**PART 1: Spring Flex Day Keynote 2021: Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, Addressing Students' Basic Needs with a Culture of Caring During the Pandemic**

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

The book scarcity explains what happens cognitively when you don't have enough money. Things actually becomes like a pressure on your brain. It crowds out the kinds of long-term thinking that we want our students to be able to engage in. It makes it harder to plan for the future. In fact, it makes it harder to also be optimistic and hopeful, something that psychology shows is important for resilience and survival.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm Sun Ezzell. You're listening to The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5:

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major. English major.

Christina Barsi:

From transforming part-time into full-time...

Speaker 6:

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 7:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

This is The Magic Mountie Podcast. In case you missed Spring Flex Day 2021, we're featuring the keynote speaker, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab. She is a Professor of Sociology and Medicine at Temple University, President and Founder of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, and author of Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream. Dr. Goldrick-Rab's research on the basic needs among college students sparked the hashtag RealCollege movement, legislation addressing food and housing insecurity and a growing understanding of and support for meeting students' basic needs at colleges across the country. In this part one segment, Dr. Goldrick-Rab outlines the misnomers we as institutes have regarding expectations of students and the difficulties they face as they aim for completion. Make sure to stay tuned next week for the outline of solutions in part two. Enjoy.

Koji Useugi:

Well, good morning and welcome to the 2021 Spring Semester Flex Day. It is so wonderful to have so many of our Mt. SAC colleagues. I see nearly 425 of us here today as we prepare for the new term. My name is Koji Useugi, Dean of Student Services and Co-chair of the Basic Needs Committee. I'm here today with-

Pauline Swartz:

Pauline Swartz, Faculty in the library and Co-chair of the Basic Needs Committee. We're very excited and truly honored to introduce our Flex Day keynote speaker, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab is a Professor of Sociology and Medicine at Temple University, and President and Founder of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice in Philadelphia. She's also the Chief Strategy Officer for Emergency Aid at Edquity, a student financial success and emergency aid company. She founded Believe in Students, a non-profit distributing emergency aid. Sara's innovative research on college students' basic needs sparked the national hashtag RealCollege movement, a legislation to address food and housing insecurity. She's a Carnegie Fellow and is ranked in the top 10 among education scholars by Education Week.

Pauline Swartz:

She's been named one of the top 50 people shaping American politics. She is the author of the award-winning book, Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream. She's the creator of the policy reports, Transforming America's Community Colleges and Redefining College Affordability, which helped shape President Obama's Higher Education Agenda.

Koji Useugi:

As you know, Pauline, we first learned of Sara's groundbreaking research on basic needs and security in early 2018 during our work with the Basic Needs Committee. That fall, we were selected to participate in the Hope Center's hashtag RealCollege survey. When we learn from our students about their basic needs it was both sobering and a source of inspiration for us to increase Mt. SAC's response to students with basic needs. While we made some progress to develop basic needs resources for our students over the years, the tremendous challenges brought on by the pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism have only further impacted our most vulnerable students. In fact, Sara spoke about this powerfully in her interview with the Carnegie Corporation of New York in May 2020 when she stated, "Students don't always drop out from their institution's lack of trying. They drop out because the forces of racism and poverty around them are such a strong pull that the institution's efforts are often no match for those forces."

Koji Useugi:

For these reasons, understanding the real-world impact of basic needs and security for many of our students is a critical part of the student equity work that many colleges, including ours are engaged in. We are fortunate to have a social justice champion like Sara, leading the critical work of the Hope Center to keep these issues front and center for all of us in higher education. Please help us in welcoming Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab with our warm virtual Mt. SAC welcome from wherever you're joining us today, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Thanks, Koji. Thanks so much. I do want to say thanks again to Mt. SAC for having me and for being part of the RealCollege California initiative. I hope that those of you who are not familiar with it, get to know the work that we are doing with you. It is giving your team and those of you working on basic needs security, it's giving them some more support, frankly, some more technical assistance, more advice, sometimes from the latest evidence that isn't even out there in the public eye yet. That's helping to keep Mt. SAC on the cutting edge of innovative practice and also helping you to stay up with changing trends and conditions for your students. I'm going to be talking today about basic needs in the context of the pandemic. Now, it really is kind of astonishing to me that we are coming up on the one-year anniversary of this pandemic. In many ways, the pandemic and its onset lifted up and made visible a set of issues and concerns that were not new to community colleges around the country were nonetheless new to many members of the public.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

For example, when people saw a headline like when colleges shut down, some students have nowhere to go. This was in many ways a wake up call to those who haven't considered that not every student has two wealthy parents who are able to house them during their so-called breaks from school. That not everyone on spring break flies off to Cancun or somewhere else. These were the headlines and we just touched the tip of the iceberg of this problem. The problem is substantial and it stems from the fact that we have disregarded students as human beings in higher education for a very long time. Their humanity in many ways has been put to the side. It has been decried as a non-academic issue, something that happens outside of the classroom, but this just simply isn't true. Students are humans first. I want to say, as a fellow faculty member to all of you today, faculty are also humans first, so are staff members, so are administrators.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

The fact is that we have a lot of basic human needs that affect the work that we do and how we learn, and when we overlook those things, we get the outcomes that we don't want to see. Things like students leaving college, things like burnout and so on. Let's take a step back and let's think first about where this crisis of basic needs and security is coming from. Now, I call the contributing factors to this crisis the new economics of college. I outlined those extensively in my book, Paying the Price, which came out in 2016, obviously, before the pandemic. I've come to think that in fact, well, it was important to talk about those new economics at that time to contrast them with the way things used to be. It's now important to also acknowledge the pandemic economics of college, because frankly, things are continuing to change.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Let's think through six different factors in the new economics of college and how they're creating a situation where in 2021, something like a food scholarship program is an innovative practice in higher education. The first really big deal, and I know that many of you have talked about this probably in your own homes and with your own friends, is the price burden. Some people call it the cost burden, but frankly, the truth is that it is about price. It's actually not about cost. Cost, particularly in the nation's community colleges have not been going up all that much over time. What's been going up is the price that's passed on to students and their families. The reason that the price keeps rising, particularly at the nation's community colleges, and it's true in California and it's particularly true for you all since you used to have a price of zero, is that the state has pulled back on its investment in higher education. And interestingly has done so during a period of time at which more people have come to college needing help paying for college.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

It is also likely not a coincidence that the state has pulled back on its support for subsidizing the price of higher education at the same time that more Black and Brown and Indigenous and female students have come to college. Essentially, the deal has shifted while those trends occurred. Used to be the government picked up most of the bill so people would say, hey, it's free or nearly free. Over time that changed and now students today pick up the majority of the bill. We expect that trend, unfortunately, to continue, unless there's significant federal action, particularly as states face additional budget cuts. Now this applies not only to tuition, but also to the rest of the cost of attending college, which is actually the bigger part and the bigger barrier to attending college.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

The full cost of attending college according to the federal government with definitions dating back to 1965, include food, housing, transportation, medical expenses, personal expenses, books, and supplies, all of the things in other words that one must have in place in order to be able to focus on education. It's not a new idea, in other words, that living expenses are part of the cost of attending college, and those living expenses have been rising even when tuition isn't rising. But financial aid is not indexed to either rising tuition or rising cost of attendance. No one says the price of rent has been going up so we need to therefore raise the amount of financial aid that we're providing. Now, the amount of financial aid that we are funding both as states and the federal government has gone up a lot over time, the total dollar expenditures. There's actually just a new press out this week saying, oh my goodness, the federal government is going to have such a big bill for the Pell Grants right now because so many students are going to need help.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Well, that's all true. We actually have been as taxpayers funding it more and more, but from the student's vantage point, it doesn't matter to them how many total dollars are going in. What matters to them is how many dollars per student are being put in. The fact is that the percentage of the total bill on a per student basis covered by financial aid has been dropping steadily over time. Some of you may recall and may actually have been around for the debates over the Federal Pell Grant in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What you might recall is that the purpose and intention of the Federal Pell Grant program was to cover 100% of the cost of attending community college or public four-year colleges, 100%, if you qualified for it.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

These days, it covers barely 60% of the cost of attending community college and only about a third of the cost of attending four years. The burden of price has shifted much more heavily on the students and families. This has happened at a moment when the family economics have also shifted. Now, a family's economics are determined by a number of things, including what the shape and type of the family looks like. As we all know, there are so many different family forms, and that has been a great point of progress for this country. It's not the case that Ozzie and Harriet are the head of everybody's family. As these things have changed, as women have entered the workforce, as families have had different structures, families' ability to cover college costs has also changed. Part of that has to do with rising income and wealth inequality, and frankly, racial wealth inequality.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Together, that inequality coupled by stagnation in terms of the money people are bringing home year after year has made it harder for families to actually cover the bill that the government is now passing off to them. That fact should help you understand why it is now in the last 20 years and particularly the last 15 and even the last 10 where you've seen such an outcry about college being unaffordable. It's not that college was not expensive in the 1980s and 1990s. It was, but families were generally doing a bit better, so they didn't feel that it was so unaffordable. I think some of you can hear my cat. I want you to know that the cat who was meowing right now, his name is Pell. I'm finding this very ironic that Pell has decided to join this conversation. Another way in which people have classically paid for college in which most economists would say they're supposed to pay for college is by working through college.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Now, the fact is that the assumption that students can work their way through college and will earn enough to do so, it's been a flawed assumption for a long time. Many of you probably like I did, we did tables to put yourself through college. If you did that, I want you to reflect back on what that experience was like. First of all, did you find that you had steady hours that you could count on week-to-week that you got approximately the same amount of money week-to-week? Or did you find that your tips fluctuated? Further, did you find that your tips at the time might've come in cash like mine did or were they primarily on credit cards? When tips are paid on credit cards, the information is automatically logged and becomes part of the record that an individual has to use for their taxes. When tips come in cash, we all know that some of that often does not get reported on taxes. I know that's what my strategy was. Please don't tell the IRS.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

The fact is that as that has shifted, for example, even as we've put more things on credit cards, people waiting tables have taken home less and less money. Of course now, thanks to the pandemic, we're seeing this change even further and further. The opportunities to get flexible work that you can get enough hours from and do so as ideally a part-time student going to school also part or full-time, the opportunity has just diminished. We have students who are trying to go to school full-time and working full-time or trying to work full-time and go to school part-time. While we want to tell them it might be better for them to just focus on school, they find that assertion rather ludicrous because who is in a position right now to put a good paying full-time job in jeopardy just to try to get a degree.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

This entire apparatus, this working your way through college thing has become increasingly brutal. Another really important part of how people have paid for college over time has not been through the financial aid system, but rather through what we call the social safety net. Now, in some ways it's sort of laughable to talk about the safety net now because it has been systematically shredded for decades. Dating back, frankly to, the Ronald Reagan, which thank you, California. He began an effort to change how we do social policy in this country. He did not feel that social policies did families or individuals real good by providing them assistance without having strong criteria for that assistance. It's thanks to the likes of Ronald Reagan and people who came after them that work requirements were added to most public benefits programs. Work requirements have the effect of making it increasingly difficult for college students to actually get help from the social safety net.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

For example, it used to be the case that you could get food stamps simply based on your income qualification. But now, you have to income qualify and you have to also meet a work requirement unless you have children. If you're a college student, the number of things you have to do in order to qualify for this program keeps getting larger and larger. Now in California, your CalFresh Program has actually been a bit more welcoming to college students for quite a while. That is not due to the federal government, primarily it's due to your government in the state taking action to use flexibilities to optimize opportunities for students. In the rest of the country, we have not had that benefit until very recently in December when congress finally did take some steps to try to make things a bit easier for students. But again, that is very limited and it's only for the pandemic.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Remember, if students who in the past could have qualified, for example, for cash assistance, they might actually now not be able to turn to it. The fifth aspect of the new economics of college, I'm going to return to government funding support for a moment. This has to do with funding support, not for the students per se, but for the institution. These dollars, what we call state appropriations, go to provide the student with the educators, the instruction and the support that they need to succeed. Just like the Federal Pell Grant has diminished in value over time, the appropriations have been dropping on a per student basis. Now, if you've looked at the charts, you might and you're reading the newspaper, you might not entirely see this drop because it is concealed a bit by a focus on funding per FTE, which means Full-Time Equivalent Student.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

At the community colleges, you are systematically disadvantaged by a focus on how much money there is per Full-Time Equivalent Student when you enroll so many part-time students. In effect, that funding formula says that a part-time student only meets half time or half as much support services. I think we all know that's not true. I'm currently teaching lots of students, many of whom are taking six credits. Even though I'm at a four-year institution, they're doing so because they're raising kids and going to school and there's a pandemic. Guess what? I have to spend just as much time advising them and helping them find services as I do for my students who were taking 12, 15 or 18 credits. Treating part-time students like less than full-time human beings actually means, and if we do this in a systematic way as we do in the state and federal funding formulas actually results in the defunding of the key supports that keep students in school.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

This is part of the reason why you see part-time students completing college at lower rates than they should. Finally, the last slide here in this set speaks to health and wellbeing. This is a slide that I did not address, these issues I did not address in paying the price and it's something that a lot of our work at the Hope Center is turning towards now. In particular, because we have migrated from the College of Education at Temple University to the School of Medicine at Temple, and we're doing that because this work, this work around students' basic needs is actually all about the social determinants of health. In other words, the work that you are doing as educators is not only about what your students will learn from you in terms of the content that you were teaching. It is not just about helping them get a job.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

It is about their health and wellbeing for the rest of their lives. As you know, if their health and wellbeing is not secure right now, if they are dealing with anxiety or depression or they've experienced COVID or lost someone who has, they are simply not able to be as present in your classrooms. If you take anything away from the new economics of college, this is what I want you to remember. Students must have their needs, their Maslow base needs attended to before they can bloom. I hope many of you are familiar with both Abraham Maslow and Bloom's taxonomy. It is nearly impossible to get to the top of the Maslow pyramid or to get to work on the things in Bloom's taxonomy if your basic needs are not met. We have to integrate that basic fact into our practice in higher education. Before we talk about how we're going to do that, I just want to take a moment and turn to some data.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

I am first and foremost, a sociologist, and I need to show you some numbers. I need in particular to help you see the scope of this challenge. We have been collecting data through the RealCollege survey since 2008. We've been collecting it around the nation since 2015. We had just released a five-year report looking at data from hundreds of institutions around the country, including the survey that we did at the California community colleges, including yours in 2018. We had just released that last February. My team had just taken a deep breath from a lot of work when suddenly the pandemic hit. I'm very grateful to my team that we pulled ourselves back together and we got a survey out in the field to try to find out how students were doing.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Now, there were two types of the surveys that went out. The first survey, which was our core instrument, went out all over the country but did not go out in the California Community College system. That happened because the California Community College systems chancellor's office and the RP Group, who we have partnered with in the past, asked us to instead work directly with them to partner on the survey they were already doing with you. The reason for that was simple. We just didn't want to see students over-survey during the pandemic. I'm going to show you first what we learned from the community colleges in this broader national survey. Second, what we learned from the California community colleges through that second survey. The measures that we used in both surveys are identical. The process for fielding was a little bit different.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

We have information for just about 49,000 students in the California community colleges across 97 of the 114 California community colleges. Here's what we've learned. This is early in the pandemic, right? This is in the first quarter following onset. When we talk here about basic needs and security, and you can see that basic needs and security affected 58% of students at community colleges in our national survey, and 57% in your California community college survey, remarkable similarity. What we mean is that a student was either affected by food insecurity and or housing insecurity and or homelessness. I want to say a minute about each of those terms. Food insecurity means that a student does not have sufficient access to affordable food so that they can eat on a daily basis. Now, this does not always equate with what we call hunger, and that is a big debate in this country. Some people think we should say hunger if we mean hunger.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

We shouldn't use this polite term food insecurity. In some ways I differ because hunger is a specific form of not having enough food, but there are other forms that also have academic impacts. Students who are cutting the size of their meals or skipping meals on a regular basis may not feel hunger. You may not see them lose weight, but it may actually affect their concentration and their ability to focus on school. The USDA recommends this food insecurity instrument for adults. While some have contended that college students are not like other adults, we at the Hope Center don't agree with that. We think they are just like other adults and that the instrument does apply to them, so that's the one that we administer. Housing insecurity, which is sort of like what one might call near homelessness is about conditions that could put you on the brink of losing your home.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

It's things like having trouble paying your rent regularly, skipping your utility bills, being in overcrowded or precarious living conditions, finding that you're having to move a lot, or living in conditions where you are not safe. That's what housing insecurity is. Homelessness, we used the same definition used under the McKinney-Vento Act which is governing K-12 education, and it includes both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. This is so important because for students across this country, most of their homelessness is not unsheltered homelessness. If you want to understand which of your students are homeless, you should not expect to see them sleeping on the sidewalk. You should not expect them to be in shelters. They are much more likely to be couch surfing. That is the most common form of homelessness, both in K-12 education and in higher education. What you can see here, what we're trying to illustrate for you is that these things intersect and overlap.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

In other words, lots of students who are food insecure are also housing insecure. In fact, some students in the same year are both housing insecure and homeless. The rates that you see here are assessed over specific time periods. The food insecurity numbers, which are 44% nationally at community colleges and 40% at the California community colleges, that is measured over the 30 days prior to the day the student took the survey. These surveys were done in April and May approximately. In California, it was a little bit closer, further into the summer. It's about 30 days prior. The housing insecurity and homelessness rates that you see here which include 11% at the community colleges around the country and 18% at California community colleges, the one big distinction we do see, that's about how they were doing the day they took the survey. I want you to think about that for a minute. These surveys were administered electronically.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

These surveys are optional. These surveys do not come out and say, hey, are you a homeless college student? Please put your hand up so you can be counted. Really importantly, these surveys really don't pay students for their time. It is very unlikely that these surveys are popular among homeless college students, such that they're jumping to do these surveys and that other students who are not dealing with these problems are not doing them. In fact, we actually think the students in the worst shape are the least likely to take the surveys. The typical response rates for these things is around 10%. Nine out of 10 people aren't taking it. It's our strong assumption that those people are actually in worse shape than people who take the survey. That would suggest the numbers are conservative or lower bound estimates.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

This is a lot of people. This is very widespread, and this is not something that we're picking up on because it was happening before the pandemic. This is something as measured was happening very early in the pandemic. Now we will have new data coming soon. We measured again. We did surveys across the country, including in California in the fall between September and November. On March 31st, we'll be releasing those results. I want to draw your attention to one form of the racial gap and basic needs and security. We assess race, ethnicity, allowing students to self-report in 11 different categories where they can write in whatever it is that they self-identify as. Here, I'm just picking on one because of national attention to Black-White gaps in schooling. And because I think it's illustrative of why we need to attend to basic needs and security as a matter of our anti-racism commitments along with everything else.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Here you can see that before the pandemic, fall 2019, our data suggested a 16 percentage point gap in the odds of being basic needs and secure, based on an African-Americans having a rate of 72% and White students having a rate of 56%. During the pandemic, we saw that gap widen. Now interestingly, here, we're not seeing African-Americans' rates of basic needs and security going up. We're seeing it to go through, white students going down. We don't know exactly why, but our strong suspicion based on some of the other information we have is that it's because White students got disproportionate access to supports, in either case, it widened. I suspect that we're going to see it continue to widen over time. Now, when you look at this gap, whether the 16 points or the 19 points, I want you to think about another really important gap in higher education. That's the gap in six-year college completion rates.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

There's a lot of national attention to the importance of raising the odds that a student will actually finish whatever it is they started in college. I think it really is notable that the racial disparities that we see in those college completion rates are about the same size as the racial disparities that we see in basic needs rates. That doesn't mean this is cause and effect, but it does mean the two are probably related. The fact that for years we have been talking about equity in higher education and diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education without talking in explicit ways about meeting students' basic needs, that was probably a major oversight. Now, I want to show you just a bit more to unpack what was happening with students. Remember earlier, I mentioned work requirements associated with the safety net and the importance of students to being able to work in order to afford school.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

We see some differences between what would happen nationally and what happens in California. In California, 59% of the community college students reported that they did not lose their job and did not see reductions in their pay or their hours. That's very interesting because we only saw that at 37% for the rest of the students around the country. It seems like job losses were much more substantial at community colleges outside of California. We don't know exactly what it is that kept more students employed during the pandemic in California, but it does seem that it's the case. Nonetheless, we still have one in five California community college students who lost their job early in the pandemic and another 19% who probably suffered from a pay cut. In addition to that, we take a look at how students were doing in terms of things like their mental health. We administer standardized measures of students' anxiety to assess anxiety and depression.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab:

Almost half of the students surveyed whether at the community colleges and the rest of the nation or in your state were experiencing anxiety. This is likely to be something that you are also experiencing and of course plays into people's ability to get help. Of course, they had very difficult times concentrating, undoubtedly, that that has continued. One part of that has to do with the need to take care of family members. Now, this of course has something to do with the fact that children have not been able to go to school in person, that childcare was closed and so on. I also want to flag that there are many people in parenting roles who are not actually caring for their own children. They're taking care of siblings, of cousins, of other family members, of neighbors' children and so on and so forth. This is of course, very disruptive. I suspect many of you are also in the same boat. Now that we've seen the problem, let's look at what happened in terms of students being able to get some help.

Christina Barsi:

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