and housing insecurity, embarrassment and stigma related to homelessness may also discourage students from seeking help (Frick, 2015). However, homelessness impacts college students' physical, mental, and academic well-being (The National Center for Homeless Education, 2015). Students may feel shame related to their situation and experience isolation from peers or other sources of support (Cruchfield, 2016; Hallett & Freas, 2018). Further, students may be forced to prioritize meeting their basic needs, such as food and housing, over academics, impacting student persistence and academic success (Hallett & Freas, 2018).

Although several federal laws have been enacted that recognize homelessness and its negative potential impacts on post-secondary students, they remain limited. For example, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 established that for the purposes of federal financial aid, unaccompanied homeless youth could qualify as financially independent from their parents. Furthermore, despite the fact that Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data is limited (e.g. not all students apply for FAFSA, some students do not view themselves as homeless, many non-traditional students are part time and are not eligible) and has never been intended to estimate homelessness, there has been a slight increase in students applying for aid as homeless for the last four year. For academic year 2016–2017, a total of 32,739 students out of 18,741,055 applicants identified themselves as having experienced homelessness, representing less than 1% of all applying students (Munro, 2011; National Center for Homeless Education, 2018).

Homelessness in community college and four-year universities has reportedly ranged from 5% to 14%, with higher rates found among community campus students (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017). Current studies also suggest that students who

experience homelessness are more likely to be students of color (Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017). For example, researchers recently found that 18% of African American students had been homeless, compared to 11% of white students (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015).

Hallett and Freas (2018) conducted qualitative interviews of northern California community college students who experienced homelessness finding that they experienced high levels of instability and daily trauma and crises related to homelessness. They reported having challenges to remain enrolled in school, when education was often the most stable aspect of the participant's lives. More importantly, students held a strong belief in education as a stabilizing factor in their lives, a safe space, and the pathway to a more stable future.

Purpose

The literature is just beginning to explore the impacts that food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness has had on college students. Overall, the body of literature has utilized large samples but has suffered somewhat from low return rates and varying definitions and measures for assessing housing insecurity and homelessness among community college and four year university students. Regardless of methodological limitations, it is clear that it is a problem that exists on many campuses and impacts students' education and well-being. However, to date no known study has specifically assessed food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness at an open enrollment unified community college and university institution.

Thus, the purpose of the current research was to implement an exploratory formative study to identify the prevalence of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness in an open-enrollment university. Research questions included the following:

(1) What is the prevalence of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness?
(2) Who is impacted by food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness?

For the current study, we used McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definitions of homelessness, as it captures the kinds of experiences college students are more likely to encounter (e.g. "couch surfing"). Specifically, people experiencing homelessness included those who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (National Center for Homeless Education, 2018, p. 1). This is further described as those who share the housing of other persons "due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason," (p. 1) and includes those living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack or alternative adequate accommodations; those living in emergency or transitional shelter; those whose primary residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; and those living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

Study site

The study site was the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA), an open enrollment state university serving approximately 15,000 students that grants vocational certificates through doctoral degrees. Open enrollment or open admission policies first developed across the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as part of larger efforts to reduce barriers and increase access to higher education for groups of traditionally marginalized students (Lavin & Crook, 1990). Further, in 1987 the Anchorage Community College and UAA merged into one unified post secondary institution. UAA's main campus is located in Anchorage, Alaska's largest city at approximately 300,000 people, but also includes 5 "satellite" community campuses in the region. The current study includes only results from the main campus. According to UAA (2017), most of its students have remained urban commuters, with less than 10% of the total student body living on campus. Further, the average student age is 28.5 years and 91% are from Alaska. Almost 58% of students are female, and 59% of students are enrolled part-time. Over the past 10 years the number of students of color have increased by 60%, with current rates at just over 42%.

Methods

The current study utilized a 34-item electronic survey developed with Qualtrics software, based on work completed by Cruchfield's CSU work (Crutchfield, 2016) and Wisconsin Hope Lab's surveys (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; 2017). The survey included 11 demographic and household characteristic questions, 11 food security questions, 5 housing security and homelessness questions, and 6 questions about the use of university and community supports. Questions included categorical, yes/no, and Likert-scaled responses. Also included in the survey was one open-ended question asking participants to offer suggestions on ways to better support students experiencing food or housing insecurity on their campus. Completed survey data were collected directly into Qualtrics and exported to SPSS for storage and analysis.

Sample

A statistical *a priori* power analysis was conducted using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang,

2009) to identify a representative sample size estimation at the 95% confidence interval and 0.05 margin of error resulting in a needed sample size of 377 to estimate a total enrolled population of 17,962 students. To obtain the study sample, the Office of Student Affairs sent introductory *e*-mails to 3000 randomly selected currently enrolled degree-seeking students that included a study description, informed consent, and a link to the electronic survey. A second email was sent approximately one month later. The University of Alaska Anchorage's Institutional Review Board approved all study protocols.

Data analysis

All incomplete surveys were removed from the database and data were checked for errors prior to analysis. A total of 205 surveys were initiated. Data were first checked for errors and incomplete surveys were removed from the database. First, univariate frequency calculations were conducted of all variables. Chi Square and Independent Samples *t*-tests were utilized to identify and assess potential group differences related to food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. Effect sizes of statistically significant differences were calculated using Eta (nominal variables) and Kendall's Tau (ordinal variables). Binary logistic regression analysis was utilized to assess potential predictors of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness.

Results

Sample characteristics

As shown in Table 1, a total of 193 students returned complete surveys, representing a final 6.4% response rate. Study participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 ($M = 27.80$, $SD = 11.25$). A total of 142 (74%) were female (20% male and 6% "other"), 70 (40%) identified as a person of color, either as a single race/ethnicity or multi-race/ethnicity, and the majority were single (55.4%). Table 1 also presents factors shown to increase risk of food and housing insecurity and homelessness among college students (Crutchfield et al., 2015; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017) such as participants' veteran status (6.2%), first generation college student (24.4%), and English as a second language (5.2%). Finally, Table 1 shows student standing and related characteristics including the number of students enrolled full-time (58%) and that over one-half (51.3%) were seniors or graduate students. A total of 64.8% of students reported receiving some form of financial aid, however only 24.9% reported that it covered educational costs and 6.7% reported that it covered living expenses. Over 84% of responding students reported that they had to assume credit card debt in order to meet their educational and/or living expenses.

Table 1. Student sample characteristics ($N = 193$).

Characteristic	*M*	*SD*
Age	27.80	11.25
	f	%
Gender		
Male	39	20.2%
Female	142	73.6%
Other	10	5.2%
PNA	2	1.0%
Student of Color	77	39.9%
Relationship Status		
Single	107	55.7%
Living w/a Partner	22	11.5%
Married	49	25.5%
Divorced	14	8.8%
Enrollment Status		
Part Time	79	41.1%
Full Time	58	58.3%
Class Standing		
Freshman	25	12.6%
Sophomore	30	15.7%
Junior	37	19.4%
Senior	77	40.3%
Graduate	22	11.5%
Receives Financial Aid (Any) ($N = 148$)	125	84.5%
Financial Aid Covers Education Costs ($N = 148$)	48	32.4%
Financial Aid Covers Living Costs ($N = 147$)	13	8.8%
Has Used Credit Card to Cover Education or Living Costs ($N = 151$)	54	28%
Formerly in Foster Care	19	9.8%
Veteran	12	6.2%
Active Duty	6	3.1%
Military Family Member	20	10.4%
Experience a Disability	19	9.9%
First Generation Student	47	24.4%
Non-U.S. Citizen	6	3.1%
English is Second Language	10	5.2%

Food insecurity

Table 2 presents the food insecurity described by participants. A total of 80 (41.4%) students reported experiencing some type of food insecurity. During the prior 30 days, students had worried about running out of food (47%), were forced to eat unbalanced meals (47%), ate less than they should (28.6%), skipped meals (27%), skipped eating for an entire day (8.4%), or stole food (1%) due to a lack of funds. As displayed in Table 3, results of chi square and independent t-test calculations showed that students who were in the freshman, sophomore, and junior class were significantly more likely to experience food insecurity than seniors. Further, students who were single, had lower reported incomes, who took on credit card debt, or experienced housing insecurity or homelessness were also significantly more likely to experience food insecurity. Other characteristic differences were not statistically significant. A logistic

Table 2. Student food insecurity during prior 30 days ($N = 193$).

Characteristic	*f*	%
Food Insecure (Any)	86	44.6%
Could Not Afford Balanced Meals	80	43.7%
Skipped Meals Due to Lack of Funds	80	43.7%
Worried About Running Out of Food	76	42.9%
Cut Size of Meals Due to Lack of Funds	49	24.7%
Hungry, Did not Eat Due to Lack of Funds	39	21.8%
Skipped Eating for Day Due to Lack of Funds	15	8.4%
Forced to Steal Food Due to Lack of Funds	2	1.2%

Table 3. Student characteristics related to reporting experiencing food insecurity.

Characteristic	Food insecure Yes *f* (%)	No *f* (%)	X^2	*df*	*p*	*phi or Kendall's tau*
Class Standing (Fresh/ Soph/Jr.)	86	94	13.26	5	.021	.271
Marital Status (Single)	86	95	16.78	3	.001	.305
Income (Lower)	85	95	47.81	8	<.001	.404
Assumed Credit Card Debt	51	96	9.17	1	.002	.248
Housing Insecure	81	71	8.92	1	.003	−.105
History of Homelessness	15	143	4.67	1	.031	.172

regression calculation showed that household income ($\beta = -.368$, $p \leq .001$), assuming credit card debt to cover educational or living expenses ($\beta = -.892$, $p = .047$) and experiencing housing insecurity ($\beta = -.922$, $p = .039$) emerged as significant predictors ($X^2(12) = 52.23$, $p < .001$). Class standing ($\beta = .436$, ns), marital status ($\beta = .813$, ns), and experiencing homelessness ($\beta = -.562$, ns), were not found to be significant predictors of food insecurity. The overall model fit was $R^2 = 0.42$ and correctly classified 75% of the cases.

Housing insecurity

Over 30% of responding students reported that they were not confident about their ability to pay rent on time and almost 18% were living in housing circumstances that were only temporary. Amplifying the stress and worry associated with making rent, 26% of respondents were dissatisfied with their current housing and 17% of respondents indicated their housing felt unstable. Nearly 46% felt their housing or their ability to pay for housing negatively impacted their education. As displayed in Table 4, students who were single, had lower incomes, or were international students were more likely to have experienced housing insecurity than other students. Other student characteristics were not significantly different between housing insecure students and their housing secure counterparts. Results from a logistic regression analysis indicated that when predicting housing insecurity none of the significant factors were predictive of housing insecurity ($X^2(8) = 2.25$, $p = .972$). Marital status ($\beta = 1.23$, ns), household income ($\beta = 1.89$, *ns*), living in temporary housing ($\beta = .99$, ns), having been homeless ($\beta = .78$, ns), food insecure ($\beta = -.06$, ns), and sharing meals ($\beta = .19$, ns), were not significant predictors. The overall model fit was $R^2 = 0.53$ and accurately predicted 97% of the cases.

Homelessness

A total of 16 (8.3%) of the responding students reported having experienced homelessness (i.e. lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence) at some point since starting college. Of those 16 students, 4 were associates degree-seeking, 8 were baccalaureate degree-seeking, 3 were graduate students, and 1 was non-degree seeking. Students of color were significantly more likely to have had an experience with homelessness, as were single or those living with a partner, formerly foster youth, students experiencing disabilities, and students for whom English is a second language (see Table 4). Table 5 displays the types of places students stayed when experiencing homelessness. The logistic regression model was statistically significant ($\chi^2(14) = 3.25$, $p = .007$) and showed that experiencing a disability ($\beta = 2.43$, $p = .009$) and being an out of state student ($\beta = 2.16$, $p = .047$) were predictive of experiencing homelessness. No other variables were significant in this model. Finally, in examining homelessness, the overall model fit was $R^2 = 0.42$ and accurately predicted 93.1% of the cases.

Discussion/implications

This was the first known study examining food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness in an open-enrollment unified university. Results of this study suggest that nearly 45% of responding students had experienced food insecurity, up to 30% had some type of housing insecurity, and nearly 10% experienced

Table 4. Student characteristics related to reporting housing insecurity and/or homelessness.

	Housing Insecure						Homeless					
Characteristic	Yes	No	X^2	*df*	*p*	*phi or Kendall's tau*	Yes	No	X^2	*df*	*p*	*phi or Kendall's tau*
Marital Status (Single)	83	71	16.47	3	.001	.327	16	144	15.86	3	.001	.315
Income (Lower)	83	71	26.01	8	.001	.110	–	–	–	–	–	–
Person of Color	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	145	4.07	1	.044	.159
International Student	6	149	5.41	1	.020	.187	–	–	–	–	–	–
Has a Disability	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	144	14.94	1	<.001	.306
Former Foster Youth	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	145	7.36	1	.007	.214
Out of State Student	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	145	7.93	1	.005	.222
ESL	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	145	4.79	1	.029	.173
Food Insecure	71	81	8.92	1	.003	.242	15	143	4.67	1	.031	.172
Share Meals	87	68	11.81	1	.001	−.276	–	–	–	–	–	–
Has Been Evicted	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	143	10.82	1	.001	.261
In Temporary Housing	81	70	54.18	6	<.001	−.529	14	137	20.97	1	.002	.373
Homeless	74	84	4.67	1	.031	.172	–	–	–	–	–	–

Table 5. Student homelessness prior 12 months.

Characteristic	*f*	%
Homeless, Ever ($n = 161$)	16	9.9%
Temporary Housing (Couch Surfing)	8	4.1%
Motel/Hotel w/out a Home to Return to	4	2.1%
Emergency Shelter	3	1.5%
Transitional Housing	4	2.1%
Evicted from Housing Past Six Months	3	1.6%
Slept in Area not Meant for Human Habitation	5	2.5%
Slept Outdoor Location	6	3.1%

homelessness. The rates of food insecurity in the current study (41.4%) fell within previously reported rates of 27% to 67% (Chaparro et al., 2009; Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017; Mirabitur et al., 2016; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018). However, housing insecurity was reported at a slightly lower rate than has been reported in the literature, 30% versus between 31% and 52% (Cruchfield et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017; Tsui et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2016). Finally, reported rates of homelessness in this study (8.3%) were similar to rates reported in studies of community college and university students that have ranged from 5% to 14%, with higher rates found among community campus students (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017). Also similar to prior research was the significant relationship between being a student of color and having greater likelihood of experiencing homelessness (Dubick et al., 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015, 2017). While it is well established that food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness have negative impacts on health and well-being, most notable in this study was the confirmation that students believed these poverty-related insecurities negatively impacted their ability to maintain satisfactory academic progress. Further, it appeared that food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness clustered together for many students, as those experiencing housing insecurity were also more likely to be experiencing food insecurity, a finding that suggests these issues must be considered and addressed simultaneously.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting the results of the current study. The random sample of 3000 non-degree seeking students was non-representative and did not achieve power, leaving the possibility of undetected relationships and predicators of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness. With 193 total respondents, findings should be validated through future research.

It is possible that students currently experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness did not complete the survey out of embarrassment, fear of being identified or stigmatized, or perhaps were simply too busy and occupied with meeting everyday needs while balancing life as a student to respond to the survey, resulting in an underrepresentation.

It is also possible that students define homelessness in different ways and may not, for example, consider themselves to be homeless if staying on a couch with friends to save money for tuition, or skipping meals to save time and money in between classes. However, it is also just as likely that only students with personal experience or specific interest in the topic area responded, resulting in an inflated prevalence. Finally, it is conceivable that the timing of the survey, which was launched during the middle of spring semester, was such that students were too busy preparing for midterms, traveling for spring break, being inundated with other email from university listservs, or left the institution earlier due to financial or personal challenges and add/drop deadlines. More research is needed to better understand the ways in which students, whether they have experienced challenges with food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness think experience these issues on our campus and in our communities.

Implications

In spite of study limitations, this research adds to a developing body of literature. As a direct result of this pilot work, the study university has launched a student housing and hunger workgroup, and efforts are underway to institutionalize the survey and distribute it more widely to include all students, both degree and non-degree-seeking, as well as satellite campuses. University programs statewide need to consider ways to better identify struggling students and link them with university and/or community resources early on. Already, results have created opportunities to engage in campus-wide discussion with students, faculty, staff, and administration about how to better serve students who might be struggling to succeed because of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. Partnerships with student organizations, faculty-led outreach initiatives, and administrative efforts in support of student retention and degree completion have created opportunities to mobilize existing resources and address gaps and shortcomings.

Possible next steps include the creation of a student housing and nutrition specialist, whose job would be to serve as a central point of contact for students to get connected to resources on campus. This may include helping students access an expanded food pantry, student health and counseling services, academic advising, career counseling, or possibly emergency and/or temporary housing services.

It is important for universities to prioritize student needs and recognize the challenges student face in their everyday lives. We must continue to

work together to find institutional responses through funding priorities and policy change to better support student success by assisting students to inform faculty and staff developing well-intended initiatives. Finally, further research is needed and should document poverty-related insecurity prevalence in fully representative student samples as well as focus on more fully understand the student experience and needs.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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Dr. Travis Hedwig is an applied cultural/medical anthropologist and assistant professor of Health Sciences at the University of Alaska Anchorage. His research examines social constructions and determinants of health inequality in the areas of impairment/disability, housing and homelessness, mental and behavioral health, and community accessibility. He is passionate about teaching and learning and enjoys the challenge of translating research into practice and action in collaboration with communities.

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