

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity Among Community College Students

**A Longitudinal Evaluation of a Housing Choice
Voucher Program**



Hosted by



Leanne Davis

Managing Researcher



Sara Goldrick-Rab

Senior Fellow



Report authors

Sara Goldrick-Rab *Senior Fellow, Education Northwest*

Christine Baker-Smith *Research Director, National League of Cities*

Sarah A. Cordes *Associate Professor, Temple University*

Kallie Clark *Senior Research Data Analyst, University of California, San Francisco*



Nine years of partnership – thank you!

Tacoma Community College

Tacoma Housing Authority

The Kresge Foundation

Arnold Ventures

U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Association of Community College Trustees

Evaluation, Research, and Assessment Solutions

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The problem

- Community college costs ~\$15K per year, *after* financial aid
- Housing insecurity affects ~50% of students; homelessness affects 8%
- Colleges and states are beginning to respond, but they lack evidence to:
 - Understand the likely return on investment
 - Inform program development
 - Drive funding



The College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP)

- Partnership between **Tacoma Community College** and **Tacoma Housing Authority**
- Established 2014
- Offered a housing choice voucher
 - Subsidized rent for the private market (~\$450 discount on ~\$1K rent)
 - Based on household size
 - Time limited
 - Had to be enrolled at Tacoma Community College or the University of Washington Tacoma



Eligibility

Homeless

- Living in an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility
- Client of a case management program serving homeless people

Near-Homeless

- Unable to meet basic housing expenses, which could result in housing loss
- Residing in a motel/hotel
- Couch surfing
- Evicted
- Recent history of serious housing instability
- Victim of domestic violence
- Facing discharge from a public institution (e.g., incarceration, hospital) without a housing plan

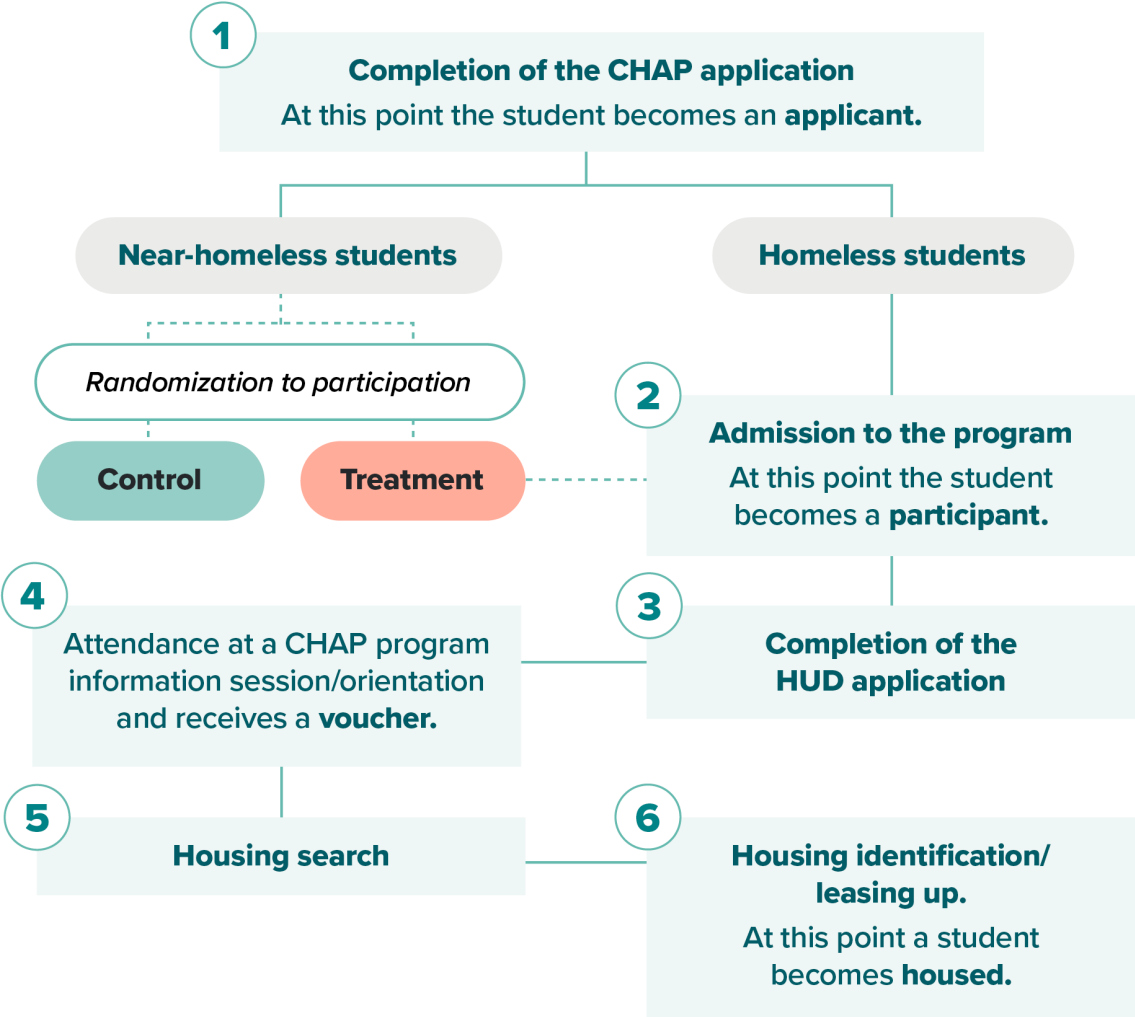
Eligibility

- Been at college for at least one term
- Taking six or more credits
- To get a voucher, also had to meet Tacoma Housing Authority criteria:
 - Proof of residency
 - Background check
 - Income level confirmed

Filing a FAFSA and meeting satisfactory academic progress requirements were continuation criteria, *not* eligibility criteria



Program bureaucracy



Roles and responsibilities

College handles

- Outreach
- Intake
- College navigational support

Housing authority handles

- Orientation
- Housing vouchers

Unclear who handles

- Housing search support navigation
- Issues with landlords
- Other duties as assigned

Evaluation framework

Social determinants of education framework



Evaluation outcome domains

- Academic performance and attainment
- Housing stability
- Employment and earnings
- Use of public benefits
- Health and use of publicly funded health services
- Interactions with the criminal justice system

Evaluation questions

1. How often did students in the program lease up?
2. Did the program reduce use of homelessness services?
3. Did the program increase academic success, including graduation rates?
4. Did the program affect employment, public benefits, health and health services, and criminal justice?
5. How did leasing up relate to those outcomes?



Evaluation design

422
individuals



Applied to the program
fall 2017 → **spring 2019**



Two groups of students
homeless or near-homeless

Data came from

- Washington State Department of Social and Human Services
- Tacoma Community College and Tacoma Housing Authority
- Student surveys



Evaluation design

- Longitudinal – six cohorts of students across winter, spring, fall
- Implementation study
- Descriptive **outcomes** for homeless students
- Program **impacts** for near-homeless students
 - Outcomes of students admitted to the program compared to students *not* admitted due to the limited number of vouchers



COVID-19 pandemic

- Hit one year *after* the last student cohort began the program
- Could affect later outcomes
- SNAP expanded during the pandemic, Tacoma implemented eviction moratoriums, etc.
- Academic data collection continued until 2022, post-pandemic



Why students applied

- Causes of housing challenges:
 - New to the area
 - Family crisis
 - Loss of income
 - Medical challenges
- Most homeless students found the program via staff recommendations; near-homeless students found it via posters/flyers



Applicant characteristics

All students

30% vs **70%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Average age

30 vs **33**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Female

63% vs **75%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Single

44% vs **41%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Had dependents

40% vs **54%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Black

32% vs **18%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

White

29% vs **34%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Other races

33% vs **38%**
Homeless vs Near-homeless

Housing challenges

- Tight housing market
- Availability near students' jobs, child care providers, and/or schools
- Insufficient income to meet landlord requirements
- Landlord discrimination
- Significant amount of paperwork required
- Difficulty conducting housing searches
- Costs: security deposits, moving costs, etc.



The program housed just 1 in 4 participants



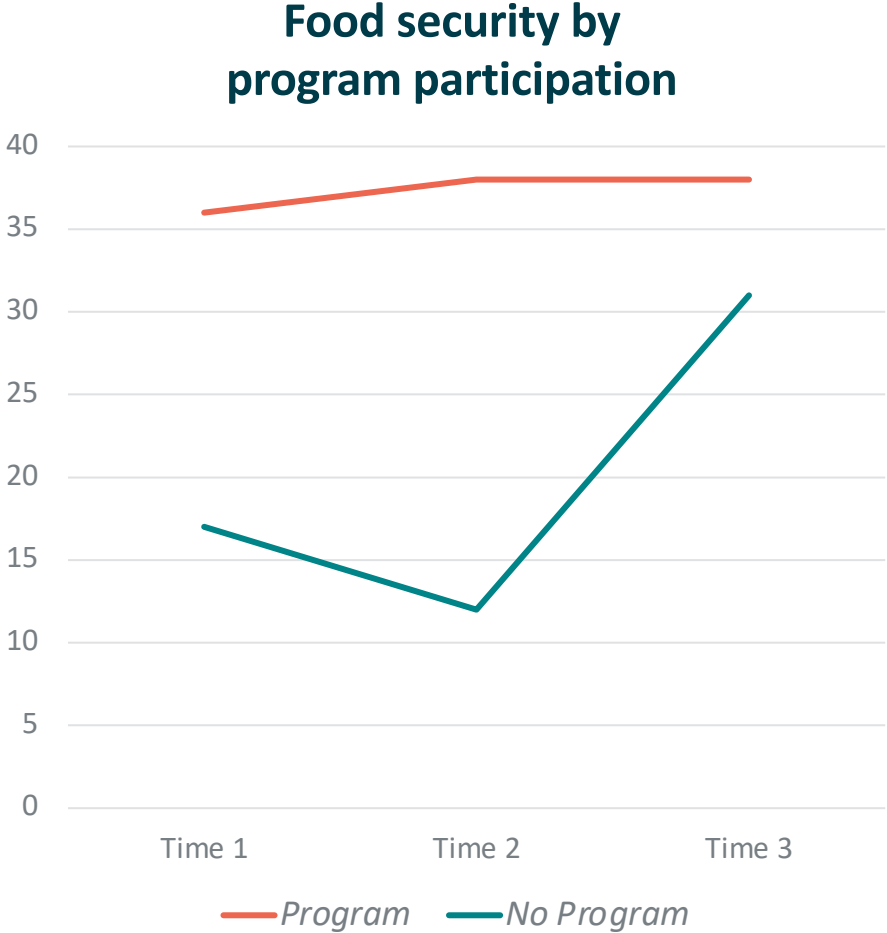
More often housed

- Students with higher GPAs
- Students receiving public assistance
- Students with children
- Women
- There is mixed evidence on racial disparities; some indication that Black students were housed less often



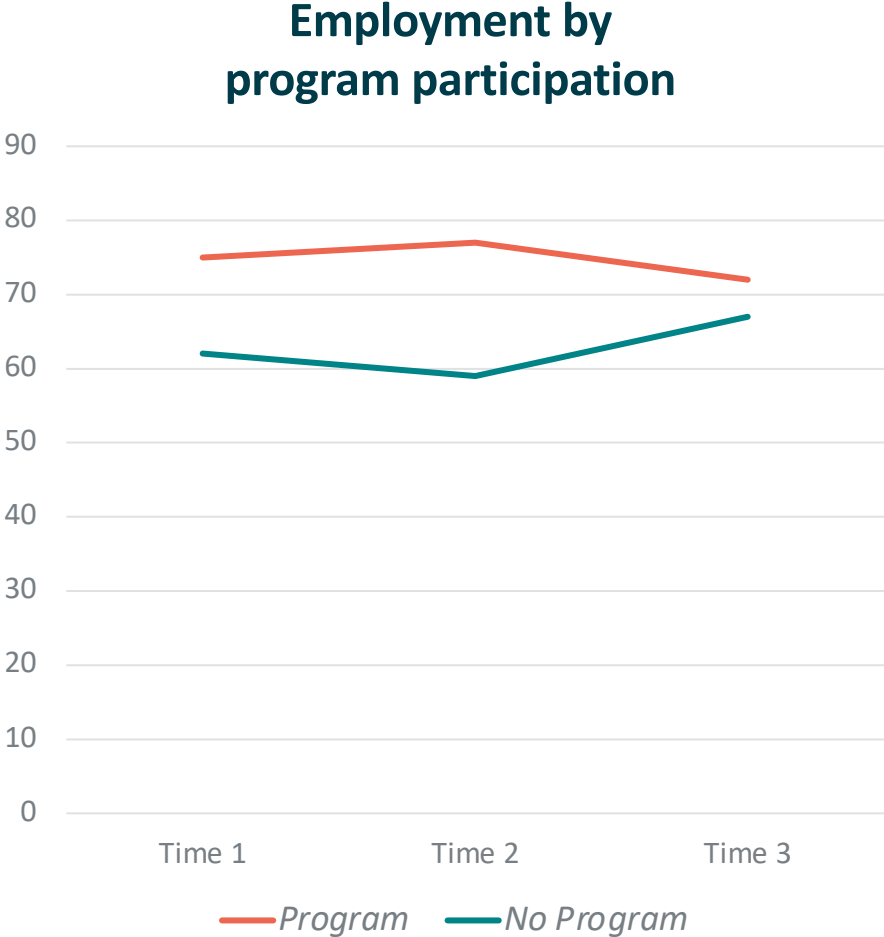
Program participation improved students' well-being, even if they weren't housed

- More likely to obtain emergency housing services (e.g., motels)
- More likely to get support from TANF and SNAP
- More likely to be food secure



Program participation improved students' well-being, even if they weren't housed

- More likely to secure employment
- Mixed evidence on use of health services
- Some possible decline in felonies, arrests, charges

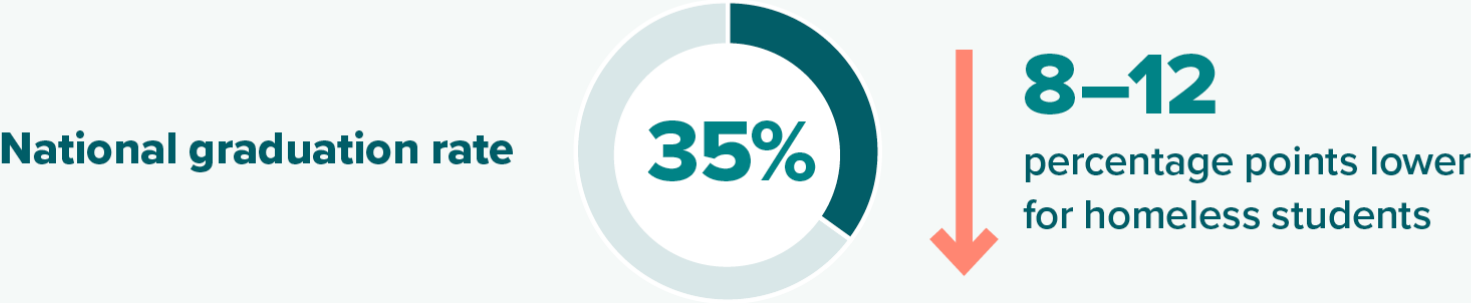
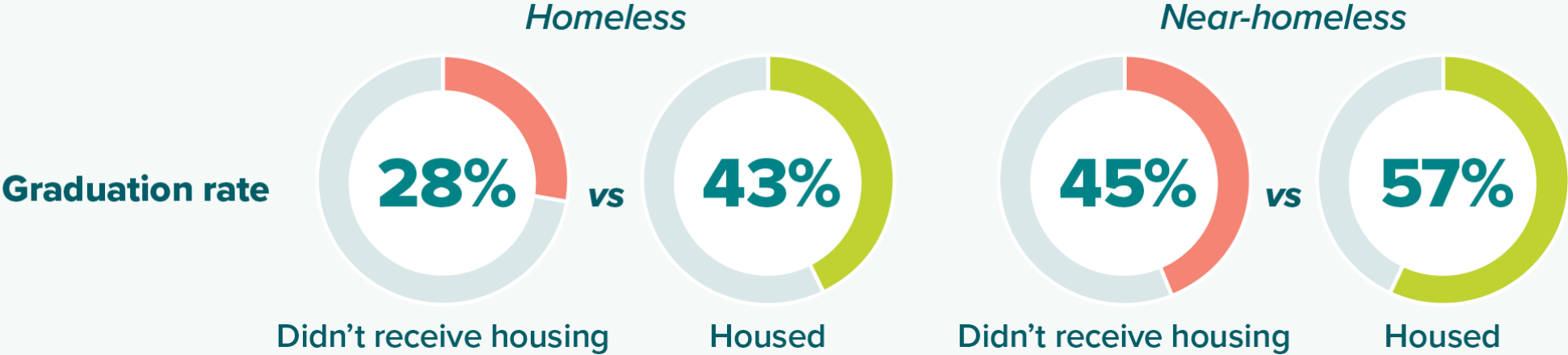


No clear program impacts on college outcomes

- Upward trends over time for homeless students
- No clear improvements for near-homeless students in credits earned, grades, or graduation levels
- **This does *not* mean that the program targeted students who are unlikely to succeed.** The vast majority (2/3) did well in college!



Housed students had much higher graduation rates



Limitations

- Small sample of students
- A single, unevenly implemented program
- Severe housing shortage in the community
- Pandemic may have impacted the results
- With more time to finish school, it's possible even more students will succeed



Lessons learned

- Homeless and housing-insecure students have plenty of potential to succeed in college—and when housed, graduation rates are much higher
- Both housing and navigational support hold promise for improving students' financial stability, health, and well-being
 - Housing is a good way to address food insecurity
 - It is possible to greatly increase the use of SNAP and TANF among students



Lessons learned

- Connecting students with housing requires more than simply offering vouchers
 - Place-based housing may be more effective
 - Housing + support is likely important
- Basic needs partnerships need resources, time, attention, and strong MOUs

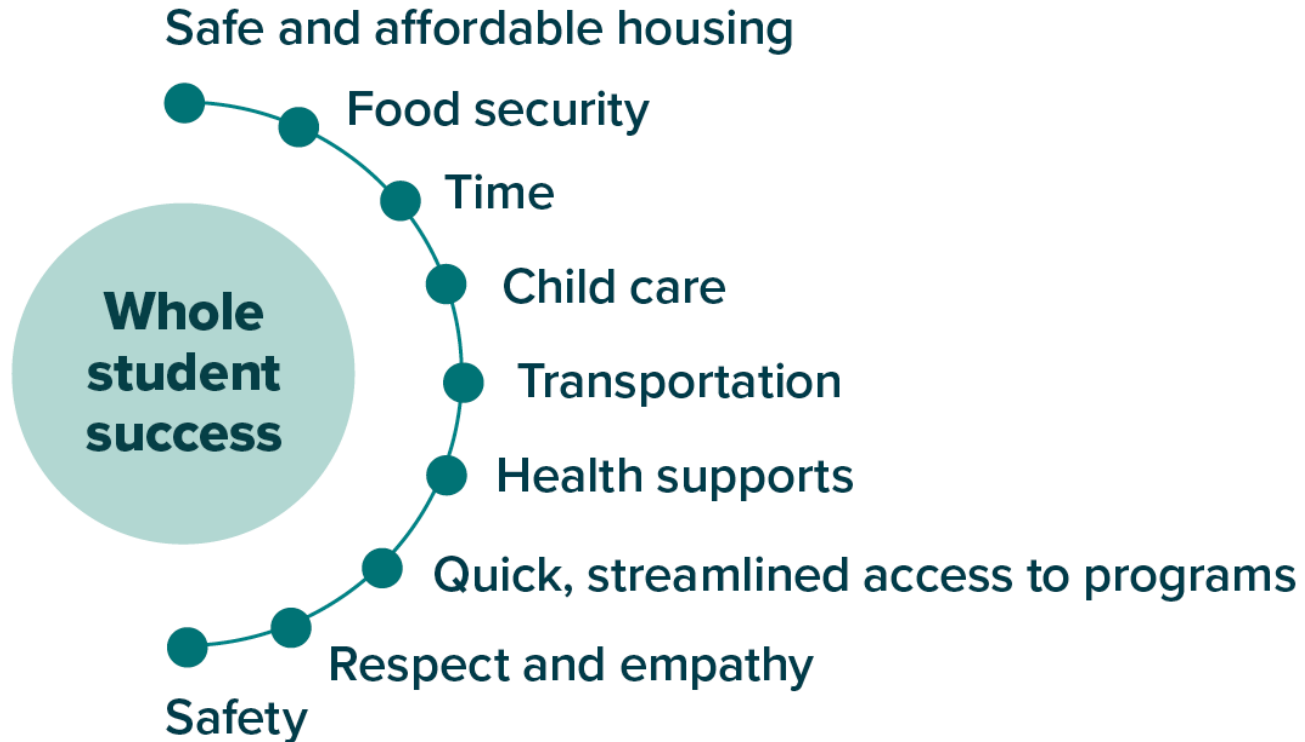


Lessons learned

- Evaluation is critical:
 - Simply observing high rates of academic success doesn't mean the program *caused* the outcomes
 - Evaluation may surface other student benefits
 - It's critical to avoid premature conclusions on efficacy
- Integrated statewide data systems are enormously helpful for seeing how programs affect the whole student



Facilitating whole student success



- What would it look like if we understood our role as professors, staff members, and administrators in this way?
- What if this were the lens for examining the return on investment for community colleges?

Panelists



Ivan Harrell
President, Tacoma
Community College



Sheila Edwards Lange
Chancellor, University of
Washington Tacoma



Christine Baker-Smith
Director of Research,
National League of Cities



Thank you!

Contact

Sara Goldrick-Rab | sara.goldrick-rab_sf@ednw.org



educationnorthwest.org



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