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PSU Student Housing Insecurity Interim Report

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*HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH
& ACTION COLLABORATIVE*

*PSU STUDENT
HOUSING INSECURITY
INTERIM REPORT
July 2023*



RESEARCH TEAM and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

This study on student housing insecurity and homelessness was funded as part of a HUD FY2023 Community Project Funding Opportunity awarded to Portland State University. Phase 1 of the study, which led to this report by PSU's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC), includes a literature review; a summary of PSU student survey results; a description of PSU programs based on interviews with staff and administrators; an analysis of programs at other institutions; and a set of recommendations for better addressing student housing needs. Phase 2 of the study will include the results of a comprehensive student survey on housing insecurity and homelessness to be conducted this fall, as well as a pair of reports by outside consultants on options for creating additional student housing and addressing policy barriers to effectively meeting student housing needs.

Student Housing Insecurity

PSU conducted in-depth surveys of student basic needs, including housing insecurity and homelessness, in 2019 and 2020, and has included a question on housing insecurity in the Student Experience Survey every year since 2020. The 2019 and 2020 survey results showed that up to 16% of PSU students had recently experienced homelessness, while housing insecurity has consistently been as high as 47% over the past five years, with a temporary decline in 2021 that may have been a result of COVID pandemic relief. Research studies have shown that housing insecurity and homelessness have negative impacts on academic performance, persistence, and graduation rates, while the provision of free housing has been demonstrated to positively impact persistence and graduation.

Student Barriers

Homelessness and housing insecurity disproportionately affect PSU students who have experienced other challenges in their lives, particularly systemic racism and discrimination. This includes students of color (especially Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Native American, and Pacific Islander students), LGBTQ students, neurodiverse students, students with disabilities, students formerly in foster care, parenting students, veterans, international students, undocumented students, transfer students, first-generation students, and Pell Grant recipients. In short, a significant proportion of all PSU students fall within groups that are more likely to experience barriers to housing insecurity, but their diverse experiences and identities require a spectrum of equity-centered approaches to address their specific needs.

Current Programs

PSU has implemented a range of successful, evidence-driven programs to help address student housing insecurity and homelessness: vouchers for temporary placement in University Place Hotel and local motels; a student-only shelter, The Landing, in partnership with a local church; a free housing pilot for Summer Bridge Program students; student emergency funds and assistance for SNAP-enrolled students

that can be used for housing; and a partnership with College Housing NW to provide deeply affordable student housing. Unfortunately, a lack of funding has led to the closure of The Landing and an uncertain future for many of the other programs.

Recommendations

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides a guidebook for addressing student housing insecurity in higher education, which should be used in conjunction with the Education Northwest Basic Needs Services Implementation Rubric. The recommendations listed below, based on PSU interviews, conversations with national experts, and published literature, would help PSU substantially address current gaps in addressing student needs and implementing best practices and federal guidance. These items will be revised and updated based on the results of the student survey in fall.

- **Center Equity in All Programs:** given disparate rates of housing insecurity and homelessness, an equity lens that centers race while incorporating other factors of identity and experience is essential. Students, student resource centers, and the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion should be engaged in program design, implementation, and evaluation. It is critical to identify and understand different types of support and engagement needed by different students.
- **Provide Free and Subsidized Housing:** although this will be fully addressed in the other reports for this project, student housing insecurity cannot be fully addressed without both free and subsidized housing. PSU does not currently offer free and subsidized student housing at the level recommended in research literature and implemented by many other institutions.
- **Expand Funding for Current Programs:** funding should be sufficient not only to sustain programs, but to fully address the direct costs of student needs and to ensure appropriate staffing levels and staff expertise.
- **Unify Emergency Fund Applications:** PSU offers a wide set of emergency funds, but differences in eligibility and application requirements create unnecessary barriers and confusion for students. Fund managers should develop a unified application that can route student requests based on eligibility.
- **Enhance Program Coordination:** the numerous programs, centers, and offices that help to address student housing needs should hold regular meetings to facilitate coordination, work to ensure that all academic advisors are aware of basic needs services, and proactively identify and reach out to students who may be in need.
- **Use Pell Grant Eligibility as a Proxy for Need:** Pell Grant eligibility can be used as a uniform method to identify and proactively engage with students who may be experiencing or at higher risk of housing insecurity.
- **Ensure Comprehensive Outreach:** basic needs services and resources should be communicated to students, faculty, and staff through a comprehensive campaign that includes on-campus events, digital communication, syllabus statements, and partnerships with student government and organizations.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In 2023, PSU received a \$750,000 award through the HUD FY2023 Community Project Funding Opportunity to address student homelessness and housing insecurity. Most of the award was dedicated to housing assistance for students at risk of or experiencing homelessness, with the remainder set aside for three studies:

1. **Barriers to PSU Student Housing Security**, managed by HRAC, to analyze drivers of student housing instability, conduct a literature review to identify best practices and potential programs, implement a student survey of homelessness and housing insecurity, and provide recommendations for new or scaled programs to address identified needs.
2. **Market Research, Development Opportunity Analysis, and Feasibility Analysis**, by an outside consultant hired through an RFQ process, to provide a housing market analysis, identify new or acquired building opportunities to house low-income students, and develop a financial feasibility report.
3. **Policy Barriers and Opportunities Analysis**, by a separate consultant hired through the RFQ process, to study local, state, and federal policy barriers for student housing security and to recommend potential policy changes.

This report comprises the first part of the barriers to student housing security project, focused on literature and programming, while the second part, released in early 2024, will report on a fall survey of students. This report was developed through a literature review of national studies, reports, news articles, and program websites; a review of the past five years of PSU reports and data on student homelessness and housing insecurity; interviews with six PSU staff and administrators managing programs related to student housing insecurity; unpublished research and data from internal PSU sources; and personal communications and conversations with national experts and administrators, staff, and faculty at peer institutions and research centers. Published sources are cited, while interviews, personal conversations and communications, and original research and calculations are not.

Due to the numerous offices, centers, and departments across campus that touch on student housing insecurity in some way, not everyone who is involved in such efforts was interviewed. Although the interviews showed a similar range of concerns and suggestions, some viewpoints may not be included. In addition, there was no direct student involvement in this part of the project; instead, student voices on housing insecurity and homelessness will be incorporated in the follow-up report.

STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY

NATIONAL RESEARCH

A national survey of 195,000 students at 202 two-year and four-year institutions found that 14% of respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year and 48% experienced housing insecurity (The Hope Center, 2021). In a 2019 survey at 14 out of Oregon's 17 community colleges, 20% of students were found to have experienced homelessness in the previous year (The Hope Center, 2020). Student housing insecurity and homelessness are driven by a combination of high costs of attendance, a lack of sufficiently affordable housing on or off-campus, and inadequate pay or financial aid.

Homelessness and housing insecurity, which are increasingly common among PSU students and other college and university students nationwide, has been shown to have a significant impact on academic performance, retention, and completion rates. A study conducted at the University of Maryland, an urban-serving public university with a broadly similar student composition to PSU, found that students "who had been homeless were 13 times more likely to have failed courses and were 11 times more likely to have withdrawn or failed to register for more courses" (Silva et al., 2017). National surveys have consistently shown lower grades among students at community colleges and universities who have experienced homelessness (The Hope Center, 2021). Conversely, a study of students who received free housing in Florida—22% of whom were experiencing homelessness—showed positive impacts on retention and graduation when compared to a randomized control group of their peers (Perez-Felkner et al., 2022).

A number of coordinated national efforts exist to document and address housing insecurity in higher education. HRAC led a two-year conversation series on homelessness and housing insecurity for members of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) in 2021 and 2022, held a virtual summit on the topic in partnership with CUMU in 2021, and collaborated on a [website listing key resources and research](#). HRAC's Assistant Director, Jacen Greene, is also presenting on the topic this fall at the CUMU national conference in Washington, D.C. Jacen is currently co-leading a national effort at the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, with support from CUMU and Campus Compact, to create a comprehensive set of standards for basic needs centers and programs at higher education institutes. These standards are expected to be completed by the end of 2023. PSU also participated in the Hope Center's Institutional Capacity-Building Cohort to Address Basic Needs Insecurity from 2021-2022 alongside 26 other higher education institutions.

PSU RESEARCH

2019 HRAC BASIC NEEDS SURVEY

In the fall quarter of 2019, HRAC emailed a basic needs survey to all students then enrolled at PSU. The following excerpt from the report (Townley et al., 2020) details responses related to housing insecurity and barriers:

Our survey was primarily based on procedures and instruments recommended or developed by (1) Crutchfield and Maguire (2017) in their work with the California State University System; and (2) Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2018) in their national research with the Hope Center at Temple University. We also consulted with other colleges and universities conducting similar research when developing our survey and methodology. In addition to asking about student and employee experiences with housing insecurity, homelessness, and food insecurity, we also asked questions about their employment and financial situation, types of assistance received (e.g., SNAP benefits, Medicaid, food pantry use), health (e.g., sleep and stress), and social connectedness. After creating the survey, we pilot tested it among both students and employees and made modifications based on their suggestions. Because the focus of our report was on housing insecurity and homelessness, participants had to complete at least the housing and homelessness questions of the survey to be included in the study. A total of 3,511 students (15% of the 23,262 students invited to take the survey) completed at least the housing and homelessness questions, while 3,272 (14%) completed the entire survey.

In our student sample, 44.6% of respondents (n = 1,567) reported experiencing at least one form of housing insecurity in the past 12 months. Moving in with other people because of financial problems was the most commonly reported form of housing insecurity. We also asked about a range of other experiences pertaining to housing vulnerability. Approximately 16% of students reported living in a home that is owned by a local housing authority or public agency, and 2.4% reported receiving a public housing voucher (e.g., Section 8) to subsidize the cost of their housing. When asked how safe they feel where they currently live, 27.1% of students indicated feeling only somewhat safe, 5.2% indicated feeling a little bit safe, and 1.7% indicated feeling not at all safe. Finally, 1.5% of students (n = 54) indicated that they slept somewhere on the PSU campus in the past year because they had nowhere else to go.

Homelessness refers to not having a fixed, regular, or adequate place to live. To assess homelessness among PSU students, we first asked about lifetime experiences with homelessness. Nineteen percent of students (n = 667) reported that they had experienced homelessness at some point in their life, with 45.9% of those (n = 306) indicating that they experienced homelessness before age 18. Following the approach used by the Hope Center and other campus basic needs surveys, we then asked students to self-identify as experiencing homelessness in the past 30 days and past 12 months. In total, 1.8% of students (n = 62) self-identified as homeless in the past 30 days

and 4.4% (n = 156) self-identified as homeless in the past 12 months. However, when we asked students about the places they have stayed in the past 30 days and past 12 months using a measure of homelessness based on definitions from both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017), the numbers increased dramatically. **Specifically, 7.4% of students in our sample (n = 259) indicated experiencing some form of homelessness in the past 30 days, while 16.1% of students (n = 567) experienced some form of homelessness in the past 12 months (see Figure 2).**

The most commonly experienced form of homelessness was temporarily staying with a relative or friend, which is also referred to as doubled-up or “couch surfing.” It is important to use this expanded, more inclusive definition of homelessness because many students may not consider themselves homeless if they are not sleeping outside or in a shelter. A more restrictive definition of homelessness may discourage students living in doubled-up situations from seeking out resources and receiving the support they need to become more stably housed.

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students experienced high rates of basic needs insecurity. In particular, Native American students were almost twice as likely as White students to experience homelessness. In addition to BIPOC students and employees, LGBTQ+ students [...] also reported high rates of housing insecurity [and] homelessness, [...] as did students with disabilities and medical conditions. Transfer students, first generation students, current or former foster youth, veterans, and DACA students all reported higher levels of housing insecurity [and] homelessness [...] compared to students without such experiences. **These disparities were particularly striking among current and former foster youth, whose rates of housing insecurity and homelessness were double those of other students.**

The final question of the survey provided space for students to write anything else they wanted to share with us about their housing and food needs, to which over 600 students submitted responses. Almost half of these responses related to their financial concerns. Many of the students discussed having to make difficult choices about which of their basic needs to prioritize given their very limited budgets. **Students framed many of their financial challenges around the cost of attending PSU and the cost of living in Portland.**

Over 200 students described how costs related to the tuition and fees associated with attending PSU make it so that they are often unable to afford food or housing, even while working extra jobs as a full-time student. Further, some students described how the payment plan options for tuition and other PSU policies contribute to their financial difficulties. Finally, some students expressed frustration that required fees that go toward resources they do not use (such as health insurance or student recreation center fees) could be better spent on their basic needs.

Around 200 students also discussed the high cost of housing in Portland and how their income is not sufficient to address all of their financial needs. Students described how on-campus housing is neither affordable nor adequate to meet their needs. Considering the high cost of living in Portland, many

students either must choose between housing and other basic needs, or they choose housing options that are more affordable but take a toll on students' lives in other ways, such as their safety. Alternatively, some students opted to live farther from campus and commute to PSU, which can create challenges related to the high costs of commuting and/or parking on campus.

2020 HOPE CENTER BASIC NEEDS SURVEY

In the fall quarter of 2020, PSU worked with the Hope Center at Temple University to administer the standard version of their national survey to PSU students. The survey found similar disparities to the HRAC survey based on student life experiences and identities. The following excerpt from the full report (The Hope Center, 2021) highlights items related to housing insecurity and homelessness:

Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. The 2020 #RealCollege Survey measured housing insecurity using a nine-item set of questions developed by our team at the Hope Center. It looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent and the need to move frequently in the previous year. How prevalent is housing insecurity at Portland State University? **47% of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity.**

In alignment with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance-Act, students are considered homeless if they are identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation). We use this inclusive definition of homelessness because students who are experiencing homelessness and signs of homelessness face comparable challenges.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 15% of survey respondents at Portland State University reported experiencing homelessness or the conditions of homelessness.

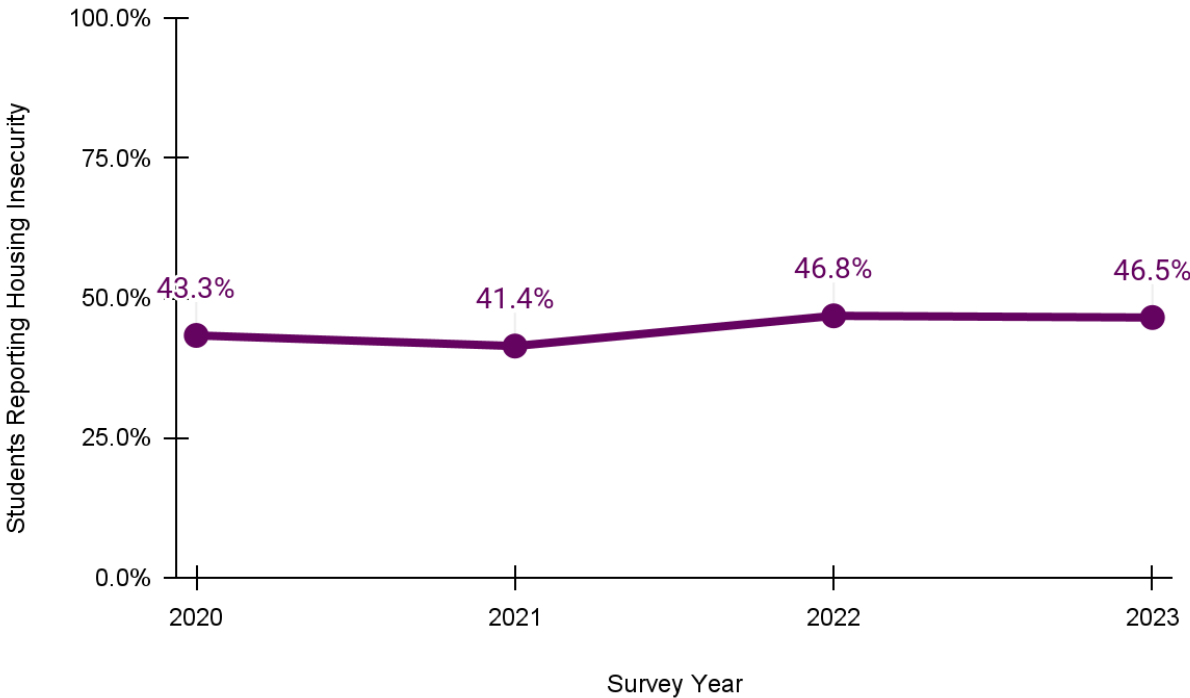
Among students experiencing basic needs insecurity at Portland State University, utilization of campus supports was generally uncommon. Only 16% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity used emergency financial aid and 22% received help in obtaining SNAP benefits. For students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Many students at Portland State University used funds to stay enrolled, afford educational materials, and reduce stress. Among those students who did not seek out campus supports, 49% did not know how to apply and 77% thought other students needed the resources more.

2020-2023 STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Beginning in 2020, the student experience survey has asked “In the past 12 months, have you worried about whether you would be able to pay your rent or mortgage?” In 2023, 46.5% of students answered “yes.” This is nearly identical to the 2022 response of 46.8% of students experiencing housing insecurity, and an increase from the 2021 rate of 41.4% and the 2020 rate of 43.3%. The 2023 survey included 2,380 responses out of 12,141 degree-seeking students for a 20% response rate with a 2% margin of error.

The survey has consistently found similar disparities as the HRAC and Hope Center surveys: “Hispanic/Latino students, Native American students, Pacific Islander students, and International students reported higher rates of housing insecurity” (Garrity and Watkins, 2022). First-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, LGBTQ students, parenting students, disabled students, and neurodivergent students also reported higher rates of housing insecurity than their peers.

CHART 1: STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY FROM STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY



PSU STUDENT NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

2022 STUDENT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY SURVEY

In the winter term of 2022, PSU, Mt. Hood Community College, Clackamas Community College, and Portland Community College collaborated on a student housing survey in partnership with College Housing NW. 1,371 respondents indicated they were currently attending PSU, although some were dual-enrolled at one of the community colleges (Sturley et al., 2022). The following responses and analysis are only from those students who indicated PSU enrollment.

Multiple students shared that they were experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey, including the responses below:

“Both my husband and I are students at PSU, and we are homeless and both are currently staying in a transitional homeless shelter here in Portland.”

“I live in a homeless shelter because rent is too high.”

Rent prices, as established in earlier PSU surveys and national research, are a major driver of student housing insecurity and homelessness. The 2023 Fair Market Rental price for a one-bedroom apartment in Multnomah County, as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,¹ is \$1,610 (huduser.gov, 2023). **Only 3% of PSU student respondents to the survey indicated they were able to afford a rental at or above the fair market rate.**

About 47% of PSU respondents indicated they preferred a single-bedroom unit, 19% preferred a studio, and the remaining 34% preferred two or more bedrooms to accommodate their family. Roughly 20% of PSU respondents had dependents living with them, while 25% of all PSU students have children (Facts: PSU By the Numbers, 2022), indicating the need for family-friendly and multi-bedroom student housing options.

PSU respondents also made clear the need for amenities beyond what are typically available in dormitory-style housing. Nearly 83% said they would not live somewhere with a shared bathroom facility and 69% would not live somewhere with a shared kitchen facility. Air conditioning, on-site parking, washer/dryer in the unit, and included utilities were listed as specific amenities sought, but not necessarily required, by a majority of respondents, while just under half preferred pet-friendly housing and a dishwasher. A fitness facility and furnished units were sought by less than 20% of respondents for each. Only 48% of respondents used a car as their main source of transportation, so locating housing near campus or transit lines is important.

¹ “Fair Market Rents are estimates of 40th percentile gross rents for standard quality units within a metropolitan area.”

STUDENT HOUSING PROGRAMS

PSU PROGRAMS

EMERGENCY FUNDS

PSU has a number of emergency funds for students:

- **Undergraduate Emergency Fund:** administered by the Office of Student Success, this fund is open to undergraduate students who face disruption to their education due to a financial emergency. Awards are typically \$500, although higher awards are given based on student circumstances, and may be given no more than once a term. During the two terms of the pilot, a total of \$276,100 was awarded to 467 students.
- **General Student Emergency Fund:** administered by the Office of the Dean of Student Life, this fund is open to any student. Awards may not exceed \$1,500; can only be utilized once per student; and cannot be used for tuition, books, dorm expenses, or fees. This fund is available to students during the academic year.
- **College and school emergency funds:** every school and college at PSU offers a separate emergency fund program for students pursuing one of their degrees. Eligibility, application requirements, award amounts, and permitted use varies by school/college.
- **Resource Center emergency funds:** the Queer Resource Center, Native American Student and Community Center, and International Student Services all administer emergency fund programs.

Housing insecurity is a major driver of need for students applying to emergency funds: an analysis by the Office of Student Success shows that **56% of students who have applied for emergency aid indicate housing insecurity or the need for temporary housing as the reason for the request.**

FREE HOUSING PILOT

A donor-funded, free housing pilot for Summer Bridge Program students (low-GPA, first-generation students) recently completed its second year. This program provides campus housing or \$8500 in assistance for off-campus housing to 50 students a year. An analysis by the Office of Student Success shows that participating students persist in their education at much higher rates than peers. Given the success rate of this pilot, continuing the program and expanding it to additional students with similar backgrounds would likely benefit student persistence on a larger scale.

EMERGENCY HOUSING

The PSU CARE Team provides hotel vouchers for students experiencing a housing crisis, but the vouchers typically last no more than a few days. Funding for vouchers comes from different sources and has no guaranteed amount, so ongoing availability for students is a concern. University Housing & Residence Life does not typically offer free housing for students in crisis due to revenue-generation requirements and concerns around how to equitably select students for emergency housing if it were to be made

available, but can support short-term emergency stays at the University Place Hotel. External partners such as New Avenues for Youth can assist with emergency housing for students experiencing literal homelessness. Student Legal Services also provides assistance to currently housed students facing eviction or lease disputes.

AFFORDABLE RENTS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS (ARCS)

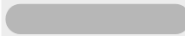

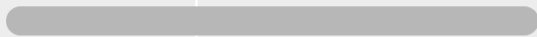
ARCS provides deeply affordable housing—typically at a 50% discount for units that are already offered at below market rate—for students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. The program is managed by local nonprofit College Housing NW in partnership with PSU, Portland Community College, New Avenues for Youth, Mt. Hood Community College, Clackamas Community College, and Native American Youth and Family Center. ARCS also waives deposits and application fees and does not require guarantors, lowering common barriers to housing for students experiencing housing insecurity. Multiple interviewees listed ARCS as an essential resource for PSU students, although available spots are not currently sufficient to meet demand.

THE LANDING

The Landing is a shelter at First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in Goose Hollow for PSU students experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis. The shelter provides bathrooms, showers, washers and dryers, wi-fi, a food pantry, one meal on campus each day, free parking, and a mailing address. Students are referred by the CARE Team and can spend as much time in the shelter as they need, typically in increments of a single academic term at a time. The shelter is operated by FUMC with support from a paid volunteer coordinator and a set of volunteers, including more than 200 housed PSU students who have volunteered or engaged with The Landing through class projects. The Landing has provided shelter to 18 PSU students since early 2022 (Powell, 2023), with a total capacity of eight students at any given time. Providing a dedicated shelter for PSU students, with peers as volunteers, keeps students connected to campus community and avoids the need to access community shelters that may feel unsafe, be located far from campus, have an environment in which students struggle to study, or lack available beds.

In June 2023, The Landing closed due to a lack of funding. This closure garnered negative media coverage (Powell, 2023; Edge, 2023) and was mentioned as having significant negative impacts on students across multiple interviews. Due to the predominantly volunteer-run model of the shelter, as well as free rent and utilities from FUMC, The Landing requires at least \$50,000/year to operate. This funding would be used to pay a part-time Volunteer Coordinator position as well as any temporary overnight staff needed to cover open volunteer shifts. Fully funding The Landing would cost roughly \$110,000/year. The Landing's closure left a major gap in medium-term emergency shelter for PSU students, since hotel vouchers are only for a few days and the ARCS program often has a long waiting list. OHSU and Mt. Hood Community College have expressed interest in partnering with PSU on The Landing if it can be reopened.

TABLE 1: PSU STUDENT HOUSING PROGRAMS BY LENGTH

	SHORT-TERM	MEDIUM-TERM	LONG-TERM
Hotel Vouchers			
The Landing			
ARCS			

SNAP EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING PROGRAM (SNAP E&T)

SNAP E&T, managed by the Office of the Dean of Student Life, supports students enrolled in SNAP benefits with education and employment coaching as well as payments for qualified expenses related to their education. Such expenses can include childcare, housing, tuition and fees, books, transportation, and personal necessities. The monthly program snapshot for April, 2023 (the most recent month for which full program data were available) showed that 51% of all student requests for assistance were for housing/utilities.

A USDA Food and Nutrition Services grant administered by Oregon DHS provides a 1:1 match for every dollar PSU invests in the program. Although such programs are common at community colleges throughout the Pacific NW, PSU was the first four-year institution in the nation to have an active program. Through June 2023, SNAP E&T has raised \$630,000 in funding for the program.

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

SHELTERS

The UCLA Bruin Shelter, opened in 2016, is a shelter for UCLA students experiencing homelessness run by student volunteers in partnership with community organizations. The shelter has nine beds, similar in size to The Landing at PSU, and provides a bed for up to six months. Breakfast and dinner are served onsite. UCLA students studying case management, medicine, and dentistry provide service connections and exams (Robinson, 2018). A similar shelter at USC, Trojan Shelter, is operated by student volunteers and provides overnight beds, two meals, and case management connections (Trojan Shelter, 2022). The Landing at PSU drew on lessons from these shelters and filled a similar role.

FREE/REDUCED-COST CAMPUS HOUSING

Massachusetts funds partnerships between state universities and community colleges to provide free campus housing, meal plans, and transportation to students experiencing homelessness from both types of partner institutions (Chimelis, 2020). The ARCS partnership between PSU, College Housing NW, and other local institutions could serve as a basis for a similar program. Many other colleges and universities provide free housing, sometimes coupled with meal plans and transportation passes, for students who have indicated they are experiencing homelessness on the FAFSA or through other documentation. California, Maine, and Tennessee require student housing to give priority to enrolled students experiencing homelessness and to provide year-round housing (SchoolHouse Connection, 2022).

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Chicago

All Chicago, the homelessness Continuum of Care² for the Chicago region, has a student emergency fund for students who are resident in Chicago. The fund is:

designed specifically to support Chicago's low-income college students at risk of dropping out of school due to an unexpected financial crisis. The short-term goal is to help students maintain stability through a crisis and remain enrolled in a school. The long-term goal is to boost rates of academic retention, success, and graduation for at-risk students.

College access and persistence agencies identify students, walk them through the eligibility requirements, refer them to the fund, and provide additional wraparound support. From 2017–2020, the fund helped 3,990 students and disbursed \$1,795,591, with an average grant size of \$450. In 2020, 13% of requests were for assistance in paying for housing and 7% were for utilities (All Chicago, n.d.).

² A Continuum of Care is a federally-mandated network of homelessness service providers and government agencies serving specific geographic regions that is responsible for homelessness estimates and distributing federal funding.

Los Angeles

The homelessness services nonprofit Jovenes operates the College Success Initiative in partnership with Los Angeles-area colleges and universities to provide housing for students experiencing homelessness.

Programs include:

- Master-leased apartments near campuses that provide bridge housing while students work with case managers to find permanent housing.
- Rental assistance to subsidize the cost of housing while a student is enrolled in school.
- Dormitory-style housing near campuses, with both free and subsidized units, managed in partnership with the local college/university.
- A temporary, six-month host home program to provide housing while students are assisted in finding permanent housing (Jovenes, n.d.).

Tacoma

In Tacoma, the College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) was a partnership between the Tacoma Housing Authority, Tacoma Community College, and the University of Washington at Tacoma. CHAP provided rental assistance to students experiencing or at high risk of homelessness through help with private market rentals, placements in housing authority units near campuses, and long-term contracts with private developments near campuses with rents paid down to levels affordable for students.

CHAP was closed in 2022 following the findings from a pair of evaluations that found:

- Only 25% of students accepted to the program were able to secure private market housing. Students who successfully leased were “more likely to be older, have stronger academic profiles, and less likely to be Black/African American.”
- The fixed subsidy amount was not sufficient to support students with very low incomes.
- While the pilot program showed significant benefits to persistence, the full program showed little difference in GPA and persistence between students who received assistance and students who did not.
- “Students of color and students with children were more likely to be removed from the program for not meeting program requirements” such as a minimum GPA of 2.0 and 12 enrolled credits per term (Tacoma Housing Authority, 2022; Berk Consulting, 2020).

One evaluation found that a lack of comprehensive wraparound support from participating colleges and universities, particularly when students were seeking a unit to lease, was a key factor in the program’s lack of success (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2021).

HOMESHARE PROGRAMS

Home sharing typically takes the form of a single-room rental in an owner-occupied house and is often more affordable than a market-rate apartment. Several university programs and partners across the nation have adopted home share models to serve students. The Housing Options for Students Today

(HOST) nonprofit in Raleigh, North Carolina matches college students at risk of homelessness with volunteer hosts for short-term stays (HOST, n.d.). The University of Michigan helps match student renters with home owners who are older than 55 (HomeShare, n.d.). Jovenes operates a program for college and university students experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles as described above. Platforms such as Silvernest and their local partner Oregon Home Share facilitate room rentals by homeowners, but aren't focused specifically on college students. Such programs are unlikely to be scalable to fully meet PSU student needs, may not be located near campus, thereby increasing transportation time and costs; and may expose students to discrimination or interpersonal conflict with hosts.

STUDENT CO-OPS

The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO), which provides resources and support for those seeking to create a student co-op, defines housing cooperatives as “democratic, member-controlled, and member-owned entities that own and/or manage real estate” (n.d.). In the United States, housing cooperatives have a long history of providing affordable housing to students, typically in exchange for work to sustain co-op upkeep and operations.

UCLA studied a successful co-operative housing model at the university and reported that it was the cheapest housing option available to students, and that “all of the tenants with whom we spoke cited cost as the number one reason they decided to live in the Co-op. A strong sense of community, proximity to campus, access to meals, and the ability to trade work shifts with other tenants were among their other reasons for joining” (Cuff et al., 2018)

A co-operative model may not work for many students with family obligations or more complex needs and barriers than what has historically been viewed as a “traditional” college student. However, some cooperatives are focused around specific identities, and may offer students facing discrimination a way to find affordable housing and a welcoming, safe community.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT (ADU) VILLAGES

Some universities are exploring the potential for ADU (individual bathrooms and kitchens) or POD (shared bathrooms and kitchens) villages as potential opportunities to quickly build basic housing for students. UCLA's City Lab explored the concept of leasing ADUs from local homeowners for students with intermittent housing needs (Cuff et al., 2018), and Pacific University in Forest Grove is considering a POD village for students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. However, POD villages are only feasible for institutions with unused land and are unlikely to meet the needs of a broad range of students, while backyard ADUs have the same risks as homeshare programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FEDERAL GUIDANCE

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in partnership with The Hope Lab, developed a guidebook for addressing housing insecurity and living costs in higher education (Sackett et al., 2016). Key strategies to support students are listed below; this should serve as a checklist for all PSU staff, administrators, and offices engaged in helping address student basic needs. A preliminary assessment of how well PSU implements each strategy is color-coded below, but is highly subjective and requires additional information to be fully accurate. This assessment is included here only as a possible guide to areas where PSU may need additional focus.

TABLE 2: HUD GUIDEBOOK FOR ADDRESSING HOUSING INSECURITY

Key:

	Implemented at PSU, may need additional funding and support
	Needs additional investment, planning, and support at PSU
	Needs significant investment, planning, and support at PSU

Category	Strategy	How to Implement	
Outreach & Identification	Establish a Single Point of Contact (SPOC)	Assign a SPOC to coordinate campus assistance, including applying for federal student aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), referring students to campus offices, and building partnerships with community organizations. It is ideal if the SPOC has connections to local benefits programs, support organizations, and other resources.	
	Engage in proactive, systemic outreach	Use a variety of venues (new student orientation, student portal, classroom presentations, individualized alerts) and in ways that are sensitive to student concerns of stigma.	
Institutional Policies & Structure	Help students manage housing costs by changing the timing of aid delivery	Ensure financial aid is delivered in a timely manner, and where possible adjust payment deadlines until after students have received financial aid. Strategies include providing students with assistance earlier to help them pay security deposits, proactively reaching out to identified high-need students to help, reducing required housing fees for high need students, and allowing high-need students to pay housing costs once aid is disbursed.	
	Prioritize higher-need students for resources, including housing and work-study, and	Prioritize on-campus housing and work-study slots for identified high-need students (for example, Pell-eligible students, unaccompanied homeless youth), and provide or help arrange housing for students with need during breaks.	

	fill housing gaps during breaks and emergencies		
Benefits & Support Programs	Partner with local agencies and organizations	Partnerships support an array of other strategies, such as coordinating with local Continuums of Care, partnerships with local housing agencies to serve students, or arranging Federal Work Study opportunities and other job opportunities.	
	Bundle academic support with other assistance	Institutions can bundle academic support, such as advising, with financial assistance (for instance, tuition waivers for high-need students), in-kind assistance, and organizational support and advising.	
	Connect students with benefits	Help students access benefits programs, such as food and childcare assistance, through a single hub with dedicated staff. You may consider an opt-out model for students who likely qualify.	
	Provide emergency aid / microgrants	Institutions can offer small grants to students. It is helpful to establish and communicate clear criteria for program eligibility, while providing for flexibility in unusual circumstances. Ideally, emergency aid programs supplement a campus benefits access program.	
	Address food insecurity with a campus food pantry, mobile food distribution, or meal point sharing	Campus food pantries directly provide food to students or staff. Local partnerships, especially with regional food banks, are critical. Dedicated staff should complement volunteers. Most institutions operate their pantry on the honor system and have not experienced issues.	
	Enable students to use SNAP on campus	Campus stores can apply to be eligible for SNAP purchases.	
	Provide assistance with housing issues and offer emergency housing	Institutions can help students address housing issues by providing free legal help, referrals to community organizations, short-term emergency aid, and emergency housing on or off campus.	
	Support student parents, including campus childcare	First, identify and connect with student parents on your campus. Provide campus childcare directly or offer individualized referrals. Institutions can also support student parents by reaching out and helping them transition to school, providing mentoring and peer support, and offering parent-specific academic support such as flexible class scheduling.	
	Support students' financial capability	Colleges can provide direct financial services or referrals, or they can partner with local organizations. Institutions can also provide Individual Development Accounts to help students save for educational expenses.	

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

The following actions are recommended to help PSU meet HUD guidance on addressing student housing insecurity and homelessness. Additional detail is provided based on an analysis of student surveys, suggestions from interviews, academic literature on related best practices, and conversations with national experts. Education Northwest has published a Basic Needs Services Implementation Rubric that should be used in conjunction with the HUD guidebook to assess progress in key areas (Brey and Hodara, 2023).

Center Equity in All Programs

Multiple PSU studies have shown disparities in housing similar to those among the broader population, especially among students of color (particularly Black, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander students), former foster students, veterans, transfer students, first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, LGBTQ students, parenting students, neurodivergent students, international students, undocumented students, and disabled students. Justice-involved students are likely to face similar disparities, although data are lacking across many PSU surveys. Appropriate housing solutions will vary across different groups of students, but ensuring that housing approaches center racial equity and incorporate a broader equity lens into program design, management, and evaluation will help reduce disparities. Justice-involved, undocumented, and international students in particular may not be able to take advantage of specific funding or programs that receive federal funding, so alternative pathways and models of support should be provided.

To ensure equitable approaches, the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion, Cultural Resource Centers, and service and resource centers under the Dean of Student Life should be engaged in all efforts to address student housing needs. Likewise, a diverse and representative group of students should be engaged in program design, programming, and evaluation.

Provide Free and Subsidized Housing

Many other institutions set aside free campus housing units for students experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Until its closure, The Landing fulfilled a similar role at PSU, but providing a range of free housing units suitable for different student household compositions (see Student Housing Preferences above) could effectively meet the same need. Students could be referred into these units by the CARE Team and should be allowed to stay until they can be placed into permanent housing. Campus Housing & Residence Life would need to be reimbursed for the cost of these units. Partnerships, such as home share models or with for-profit housing providers, are likely to foster isolation or introduce additional complications and barriers for students who need sustained engagement from campus services and should be considered as a supplement, rather than a replacement, for free on-campus housing.

Deeply affordable on- or near-campus housing of a range of unit types is in high need by students experiencing housing insecurity. Parenting students with young children, in particular, are poorly served

by current campus housing options. PSU should not only subsidize a range of current student housing units, but will almost certainly need to acquire or construct additional units. This will be explored further in a separate report.

Expand Funding for Current Programs

PSU has implemented a wide range of recommended programs and practices to address student basic needs insecurity, including homelessness and housing insecurity, that are managed and staffed by talented and committed employees. However, many of these programs are chronically underfunded and therefore unable to fully meet student needs, or have been forced to close entirely (as in the case of The Landing). Although the university faces significant fiscal challenges, investing in basic needs has been proven to improve academic performance, persistence, and graduation—outcomes that would, most likely, not only pay for themselves in the long run, but also ensure the university fulfills its responsibility to support student success. Funding should be adequate for programs to fully address the direct costs of meeting student needs and to achieve staffing levels and attract staff expertise appropriate for the level and types of need.

Unify Emergency Fund Applications

The wide range of current student emergency funds, each with different application and eligibility requirements, can be confusing and challenging for students to navigate. Providing a unified print/online application for all students, with information on the form that can be used to determine eligibility for specific funds and route the application to fund managers accordingly, would lower student barriers to accessing this essential resource. The application should be designed with engagement from all current fund managers and should minimize the amount of personal information required.

Enhance Program Coordination

Programs and services related to addressing student housing are widely distributed across offices, centers, schools and colleges at PSU. While this helps ensure a variety of access and information points for students, the reality is that services are sometimes uncoordinated. Employees working in these or related programs may not always be aware of the variety of services on offer, or even when they are aware of resources, handoffs can create barriers for students due to the time involved and emotional labor of making the case for their assistance more than once. To ensure that student needs are addressed in a timely and holistic manner, better coordination is needed across campus programs.

Improved coordination can take several forms:

- Creating unified applications for assistance (see above for a specific recommendation around emergency funds);
- Holding regular meetings of staff and administrators involved in addressing student basic needs, organized by area (for example, all emergency fund managers);

- Ensuring that all academic advisors are trained on how to identify students dealing with basic needs insecurity, are aware of available services for students, and know how to assist students in accessing those services;
- Identifying students who may need additional support and proactively engaging with those students to build awareness of available services.

Use Pell Grant Eligibility as a Proxy for Need

Pell Grant eligibility may serve as a proxy for directly assessed student homelessness (for example, through the FAFSA homelessness determination or a case management meeting). Pell Grant eligibility holds the advantage of being recorded across enrolled students and accessible through current campus recordkeeping services. Pell Grant students could receive text or email “nudges” that notify them of additional services and resources or academic advisors could be prompted to provide that information during meetings. However, such outreach and engagement, as with all student basic needs engagement, should be done in a way that signals respect for student autonomy and choice and does not assume basic needs insecurity.

Ensure Comprehensive Outreach

The 2020 Hope Center survey of PSU students found that “49% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for campus supports because they did not know how” (The Hope Center, 2021). This indicates a significant awareness gap among PSU students. The university could work to build student awareness and understanding of basic needs services through methods including, but not limited to:

- Materials and events at orientation;
- Engagement in on-campus events;
- Periodic emails and/or text messages;
- Suggested syllabus statements for faculty members;
- Campaigns through student-facing centers and programs;
- Campaigns in partnership with student unions and student government;
- Cross-campus coordination between basic needs services (described above).

Messaging should focus on building awareness of and familiarity with basic needs services, as well as de-stigmatizing and normalizing the use of services, to reduce student confusion or reluctance around engagement.

CONCLUSION

PSU has a strong foundation and culture of helping to meet student housing needs. With additional funding and coordination, existing programs could be scaled to better support students. Federal guidance and national research offer clear frameworks to follow, which should be supplemented with employee and student suggestions and implemented using a strong equity lens. However, substantial additional housing units offered for free or at reduced cost are needed to fully address student housing insecurity.

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Prepared by

Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative

PSU-HRAC addresses the challenges of homelessness through research that uncovers conditions that lead to and perpetuate homelessness. Our goal is to help reduce homelessness and its negative impacts on individuals, families and communities, with an emphasis on communities of color.

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