CRC Housing Resource Proposal

A basic needs initiative, offering insight and proposing solutions to student’s highest non-tuition expense

CRC Peer Mentor Program, Student Service Project
About Homes for Hawks

Founded in August of 2018, Homes for Hawks is a student-led service project founded and fostered under CRC’s Peer Mentoring Program. The main objective of this project is to become the housing resource hub to current and future students at CRC.

This project aims to be relevant, accurate, and sustainable in information and resources it provides to students who seek affordable housing options and services.

Project Team

Malisha Blakes
Jonathan Leong
Bryan Mai

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College Ready, Hungry, and Homeless

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Paul Meinz, Ph.D.
IT Business/Tech Analyst, Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Homes for Hawks has also collaborated with the following projects in the efforts to tackle basic needs insecurities of CRC students:

Hawk Swap
Hawk Spot Food Pantry
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Overview

Food, shelter, and clothing have historically been identified under the umbrella term of ‘basic needs’. Basic needs insecurities have always existed, and even predates the creation of the upper education system. It is only as of recent, though, that this issue has been brought to light amongst college students as a concern that needs to be addressed.

Objective

Housing insecurity poses a challenge to all college students and their ability to perform academically. Housing alone equates for the largest expense an individual can accumulate in the course of their life. With California’s high housing costs, rising rental rates, and a lack of streamlined support services, students often find themselves having to prioritize their financial commitments over their academics.

As a college campus, our commitment is to our students. Homes for Hawks aims to be the bridge between our campus and the community, in assisting our students with access to affordable housing options and services.

This proposal aims to shed light on the legislative efforts—of which, are either already written into law or are in the process of becoming law—geared towards assisting students facing housing insecurities. Additionally, this proposal will examine solutions to housing insecurities that colleges have implemented. Finally, this proposal will address the sentiment of CRC students towards housing, identify barriers to accessing housing and basic needs resources on campus, and propose recommendations to eliminate these barriers through 6 Key Areas of Action: facility, information, training, personnel, advocacy, and community.
The Problem is a Statewide Epidemic

California’s High Housing Costs

California’s housing crisis presents the biggest financial barrier to students desiring to achieve academic success. Many of California’s community college institutions are in very expensive areas of the state, with low or declining rental vacancy rates and an uncontrolled rise in rental prices.

Year-over-year rent increases topped five percent in several cities in California from March 2017 to March 2018. Sacramento experienced an 8.6% jump in median rent over this period—the highest increase out of the 100 largest cities in the entire country. Six of the top 10 cities nationwide with the highest year-over-year increases in this period were in California: Sacramento, Anaheim, Oakland, Fresno, Santa Ana, and Riverside.

Whether or not public institutions offer on-campus options varies. Only about 20% of CCCs offer any student housing on campus. This results in students having to compete for housing in a market that is already competitive and favored towards individuals with experience, certification and/or degrees.
Inadequate Financial Aid Coverage

The CCC (California Community College) system and its institutions are at the pinnacle of this nation’s post-secondary education system. Community college has historically been a place for social mobility amongst our state’s low-income and working-class populace. However, recent studies have identified that Financial Aid coverage has failed to provide financial security to its students when it comes to out-of-tuition costs.

The majority of California College Promise Grants (formerly the Board of Governors’ Fee Waiver) is targeted at covering tuition costs for students with financial need. The Institute for College Access and Success estimated that the average amount of grant aid available per low-income student in 2015-16 was $5,400 to CCC students. The Legislative Analyst’s Office found that grant aid at CCCs covers only one-third of the cost of attendance. Additionally, less than 10 percent of CCC students borrow federal loans, and many CCCs do not even offer federal loans to students. In addition, though 54% of all CCC financial aid received in 2016-17 was Pell Grant aid, the Pell Grant does not cover even a third of average non-tuition costs for CCC students.

This financial pressure on CCC students lead many to enroll only part-time and work long hours each week to try to cover the rest of their living expenses. As the basic needs insecurity data from CCCs demonstrates, many are unable to fill those gaps and suffer as a result. Beyond the amount of aid available, the timing of disbursement also presents another challenge for students. Institutions can make their own aid available earlier, but they can disburse federal student aid no earlier than 10 days before the first day of classes. For first-year, first-time borrowers, schools cannot disburse federal direct loans until 30 days after the first day of classes. This poses a challenge particularly to students living off-campus, as their landlords will likely require security deposits in advance of the start of term, and some pay rent through summer, when less aid is available.

Though the problem finds its roots in the inflated costs of living, CCC students are at the brunt of California’s epidemic. Without the proper financial aid support, it is unrealistic to expect our students to perform to the high standards of California’s academic institutions.

Lack of Support Services for the Homeless

Existing social service programs, including CalFresh (SNAP), housing assistance programs, and homeless shelters, tend to be ill-equipped to serve students, and in some cases are deliberately structured to exclude students or make it difficult for students to access them.

CalFresh, the primary nutrition assistance program for people struggling with food insecurity, provides a monthly benefit to households that meet income and eligibility requirements. Benefits can be used to purchase groceries from approved vendors. However, there are restrictions that limit the eligibility of college students (enrolled at least half time) for CalFresh unless they meet...
certain exemptions. Exemptions are available for students if they meet income eligibility and are working at least 20 hours a week, are receiving federal or state work-study, are unable to work because of a disability, or are certain types of single parents, among other criteria. However, studies show that the optimal number of hours of work per week for students to stay on track to graduate is 10-15 hours, not 20 or more.

At CCCs, where full-time enrollment is much lower than part-time enrollment, higher percentages of students likely work 20+ hours a week and meet that exemption—though many need to work in order to afford the full cost of attendance and are prevented from taking as many courses as they would like.

Housing services are no exception to this issue. Many transitional housing services are catered towards ‘youth’ or ‘young adults’ that meet specific requirements to receive the benefits of their services. These services often work as referral networks, which can also add to the burden of those who fall under the category of homelessness.

Take, for instance, services like Volunteers of America and the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project. Both services are specifically catered to former foster ‘youth’, with strict age requirements. The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project intakes former foster youth from age 18 to 21. Volunteers of America’s Youth Services are also only catered towards former foster ‘youth’, with age requirements between 18 and 23.

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) has identified that 31.8% of men and 33.9% of women experienced housing insecurity. While a much smaller percentage, 15.4% and 8.7%, respectively, experience food insecurities. This chart from the CCEAL examines CCC students' housing and food insecurities.
Key Legislation

In the initial phase of our project, our research was heavily centered on identifying the problem of inadequate housing resources on campus. Our research led us to inquire with CRC’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness on broader issues of homelessness and housing insecurity, and how these issues affect students’ academic success. Our project expanded both in scope and direction when we discovered that legislation played a key factor in identifying and addressing these issues holistically—that is, the issue of basic needs insecurity amongst students.

California’s Legislature has recently taken steps to address the issue of basic needs insecurity on college campuses through legislation. In this section, we have identified key legislation to address this issue that are either active bills or signed into law (Chaptered).

Chaptered Legislation

Chaptered bills are bills that have become official statutes, or laws, in the state of California. The following legislation are bills that have already been signed into law that require college institutions to address the basic needs of their students.

**AB 214, Chapter 134 “Postsecondary Education: Student Hunger”**: This bill speaks to clarifying educational policies for purposes of improving access for low-income students to the CalFresh program. For purposes of the federal regulation, the bill would specify the definition of half-time college enrollment. The bill also requires the student aid commission to provide written notice to recipients of Cal Grant awards who qualify for participation in the CalFresh program.

**SB 801, Chapter 432 “Postsecondary education: Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education”**: This bill would require qualifying institutions, other than the University of California, which would be requested to do so, to designate a staff member who is employed within the financial aid office, or another appropriate office or department, of the institution to serve as a Homeless and Foster Student Liaison and to inform current and prospective students of the institution about student financial aid and other assistance available to homeless youth and current and former foster youth, as specified.
**AB 1018, Chapter 751 “Community Colleges: Student Equity Plans”:**
This bill would add homeless, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students to the categories of students required to be addressed in the student equity plans. The bill would also add any additional categories of students determined by the governing board of the community college. To the extent that these provisions would impose new duties on community college districts, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

**AB 504, Chapter 742 “Community Colleges: Student Success and Support Program Funding”:**
A section of this bill requires community colleges to develop and maintain their student equity plans for certain disproportionately impacted student groups. Among the groups included are homeless students.

**AB 1995, Chapter 407 “Community Colleges: Homeless Students: access to shower facilities”:**
This bill would require a community college campus that has shower facilities for student use to grant access, as specified, to those facilities to any homeless student who is enrolled in coursework, has paid enrollment fees, and is in good standing with the community college district, and would require the community college to determine a plan of action to implement this requirement. By imposing additional duties on community college districts, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

**Active Bills**

Active bills are bills that are in the process of becoming official statues, or laws, in the state of California. We recognize these as efforts that may soon be mandated by Legislature, as it speaks to the broader issue of basic needs insecurity. These bills are still in the process of being amended and/or modified and are in no way the complete or finalized version of the bill.

**SB 568 “Postsecondary Education: Student Housing College-Focused Rapid Rehousing Program”:**
This proposed bill speaks to rapid rehousing for homeless students and spells out what the definition of homelessness is and how the colleges should handle this issue if they run this program.

**SB 291 “Postsecondary Education: California Community College Student Financial Aid”:**
This bill would establish California Community College Student Financial Aid, to provide need based awards to eligible community college students who attend a community college voluntarily designated by its district governing board to participate in the program, as specified. Subject to an appropriation by the legislature, the bill specifies that the program shall be administered by the board of governors of the California Community Colleges and implemented by the eligible California community colleges.
AB 302 “Parking: Homeless Students”:
This bill would require a community college campus that has parking facilities on campus to grant overnight access to those facilities, on or before July 1, 2020, to any homeless student who is enrolled in coursework, has paid any enrollment fees that have not been waived, and is in good standing with the community college, for the purpose of sleeping in the student’s vehicle overnight. The bill would require the governing board of the community college district to determine a plan of action to implement this requirement, as specified. By imposing additional duties on community college districts, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

Efforts from Other Colleges

Los Angeles City Community College

We went on their website and just searched housing. We searched housing and came up with information on an event given by the “Genderversity & Multicultural Center’. This event was targeting the LGBTQ community and other students; however, the target audience was LGBTQ. They had a housing navigator that helped students find suitable housing. There was a lot of information for international students however there was not much for just regular students. The name of this center is “The Genderversity and Multicultural Center”. They advertise services that will assist with housing and other needs. They have someone on site that addresses the needs of these students.
Sacramento City College

On their website they have a designated office that students can go to and get services. They advertise on campus, in a display case, the places that are for rent. They also maintain a list of places to rent in the area.

This is important because this is our sister college. The services they offer are not hard to maintain. Having something like this on our campus would go a long way. They also have a disclaimer regarding the responsibility of the college which states they are not liable.

Berkeley City College

The interesting thing about Berkley’s housing resource is that they have organized a CO-OP they have apartment and houses that are dedicated to students. These houses have themes and they have apartments that collaborate with the college to provide affordable housing options to their students.
How Does Our College Match Up?

What We Have

We have some great services that we offer on campus for former foster youth and some other programs. The homeless liaison for former foster youth, is a great service that we offer to our former foster youth. But what we have for all other students is the housing list. Which is known to be outdated and suspected of being listings from Craigslist and Facebook. We find that to be problematic because both of those sources have been known to be unreliable sources as well as have a high activity of fraud. So, we think that is an unacceptable resource for our students.

Where We Lack and Our Plans

Our mission in the beginning was to update this list. Our idea was to solicit some of the local apartment complexes in the area and see if they would be willing to rent an apartment to our students at a reduced rate or split the lease on one two-bedroom apartment for two of our students. Similar to the student housing around Sac State. There are many conversions in that area. So, we wanted to pitch that idea to some of the apartments in this area. Our plan was to visit those apartment complexes around that area and ask what they did and how they converted. We would have done that before going to the apartments in this area.
We also entertained the idea of having a Town Hall or Community Day, where we would invite people from the community to come and post their rooms for rent. We wanted to canvas the area and solicit the information from local homeowners in the area. Then provide a sustainable way for the community homeowners and apartment reps to list their rooms and services with the campus.

There was some mention of tiny homes being an option for some homeless students. We thought this was a good idea, as well as something that we could also do here. We have the construction department which has built tiny homes before and we thought it would be a good idea to have the students build homes for class and major incentives and for homeless students. We could also use that to advertise the construction program. At the state level there was also talk about partnering with HUD and Section 8 to possibly help our students but again that takes a long time.

There is a lot of talk about the AB302 bill that has been introduced to legislature. This is a great idea, but we don’t want to use this idea as a solution to a growing problem. We would like to see this taken a little farther. However, it does not address the needs of students that don’t have a car. Do they put up a tent in this area? We think this option needs to be explored more. If this option was available on campus, we would want to have a place on campus for the students to use their EBT cards. Currently we have no place on campus for individuals to use their card or prepare the food they are given from the Hawk Spot. We see this as being a huge problem since we have a representative on campus that will sign you up for CalFresh.

There is something going on at the State level to address the problem however the process to become an approved EBT/Fresh vendor is long, bureaucratic and requires approval through county, state and federal agencies. Colleges must apply to be a restaurant meals program vendor individually and the process can take over 18 months for approval. There are over 60 Colleges in the counties that do not have a restaurant meals program and therefore ineligible to provide access to CalFresh for their students. This is a problem for many colleges, but we would like to see CRC in the running to get something like this implemented. There are legislative proposals for changes in this area.
Student Sentiment

What is your current housing status & would you be interested in moving out?

In our efforts to better understand the student demographic of Cosumnes River College, we conducted a series of in-person surveys so that we could fully encompass the sentiments that our fellow peers had towards housing resources on campus. The survey results were recorded during various events and activities on campus, as well as during passing periods throughout the day, at both the main campus and the Elk Grove Center, to ensure that we reached a wider range of students and avoided any biased samples. Our survey consisted of a few questions based around the students’ academic standing, income, housing expenses, and interest in school housing resources. To initiate the survey, we briefly asked the students about their current housing situation and if they were considering changing residences. These questions helped us probe the students for an understanding on where they stood regarding housing; whether or not they are interested in finding new housing opportunities or if they are already settled in and unconcerned. Unsurprisingly, we saw that most of the students live at home with their families or rent an apartment or house, with very few people that own a house of their own. It could also be seen that most of the students that were surveyed want to or have considered moving out. From these results, we can conclude that most of our surveyed students show interest in finding new housing opportunities.

Would you rather live alone or have roommates & would you be interested in rooming with other students?

In the beginning of the Homes for Hawks project, one of our initial intents was to assist students in finding shared housing opportunities with other students that had similar intentions. As such, we also inquired if the students had any interests in living with roommates, and more specifically, sharing housing with other CRC students. From our results from these questions, we saw that around 70% of students were interested and willing to live with roommates. Most of the students
had also expressed that they favored living with roommates primarily because it would be too difficult to find adequate housing on their own. They wanted to find other students that were looking to share housing so that they could lessen the financial burden of rent.

How many hours do you work a week & how much do you make per month

In addition to helping students find shared housing opportunities, our other initial goal was to update the severely outdated housing list provided on the college’s website. We wanted to establish a new, relevant housing list that catered to the preferences and demographic of our students. To accomplish this goal, our next few questions were tailored around the financial standing of our students and their income, so that we could develop an understanding of how much monetary assets the average student has to spend and how much time they spend working every week. By understanding how many hours the average student spends working every week and how much they make per month, we can deduce how much time a student can spend focusing on school and other responsibilities, as well as how much they can afford to spend every month of their basic necessities.
How much is average monthly housing costs & how much would you be willing to spend monthly on rent?

In accordance to establishing a housing list that caters to the demographic of our students, we also included questions inquiring about the students’ average monthly rent and how much they preferred to spend on rent every month. As you would expect, our results show that most students prefer to spend less on their monthly rent than they currently do, but the significance in our data lies in how much students spend on their monthly rent regarding their monthly income. On average, most of the students that we surveyed made between $1,200 and $1,500 a month, while their monthly housing costs averaged at around $600-$800. According to our recorded averages, it can be assumed that around half of a student’s monthly income is spent on just housing expenses alone, with the remainder being responsible for covering all other school expenses, food costs, transportation fees, and the costs of other necessities.

How much is your average monthly housing costs?

How much would you be willing to spend on monthly housing costs?

How many units are you currently taking & Have you had any difficulties or would like assistance with finding housing opportunities?

With our understanding of how many hours the average CRC works in a week and how much income they receive monthly, as well as how much of that income is spent on housing expenses, we can begin to observe how impactful a student’s housing situation is on their academics and standing as a student. Of all our surveyed students, only 26.8% reported that they took more than the bare minimum number of units to be considered a full-time student, while 55.2% reported that they were at that bare minimum of 12 units or barely under it. Given our previous results on the average work week of a student, most students work between 20-35 hours a week, and if they were a student with a full-time unit load of 12-15 units during the semester, they would be spending just as much time working as they are focused on their classes, if not more. With housing expenses being, on average, half of their expected income, students must work more
often and risk their ability to do well in their academics. With the appropriate housing resources, students would have a higher chance of obtaining more affordable housing and wouldn’t have to dedicate so much of their time towards working. Our students also reported that over 75% faced difficulties in finding housing resources on campus or would like additional support regarding those services. With such a high majority of students facing these difficulties, it is hard to ignore the fact that the Cosumnes River College campus severely lacks the accommodation of housing resources for our students.
Proposed Recommendations:
6 Key Areas of Action

Based on the findings of this proposal, Homes for Hawks has identified 6 Key Areas of Action that CRC can take to address the housing concerns of its students. Most of these recommendations have already been cited in recent reports as recommended actions and/or best practices by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO); the Chief Executive Officers of California Community Colleges (CEOCCC) Affordability, Food & Housing Access Task Force; and California Speaker’s Office of Research and Floor Analysis. Some of these recommendations are also aimed at holistically addressing the basic needs insecurities of students.

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<td>Establish safe lots for homeless students to park and sleep in overnight</td>
<td>Establish proper liability clauses before disseminating information from third party sources</td>
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<td>Create emergency housing units for students identified as homeless</td>
<td>Housing List overhaul (website)</td>
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<td>• Tiny Homes</td>
<td>• “Homes for Hawks Housing Resource Center”; streamline all housing services onto one webpage</td>
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<td>• Establish a permanent on-campus residence (dorm)</td>
<td>• Include links to local, state, and federal housing support services</td>
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<td>• Designate a physical space on campus as a Housing Resource Center</td>
<td>• Create a list or map of nearby housing with filterable options (i.e. listing price, zip code, distance, etc.)</td>
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<td>• Expand campus food pantry and access to fresh food</td>
<td>• Routinely audit listings of nearby housing</td>
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<td>• Remove EBT barriers at points of transaction</td>
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Training

- Integrate basic needs insecurities and initiatives into professional development opportunities for staff.
- Incorporate concerns of basic needs insecurities into counseling, orientation, and other processes of matriculation.
- Continually train and inform designated personnel for basic needs.

Personnel

- Designate a full-time staff/faculty as a point of access/contact for students facing basic needs insecurities (case manager), whose duties to include:
  - Assisting students in the financial aid process
  - Referring students to on and off-campus support services
  - Case management
  - Point of contact between campus and community resources
  - Continually audit and update housing list

Advocacy

- Form a collaborative network with other basic needs initiatives:
  - Hawk Spot Food Pantry
  - Hawk Swap
- Create a student government committee assuring that the basic needs of students are addressed on campus and in campus policy
- Inform and send students to advocate in support of legislative efforts towards students' basic needs

Community

- Establish outreach efforts to community property owners and landlords.
- Identify and establish a network of local cohort/co-op housing communities
- Create a locally coordinated housing entry system for students facing homelessness:
  - Temporary housing vouchers
  - Guided and urgent processing of applications and entry into local support services
- Zone nearby undeveloped lots for college campus use.
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