Helping Homeless College Students By Providing Access to Showering Facilities

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Thesis
There are at least 55,000 homeless college students in the U.S., and while it is difficult to document, we know the trend is growing. In Michigan, there have been numerous reported cases of homelessness, which hamper student success. The University of Michigan can combat this by providing its homeless students access to showering facilities.

Background Analysis
The 2016 annual tuition for an in-state student at the University of Michigan is $28,776, including $10,246 for room and board. The current trend suggests it will continue to become more expensive, considering that room and board fees have increased 54 percent in the past 20 years. The current Michigan minimum wage, at $8.50, makes it impossible for undergraduate students—working without a college degree—to afford these expenses, even working full-time. Poverty-related issues such as lack of affordable housing, job loss, and eviction are often the root cause of student homelessness.

There is no good estimate of the number of homeless students in Michigan, but there have been numerous reported cases of homelessness at Michigan universities. According to FAFSA, there are currently about 58,000 college students who are homeless. Homeless students are more likely to repeat grades, drop out, or be expelled; they also suffer from mental and psychologica stress such as anxiety prior to interviews and show symptoms like cold, flu, and body aches. Surprisingly, research shows that housing conditions have no correlation to a student’s academic performance. Homeless students also show a high regard for higher education. At the same time, research suggests that these students tend to drop out because of a shortcoming in perception: Either homeless students do not believe an adequate support system exists, or they lack the awareness of resources available to help them attend college.

Talking Points
- The University of Michigan can reach out to homeless students by providing them access to its showering facilities.
- Providing basic needs to homeless students can alter their perception about the lack of help on campus—and make them more likely to get help.
- These services would allow homeless students to meet one another, allowing them to foster inclusive communities.

Policy Idea
The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor should offer UM homeless students not enrolled in exercise classes access to its showering facilities on campus. Students would fill out a

KEY FACTS
- Michigan is one of the states most affected by the Great Recession.
- In Michigan, 15–20 percent of college students work full-time.
- Forty percent of students from low-income families go to college, but only 12 percent graduate by age 24.
- The maximum Pell Grant for 2016–17 is $5,815, not enough to cover tuition cost.
request to the Office of Financial Aid, which would determine if the student is eligible. Once eligibility is determined, students could then go to an ID issuing station on campus to acquire a special ID to gain access to these facilities. Literature relating to campus resources and nonprofit organizations (CAPS, Friends in Deed, Power, Inc.) would be made available at these showering facilities.

**Policy Analysis**

Students who are homeless are often an underreported population. The University of Michigan can reach many of these students indirectly by providing them access to its showering facilities. Right now, homeless students cannot use the showering facilities on campus residential buildings nor at campus exercising facilities without proper ID. Research suggests that homeless youths are more likely to commit crime when they lack access to provide for their basic needs. The research also recommended a gradual process of building trust with homeless youth through actions such as opening access to showering.

In California, a bill requiring community colleges to allow homeless students access to its showering facilities was recently passed. It is currently being implemented by 113 community colleges in California. Other locales, both in the U.S., such as D.C., New Mexico, and Hawaii, and outside the U.S., such as the Vatican, are adopting a similar idea by financing “mobile showers”—buses that provide free showering—in the interest of public health and the individual. In San Francisco, Lava Mae is one such nonprofit that finances these mobile showers. Each bus provides 500 showers per day for $100 every four days, or about $9,125 annually.

**Next Steps**

Ultimately, the University of Michigan administrators would have to change the rule to allow homeless students greater access to campus resources. We will build a coalition among existing student organizations to lobby for this change. In seeking out homeless students, we have contacted the Balvin Scholars Project at the University of Michigan. This program recruits students who have experienced foster care or are homeless and helps them to access resources such as counseling, workshops, and financial aid. The program has liaisons at the Michigan Department of Human and Health Services and at the University of Michigan Financial Aid Office, which oversees students’ FAFSA applications to identify those in need of housing. We will also work with representatives in the University’s Central Student Government to introduce a referendum and demonstrate student support behind this issue. We have already contacted the MAGIC program at Eastern Michigan University, a similar program to the Balvin Scholars Program, to get a better understanding of their programs and the costs of implementing them.

**End Notes**


Ibid., 1


Ibid., 1


Student Life Blavin Scholars. “Staff.” https://blavinscholars.umich.edu/staff.