

Care Off-Campus

How Supporting Students' Basic
Needs Creates Scholars

By Holliday Senquiz



What can make CUNY better?

When we think about supporting college students, we often think about their needs on campus. However, we must remember, students are more than **just** students. They are individuals with the same basic needs as everyone else, and oftentimes those needs are not met.

Here are the facts:

- According to a study conducted in 2019, 36% of college students are food insecure.
- A different study from 2017 found that 51% of students had faced housing insecurity.
- The total share of undergraduate, low-income college students increased from 12 percent in 1996 to 20 percent in 2016.
- As of 2022, New York State had the 5th highest cost of living index compared to the entire nation.





Thought Exercise

Which scenario would you be the most concerned about?

You have a final paper due on Sunday, and you're five pages short



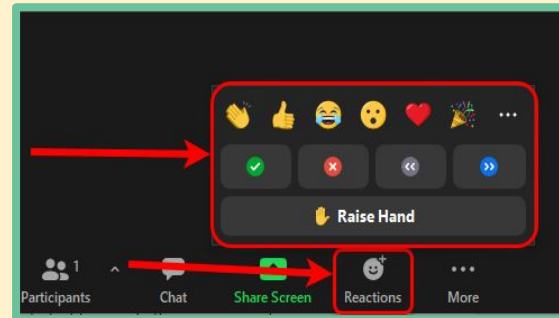
OR

Your electric bill is due on Sunday, and you're \$50 short



Using the “Reactions” feature on Zoom, **raise your hand** if you'd be most concerned about the paper.

Clap your hands if you'd be most concerned about the electric bill.



Students cannot prioritize their education if their basic needs are not being met!

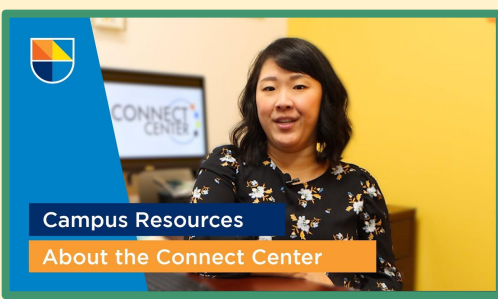


If we want students to do well in school (graduating on time, participating in extracurriculars and honors programs, etc...) then we must eliminate outside factors that will inhibit their success SUCH AS housing insecurity, food insecurity, and economic instability!

One of the studies from earlier reads:

“The stress associated with housing instability and food insecurity negatively impacts daily life for low-income college students. The inability to meet basic needs has adverse consequences for their psychosocial outcomes and educational attainment including college completion, academic performance, concentration in class, class attendance, fear of disappointing family, sadness, hopelessness, isolation, embarrassment and frustration.”

(“Many College Students Struggle to Have Their Basic Needs Met”, Harmony Reppond, Ph.D.)



Meet Dana LePage

Dana is the Associate Director of the **Connect Center at Guttman Community College**. The Connect Center provides resources, referrals and support to address student's essential needs including access to food, financial stability, housing insecurity, immigration assistance, and more.

The Connect Center is a great example of how supporting student needs is **entirely possible** in postsecondary education!





More about the Connect Center

I interviewed Dana to learn more about the Connect Center: how it works, and how it's successful.

What basic needs does the Connect Center help meet?

“Food, financial, legal, immigration, childcare, housing, tax assistance, and more.”

Do you think the Connect Center's services have a positive impact on students' well-being?

*“The Connect Center provides very important **stress relief** when students are unsure of how they will be able to pay a bill or have enough food at home for themselves or their family members. All of our services are completely free to students so they don't have to worry about paying back loans, etc. Some programs don't even have an application process so it is easy and quick to get access to essential needs. Student can also feel less alone when **these programs are normalized** and they see their peers partaking as well.”*

How does supporting students' basic needs improve their time at college?

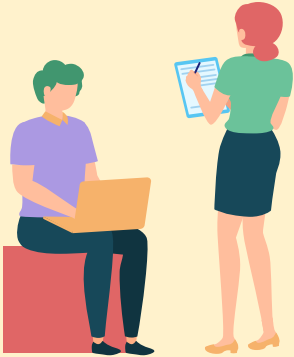
*“Supporting students essential needs allows them to **focus more on their academics** instead of worrying that they will not have enough food at home, or how they will pay their rent... Now more than ever it is difficult to pay for rent and utilities, on top of food and college tuition. That is why the Connect Center and the services we offer are so vital.”*



Connect Centers Across CUNY!

How can this resource be improved upon and replicated CUNY-wide?

What steps would individual schools or CUNY as a whole have to take in order to replicate the Connect Center model?



*“Most of the other CUNY schools, if not all, have Food Pantries on their campus, which is a great first step. But not all have **an actual physical center with full staff** who are there to meet 1:1 with students who need help with housing, food, legal issues, etc. Administration at these schools would need to understand how important essential needs are and how much they impact CUNY students.”*

What could CUNY do to improve Guttman’s own Connect Center?

*“**Providing specific funds** to us that do not have to be raised through grants would be incredibly helpful. We can also use additional money to be able to support our student needs better. Longer term, in an ideal world, it would be wonderful to provide low-cost housing options through CUNY for our students as well as a childcare center for those students who are caring for children while they are trying to finish their degrees.”*



Overall, students need support in meeting their basic needs. If their needs go unmet, they are unable to prioritize their education and reach their full potential. **CUNY schools should offer resources to help students meet their basic needs.** This work is already being done to some extent thanks to people like Dana at Guttman's Connect Center, so we know it's possible. We need more schools to adopt the methodology of the Connect Center and more funds need to be made available to make it happen. This is one way we can **make CUNY better.**

