INVISIBLE IDENTITY

HOMELESS STUDENTS

Professor Stephanie Block
COLLEGE IS STRESSFUL

WHAT STRESSES YOU OUT?
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE STRESSED?
Homeless Students
Where do you go during winter break?
Steep dropout rates exist among homeless college students around the cold winter break
Who is homeless?

- Alternating nights at friends couches and college common areas?
- Confusion in definition results in students unaware that they are eligible for federal or university aid
- Homeless students struggle from a lack of information/guidance about resources to help them succeed (Christian, 2012)
Estimated Figures

- Estimated numbers of young adults (ages 18-24) who experience an episode of homelessness each year range from approximately 750,000 to 2 million.
STIGMA

The stigma of homelessness contributes to students not wanting to identify
- Not sure who to trust
- Unaware of support services
Young adults “aging out” of the foster care system are especially vulnerable to homelessness. One study found that nearly one quarter of emancipated youth had been homeless 2–4 years after leaving foster care (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2004)
A Los Angeles County study estimated “approximately 45% of the youth who ‘age out’ of the foster care system each year will either be emancipated to the streets, that is directly into homelessness, or will have such unstable plans that they are likely to be homeless in a very short time.” (Shelter Partnership 1997)
Disparities

Victims of physical or sexual abuse, as well as racial and sexual minorities, are also over-represented among the homeless adolescent population (Durham 2003)
Colleges are also an unreliable source for the number of homeless students because there is no ‘Homeless’ option on forms such as FAFSA
Some universities target homeless students to “fleece them off financial aid money”

Business Week
The following slides list challenges and potential solutions identified by anonymous homeless students at UML.
Access to Services

With no parental guide, it may feel overwhelming for someone to navigate solo

Potential Solution

Student Mentor Service
Learning to navigate the web

The University has a ton of services and supports.. finding them can be overwhelming

Potential Solution

A small packet on exploring the University's site
CHALLENGES

Dining Hall hours

Aramark provides limited access to food service hours. This is difficult when you have a lot on your plate and miss food service hours (especially on weekends)
A place to rest

“I know this sounds crazy, but sometimes you just want to rest (sleep) between classes... and when you're homeless you may not have a place to do that. One of the smaller rooms in Mahoney Basement count become a small lounge with comfy seats. The current student lounges are very public; it is embarrassing to rest there sometimes.”
CHALLENGES

Lack of bonds between people on campus

“Encouraging people to make friends in classes or in your majors... very basic principle that goes a long way. You can learn a lot of hidden passages from a friend.”
Money is always a challenge

“ I don't really condone entitlement funds; finding ways to earn money is more valuable. A list of local places that hire college students, or a list of places where you can find these advertisements may be good.”
Sequence of success

“When do I find my first internship? What kind of job should I be working in college? What time of experience and when? Ways of bulking up your resume are important for finding a job upon graduation. College is a busy time where you are creating your future... take advantage of all the opportunities here.”
Other University Solutions

- Guardian Scholars Program
- UCLA
  - BruINTENT
  - Craigslist like list of places to crash
- NPR
Last year, Washington Post reporter Petula Dvorak chronicled the story of two homeless D.C.-area students, Ronnell Wilson and Miracle Lewis. Lewis - in her late twenties - had worked as a flight attendant for United Airlines, but decided to go back to school after mass layoffs in 2008. She got a scholarship to study business and took temp jobs to make ends meet. But when temp work "dried up," she found herself living in the Calvary Women's Shelter in Northwest Washington, D.C.

Wilson - also in his twenties - was a forklift operator before he decided to go back to college. He took classes at the University of the District of Columbia during the day, and worked at California Pizza Kitchen at night. Then he got laid off and ended up homeless. Wilson continued to take classes, but had to reorganize his schedule to make sure he could get to the shelter on time to get a place to sleep.

The New York Times similarly reported the story of 22-year-old Fallon Coffer, a homeless college student who worked as a taxi dispatcher at night, and went to class during the day, taking care of her young son in-between.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Next steps
THANK YOU!!

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