Rikiesha Pierce: How can I focus on this paper that I have to write for my class, you know, when we don't have any heat and there's no hot water in the house? It just was not a ... It wasn't an environment in which I able to just really be a student and really be successful.

Speaker 2: I have had students come up and just ask, "Is there a place where I can get some food? I haven't gotten to eat anything today." And so, just if I have that knowledge and I know where to send them so that they can get that food so that they're not on campus hungry, then that would make me feel like, yeah, I really accomplished something.

Liesel Reinhart: Welcome to The Magic Mountie Podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Liesel Reinhart: I'm gonna keep this intro really short today. We've got a jam-packed episode. We sat in for a 2018 Fall Flex Day presentation on basic needs and securities among students. You're gonna find out what that is. You're gonna hear some data that will blow you away. The issues are huge, but so are the resources. I could not believe what I can do right now to help my students.

Liesel Reinhart: We will also hear from former Mt. SAC students, Rikiesha Pierce and Michael DeCarbo who took time out of their currently very busy and successful lives to recount a time when they were students at Mt. SAC and were struggling with some of the issues we're discussing today. Please enjoy.

Koji : Well, we really thank you for joining us today for our presentation: Developing a Cross-Campus Approach to Addressing Basic Needs and Securities at Mount San Antonio College.

Koji : Kind of our guinea pig, this is our test run. We hope this is informative for you, we'll go over some objectives and goals for this presentation, but before doing so, my name is Koji Uesugi, Dean at Student Services, and co-chair of the Homeless and Basic Resources Committee.

Eric : Good morning. My name is Eric Lara, I am the Associate Dean for Student Success and Equity. I'm also a co-chair for the Student Equity Committee.

Pauline : Hello, my name is Pauline Swartz and I'm a librarian here at Mt. SAC, and I'm the co-chair of the Homelessness and Basic Resources Committee.

Koji : Right, Oh, hi! Thank you.

Koji : Before we even get started, thank you. Today's goals:

Koji : 1. To understand the problem: Basic Needs and Securities. How many of you have heard of this term, "basic needs and securities?" Okay, some of you. "Food insecurities?" Okay. "Housing insecurities?" Okay. "Homelessness?" Okay. So all those fall under this category, and others. So we'll get into a definition of what those are. You're going to be hearing more about this and we're going to be citing findings from recent studies.

Koji : 2. Share ways at Mount San Antonio College, Mt. SAC, how we're beginning to address these basic needs and security needs on campus.

Koji : And then finally, we're looking to you. So, we want to generate ideas today to help solve this issue on campus. We may not be able to address everything all at once, it is going to take some time. But we don't have all the answers, so we're looking to you.

Eric : So kind of the framing question that we have for today's presentation, "What do you think our students bring with them to the college setting?"

Eric : We want you to think about this question. We want you to think about this as you're listening to the presentation, as we're going through. Many of our students are afraid to ask for help, many of our students are afraid to ask faculty or staff for resources on campus, so they don't know what resources we have, what we have and what we don't have. So as we go through today, hopefully, you'll be able to have a better understanding of what we're doing currently, what we plan on doing in the future, and how to answer this question.

Pauline : We're going to start with trying to understand a little bit about the scope of the problem, and we know a lot about K-12, hunger and homelessness in K-12. There's been a lot of studies about that and it's led to programs like free lunch, free breakfast, and even free supper. And what hasn't been happening in until quite recently are studies, similar studies, done amongst college students. So we're going to share with you some recent studies.

Pauline : One of the main studies is from a group called the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, so if you haven't heard of that before, it's a center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and they've been studying issues about homelessness and food insecurities amongst college students since 2008, and there's a person there named Sara Goldrick-Rab, you might hear about her in the news or she's on the daily show, things like that. So you might hear her name and she's at a temple university, she's affiliated with this particular institution. And we're gonna go over a little bit about the HOPE Lab study, and few other studies that have been done.

Pauline : But before we do that, let's look at some definitions. And when we're talking about food insecurity, we're talking about limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. The HOPE Lab uses the same definition that the USDA uses, which is a little bit easy to understand, and that is, "If you are food secure, you have enough food to have a healthy life." So if you're food insecure, you don't have enough food to live a healthy life. So, that's putting it in a nutshell.

Pauline : The next definition we have is homelessness. And in these studies when we're talking about homelessness, we're talking about a person without a place to live. Often residing in a shelter, an automobile, an abandoned building, or outside. So, someplace not meant for living. Now homelessness falls under an umbrella term that's broader, housing insecurity. It means lot of different things, but it can be a broad set of challenges such as you can't pay your bills, your rent, your utilities.

Pauline : So we're looking at three studies now, we have a national study from the HOPE Lab and it was conducted across the country. What we're looking at are the numbers specifically from community college students. There were 23,000 respondents to this survey, just from community college students, and they found that those respondents, 42% of them said that they had experienced food insecurity. That's 42% of them said they didn't have enough food to live a healthy life. The LACCD study, that's Los Angeles Community College District, they did a study in collaboration with the HOPE Lab, and they found that 68% of their students who answered the survey said that they didn't have enough food to live a healthy life. And Mt. SAC did a study, it was actually Phi Theta Kappa, the students did the study, and they found that 30% of students who answered their survey said that they were food insecure or didn't have enough food to live a healthy life.

Pauline : So onto housing and security, 46% nationally said that they had experienced some form of housing insecurity. That's almost half, and 55% of students in LACCD said the same. And then we look at homelessness, 12% nationally said that they had experienced some form of homelessness, nationally, community college students. 19% in LACCD, and 18% of student at Mt. SAC who answered the survey said that they had experienced some form of homelessness.

Pauline : So when we look at some common causes of homelessness, this was done by the HOPE Lab, they found that 6% had been thrown out of their homes, 21% felt unsafe in their homes, 33% had difficulty paying rent or mortgage, 40% had a conflict or problem with someone they lived with, and 58% had some other problem. And a lot of studies have been done more recently about the impact that lack of food and housing can have on a college student's life and education, and what they've found is that basic needs and securities can lead to greater levels of stress, anxiety, unhealthy eating, chronic illness, it can inhibit a student's sense of belonging, it can increase a student's intention to drop out, and it's correlated with lower grades. Of the students to reported receiving Ds and Fs, more than half were food or housing insecure.

Pauline : So what the HOPE Lab did, they compared students who had these challenges and how they spent their time with students who didn't have these challenges and how they spent their time, and they found that students who had these food and housing insecurities, they worked more often and they had later shifts. They spent more time taking care of their children or other family members, they spent less time sleeping and less time on leisure activities, but they spent a similar amount of time as other students attending their classes and doing their homework. So, how do we help them?

Pauline : The first step is to recognize if a student needs help. So we're going to be asking you today to share out if you have experienced working with students in this way, how do you now recognize when students are experiencing these problems?

Speaker 7: I worked as a custodian and I see a gentleman, well a young guy, and by my building and he seems to have been sleeping in there, but I see him recently in like, once every day and every night. I don't know what his insecurities or what he's, you know, going through, what he's going through, but he seems to be a homeless young adult.

Pauline : So one thing that we want to keep in mind is that sometimes it's hard to tell, sometimes they want to blend in. This is their identity on campus as a student so it might be hard to tell.

Liesel Reinhart: Several years ago, before we did the remodel of building 26, this is early in my career, there was a kid and he was on the speech and debate team ...

Michael DeCarbo: My name is Michael DeCarbo and I was not a great student. I did okay the first year and then started working more and doing less school. I had just gotten in a motorcycle accident so I was living with my folks and my father and I had gotten into a very final and large conflict and as a result I was no longer welcome to stay in their house. And for three months I floated between, I was couch surfing some places and I was living in the squad room at Mt. SAC. The squad room was a core room off to the side of one of the larger rooms, and like an office, and we had a couch in there, I had a desk with a can opener and filled with canned beans. And I would shower down in the gym and for about three months, not typically on the weekends, but usually you know, Monday through Thursday I was sleeping in the squad room.

Michael DeCarbo: I mean, I can't imagine that people didn't know. The custodians finally said they couldn't let me stay there anymore. I thought I was slick, but probably there were other people looking the other way, in retrospect. Well had I not been able to follow through competing, getting my degree, which then led to the open invitation to my four-year transfer, 'cause I wasn't the greatest of grades at that point, I can't tell you what would happen but most likely I would have settled for a job in the restaurant and be a restaurant manager I would imagine, something along those lines. I don't know, or it could have continued to spiral further, because had I not had my education and the opportunities that presented, I would not have been able to undo some of the things that were done to me so that I could live a happier and more productive life.

Liesel Reinhart: He went on to get his degree, his bachelor's degree and then his master's degree and now he's a full time professor of communication down at Rancho Santiago Canyon College, even though I'm sure it's a policy no one would officially want us to do, but what a difference that made not just for him, but for all his students over the years.

Eric : Some of the things that we've done already through equity funding, we have the opportunity to help students in various ways. Some of the ways that we've helped students when it comes to basic need, food insecurities, housing insecurities, or monetary, is we do provide free textbooks to our students. Many of our programs, for example, The Pride Center, DREAM Program, Aspire, Arise, our REACH program which is for foster youth, they all have equity funding to purchase textbooks.

Eric : Through my office, and through my administrative assistant, Catherine Parks, we also have a textbook loan program where it's no questions asked, a student just comes to talk to myself, or to Catherine, and bring their syllabus, bring the schedule of classes and say that, "I need help, support, in purchasing textbooks." We will purchase it for them, ti's about a 24 hour turnaround time. It's a loan program so we just ask that they bring it back at the end of the semester and they'll be eligible to receive it again the following semester.

Eric : We've also purchased food vouchers to give out. So at the moment, we've had them for about a year, it hasn't been that well publicized yet only because we're still in inception. We're still trying to figure out how to roll them out to the campus, the best way to track these, but we are continuing to purchase them and right now they are run through my office, run through my administrative assistant, Catherine Parks. Her email is CParks, P-A-R-K-S, the number three, @MtSAC.edu, mine is ELara, L-A-R-A, the number six @MtSAC.edu.

Eric : So at the moment those are the two locations where you can get the cards. We have Jack in the Box, Subway, Sodexo, those are all $10 each. We have Vons, Albertsons, that is $20, and we have Chevron gas cards for $25. In the next few months I hope to purchase Target gift certificates as well. Cardenas Market as well for markets on the east, I believe those are the other two that are coming down in the next few months.

Eric : For these, at the moment, the way we run them, it is a faculty or staff that we ask to come pick them up. Again, no questions asked. You all are the ones that are talking to these students. You see a student in need, or they come up to you, they confide in you, they work with you, you find out that they're living in their car or that they haven't eaten in a day, two, three days, whatever it may be. We don't need to know that. All we need to know is, "Hey Eric, I need two Jack in the Box cards." "Hey Eric, I need a Chevron gas card." No problem. All you need to do is come with a student name, A- number, come to our office, you sign off on the card and then we give you the card and you give it to the student.

Eric : This way we don't have the student come to us, we don't want them to feel embarrassed or ashamed, or tell you the story and then you tell them, "Oh go talk to Eric, go tell him your story." They don't know who I am, they don't know who Catherine Parks is. So we don't want that to happen. If you assist a student to come to our office, all we ask is that you come with them or you send a faculty or staff with them. We don't want the students showing up on their own. Even though we will support them, what we've noticed is if you send them to our office they may never show up because of the embarrassment.

Koji : Last fall we launched the Homelessness and Basic Resources Committee in response to the growing need for food insecurities, housing insecurities, transportation, all these other basic needs as we began hearing reports from faculty, staff, students themselves, we felt that we needed to somehow have a group that's beginning to research this and make recommendations. So this committee was formed in the fall, it's composed of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. We convene twice a month and basically we're trying to learn, ourselves. There's just a lot of information out there that we're not experts in, so we're trying to learn, ourselves. And based on what we learn and what we're hearing from students and the needs on campus, putting into place a different resources to begin addressing some of these needs.

Rikiesha Pierce: I came from a home that was riddled with a lot of dysfunction and drug abuse and you know, even when I was you know, living with my parents, you know, my mother was unemployed and my stepfather wasn't employed and there would be times where we'd have no heat in the house. You know, where there's not enough food to go around, and in that kind of environment a lot of hostility grew. It was a lot of ... tension is common.

Rikiesha Pierce: So I was, I guess, somewhat I kinda ran away from home when I was 19 and that was right at the beginning of my time at Mt. SAC, so I was living kind of place to place to place, and there would be days where I would just be on campus because I knew that you know, I didn't necessarily have any food at home, but if I was in the career center I could go sit in the office with one of the counselors and you know, they had snacks in their desk or, you know, something like that.

Rikiesha Pierce: That uncertainty around you know, whether or not I was going to eat, you know, was something that was really real. I didn't have any other support system outside of what was around me at the campus at that time in my life.

Liesel Reinhart: How did you get by with regard to food and housing? How did you navigate that on your own?

Rikiesha Pierce: Well, so that was the tricky part. Initially I ended up living with a friend who I met while I was a student at Mt. SAC, but when I was staying at her house, you know, there were a lot of obviously other challenges that I did not anticipate having to overcome. Just specifically, you know, with regard to her family dysfunction, you know? Her mom was a recovering crack addict and she slept like, during the daytime and she would be up all throughout the night. A lot of chaos in that house, and I slept in the living room on a mattress with two other people who were kind of staying there, so it was really interesting. It was a really interesting experience for me.

Rikiesha Pierce: When things would get really tight, you know, I would, I mean, kind of embarrassing to say but I would kind of just live off of snacks throughout the day that I would you know, come across while I was in different campus offices and things like that.

Liesel Reinhart: Did you have any other issues when you got to USC? With housing or food?

Rikiesha Pierce: Absolutely I did. Absolutely I did. In the summer of 2011 I lost a roommate and these are, in retrospect, these are probably you know, challenges that anyone would experience in a lifetime, you know, any type of transition or change, but you know, for me they became like, very traumatic, life jolting, you know, experiences. But at any rate, I had a roommate my first year at USC and so that was okay then, but she left kind of in the middle of our lease and I couldn't afford to pay the rent in the apartment by myself, so I had no choice but to leave our apartment, but I didn't have an alternative place to stay.

Rikiesha Pierce: So you know, kind of at that same time I ended up getting in a car accident, now I no longer had transportation and I ended up staying with a friend inside of her dorm and sleeping on a beanbag for about six weeks in an apartment that was really close to campus, like walking distance, so I could still reach all my classes and things like that. But that, for me, was kind of when I hit rock bottom at USC, and it was just a very difficult time for me psychologically. So it certainly wasn't like things were out of the woods once I transferred.

Rikiesha Pierce: I mean, I can say the benefit for me having gone to community college was that when that happened to me I knew that there had to be some support system, support services on campus for students in crisis, which I was really fortunate to have been able to receive, because you know, had I not known of those things, you know, through my experience at Mt. SAC then I really probably could have taken a dark turn at that point.

Rikiesha Pierce: I graduated magna cum laude and I was recruited by an organization called Teach For America to support disadvantaged school districts around the country, and I was placed in the Bronx, New York, and I worked for five years as a special education teacher in South Bronx.

Koji : Food insecurities, these are students who may be in your, in the classrooms, coming to your centers, your services, your offices, on campus, and they simply don't have enough to eat. CalFresh is basically California's version of the federally funded SNAP program. Basically, funding to help folks purchase healthy foods and cook meals. In California those who qualify can get up to $192 a month if they're cooking for themselves. And if they're cooking for others, and there's a set of criteria in how they define this, they can receive additional funds so they can cook for others in their household.

Koji : So if you hear of CalFresh, and it used to be called the food stamp program, so that's probably a more familiar term. They went away from this term several years ago, and it's called CalFresh. Those who are on CalFresh receive an electronic benefit transfer card, EBT for short. So you may have seen at some of the restaurants, fast food, even supermarkets that say, "We Accept EBTs", so that's what they are. And it looks like basically a debit card, so that's how it's used. Most supermarkets accept EBTs so this is more of a longterm approach to serving this need. Food vouchers are great because students just need something, they just need to put something in their stomach just to get through that day, maybe that night. So we definitely need to keep that going. But for those who qualify for CalFresh, that's the longer term approach.

Koji : California is making a push to really increase the number of individuals on CalFresh because, quite frankly, we're one of the lowest in the nation, and there could be a lot of different reasons for this, but one of them, I would gather, is because it's a very complicated process to apply for CalFresh. It typically takes a month, it could take up to a month, it's a 30 page form. It's done electronically for the most part, so you do need internet access. There is a paper version, but they really want to go the electronic route, but even if you have access to this it can be difficult navigating this. There is a interview that takes place, it can be done by phone, but there is a lot to this. So you know, folks may start this but they may not go through with this.

Koji Uesugi: So on our campus we started promoting CalFresh and we did a Mountie Fresh Day in April, so it was a big resource fair we had on campus and we basically promoted CalFresh. We also had provided over 120 grocery bags full of fresh food items and nonperishable items for students who applied for CalFresh. We also made it a partnership with our local Department of Social Services, so as you can see here on the grocery bag, they will begin coming here twice a month, eligibility workers will be coming from LA County to help students apply for CalFresh. And so between 12 and 4 on Mondays in the student health center annex building in 9E, we'll have eligibility workers there to help students, and they will also be here on the food pantry days, so which is the next one.

Koji : In May, we started a food pantry. This is mobile food pantry, we don't have a standalone pantry that's opened during the week. In partnership with Sowing Seeds For Life, which is a local nonprofit in La Verne, they receive donations from the LA Food Bank, and they drop off those items on our campus, and with student volunteers, staff volunteers, we pack our grocery bags full of these nonperishable food items as well as paper products like toilet paper or diapers, other things, and redistribute these items to students in need. We launched this in May, it was kind of our soft opening, we didn't advertise much, but we distributed close to 350 bags that day. Our next one will be coming up next month, September 11th, Tuesday. It's going to be on the second Tuesdays of every month from 11 to 1, in front of the student life center, the patio area. Direct students there if you feel that they can benefit from this and we'll be providing the nonperishable food items there. And we will also have CalFresh Eligibility workers there as well, so students could get their grocery bags and also apply for CalFresh.

Eric : One thing that started about a year ago, it's actually a state mandate, is that we have open shower access open to any and all of our students on campus. Monday through Friday, 7:30 to 4:30 in the building three gym, shower access is available to all students. We don't provide any towels or shampoo or soap or anything like that, it's just the stall and the water, but it is open and accessible to all students.

Eric : Housing referrals, at the moment, again we don't have a central office or central point of contact for any of these, but through our REACH program, our foster youth program, Jezze, who's our coordinator, and Rigo who's a program specialist, they've been helping students not only with CalFresh application assistance, but also with housing referrals. And this could be emergency housing, same day 24 hour housing, it could be referral to local shelters, or it's also referral to more of a longer term 30, 60 day apartments. They have local connections in the local San Gabriel Valley area, specifically east San Gabriel Valley to help students.

Eric : While it's not the official campus contact, if you do need some sort of assistance when it comes to housing referrals or housing insecurity, please do send the student to the REACH office, for now.

Koji : And something that a student I met with a few weeks ago told me, was that, "We just want to be treated with dignity." And just think about that, "We want to be treated with dignity, we just feel that we should have access to the basics and not be treated like we don't belong here." These are students who are really, they're trying to make it. They've come to Mt. SAC as a resource for their future, but they have additional challenges and they feel that if we're saying, "Hey, the shower's available. Hey, if you go here you can get food, or if you go here ... " Then they should be able to do that without having to fight for those things. That was a very powerful statement by that student, so something that I think is good for all of us to keep in mind.

Pauline : Okay, so we're going to do a brainstorming activity on what we can do for our students. [crosstalk 00:26:24]

Speaker 8: They just can't make it.

Pauline Swartz: 'Cause of bills and ...

Speaker 8: Yeah, I mean I, actually, I'm gonna confess. I had, my daughter's in college, and her first year was very challenging for us and towards the end of the month we had to do a lot of creative budgeting and stuff like that, and there were times that she didn't even want, I'm her mom! She didn't want to admit to me, "Mom, I ran out of money and I'm hungry." So I feel like we see what's going on at campus. I mean, I see these individuals that I feel like they need help, but like you were saying-

Speaker 10: How do you-

Speaker 8: How do you approach it? How do you, do you assume that they need help? And that's not really, that's not really giving them dignity.

Speaker 10: Right. And it isn't, because then how do you say-

Pauline Swartz: Do you need some help? I mean ...

Speaker 8: I, how do you say it?

Speaker 10: I don't know.

Koji : So, we're just going to go around and touch on, maybe you can highlight some of the things that you feel are the most important ideas, suggestions, that came from your discussions?

Speaker 11: There are sometimes properties that get endowed to Mt. SAC from local people who don't have anybody else to will that property to, could Mt. SAC use those properties as possible home situations for students that are homeless?

Speaker 12: Could we have like a monthly, okay it's a competition, anybody can enter, we're going to grade you on how nutritious is divided by how much money you spent on it. So good, cheap food and basically what we're doing is having a big picnic for anybody that wants to show up.

Speaker 12: Can we normalize it? Keep the dignity?

Eric : We want to come back to the initial question which was, "What do you think our students bring with them to the college setting?" Yell it out, raise your hand ...

Speaker 13: Diversity.

Eric : Diversity.

Speaker 13: Diversity of everything.

Eric : Diversity of everything.

Speaker 13: Yeah.

Eric : Perfect.

Speaker 14: Perseverance.

Eric : Perseverance! Okay. What else?

Speaker 15: Support.

Eric : Support. Okay. What are some things that they bring that they may not see as they walk through the campus? That we may not realize or think about?

Speaker 16: Insecurities.

Eric : Insecurities.

Speaker 16: Stress.

Eric : Stress.

Speaker 17: Funding.

Eric : Funding. Absolutely.

Speaker 18: Family responsibilities.

Eric : Family responsibilities. So on the stress, family responsibilities, many of our students are working full-time, or they're working the graveyard shift and they have an 8 AM class. They have to drop off their siblings, or their own kids at school at 7:30, 8:00, 8:45, and have to get to that 9:00 class. So just because they may be yawning in class, or falling asleep, or leaving early, or arriving late, doesn't mean that they're not engaged, doesn't mean that they don't care. There are other factors that we don't see. There are other factors that we don't know.

Rikiesha Pierce: If you want to have a successful population of students, then you need to provide those supports and Mt. SAC is a gigantic institution. There should be some sort of campus housing that's available, and you know, in those instances because I really, I firmly believe that community college is place where life changing work happens. You know, that's where people come and change their lives, and so as an institution we need to provide every fundamental support to ensure that that can happen.

Michael DeCarbo: I'm very biased, right? I'm almost a socialist. I think that those that have should give to those that don't so that we as a society can benefit, but what's our obligation to our students? Well if our mission is to help them, which I'm assuming most community colleges' missions are to help our students achieve an education, and if they're hungry or worried about where they're going to sleep that night, then they're not going to be able to get their education. So, I think at some level we should provide, if we have the resources and ability. For instance, at Santiago we're going into our third year of having a food bank and it's a very successful program. Most people assume because we're up in the hills of Orange, we wouldn't have that need, but there's plenty of need so I think it's a mistake for people to think that students aren't in need and just, you know, if they can get into college that they're able to succeed through college.

Liesel Reinhart: I know you're also collecting data so that we can find out, really, how big the need is. So how can we help to participate in this big survey you're doing?

Koji : Great, thanks for asking that question. We are really excited that this fall we're going to be a part of a national study, which is sponsored by The HOPE Center for College, Community, and Justice. Students will be receiving up to four emails on a weekly basis to remind them to participate in this very important study on basic needs and securities and we hope to gather data from the surveys, we hope students will participate. There is a $100 incentive for those who do participate and are entered into a drawing. We hope that that will help students incentive the survey, but more importantly we hope that students will participate because they're contributing to a very important study that will help not only our Mt. SAC students, but students at the other community colleges in the state as well as nationwide. These kinds of data are critical to gather the kind of resources that we need to address this. Students shouldn't have to go hungry, students shouldn't have to worry about where are they going to sleep that night as they're trying to concentrate on being successful in school.

Liesel Reinhart: Hey! Thanks so much for joining us for The Magic Mountie Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments. So please engage with our community. Download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, RateMyProfessor, we're there! And we want you to be back with us next week. Remember any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.