



**Center for Equitable Higher Education**

To study and promote economic, food, and housing justice

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# The RISE Framework

A Socio-Ecological Model of College  
Student Basic Needs



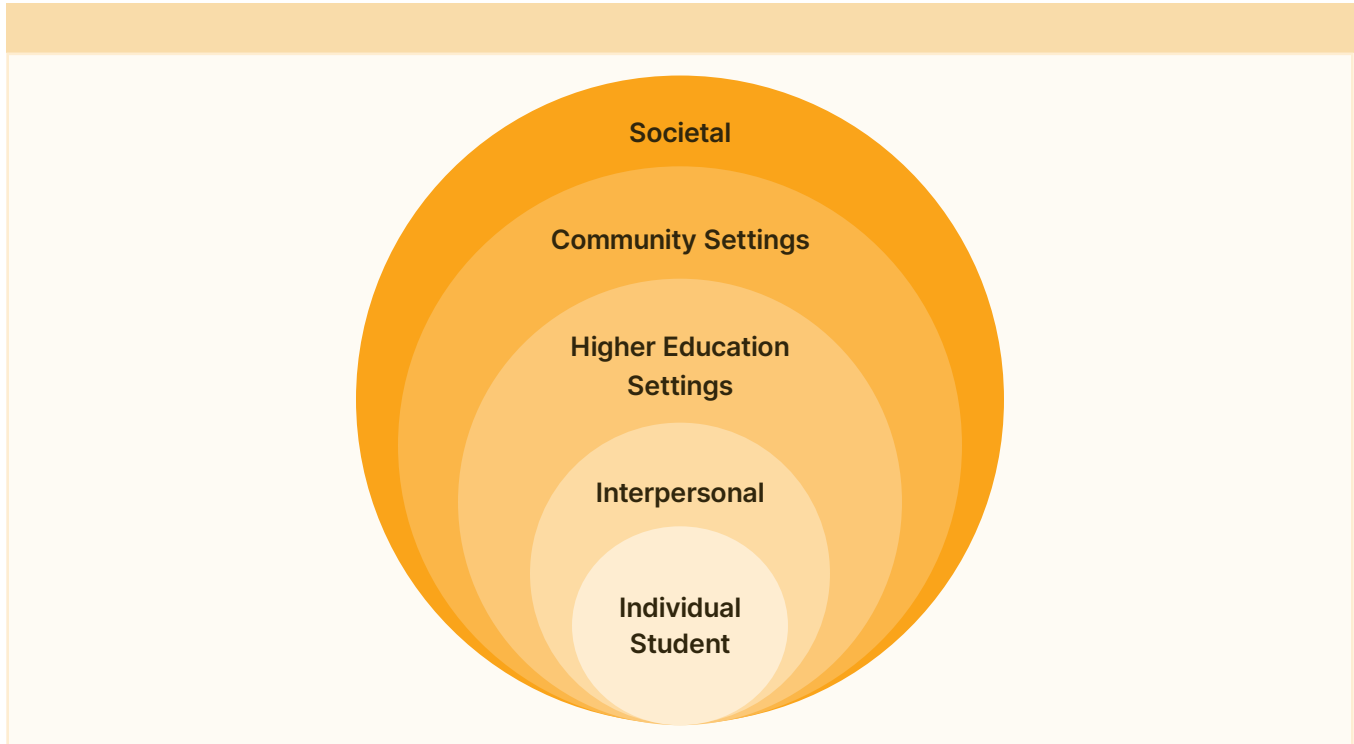
**The RISE (ReImagine the Student Experience) Framework, a socio-ecological model of college student basic needs, builds on decades of work on socio-ecological and systems theory in higher education.<sup>1</sup> The RISE Framework presents student success as tied to a wide range of factors that play out at different contextual levels. This framework aims to describe the specific intertwining contextual factors that determine student basic needs challenges and the needed strategies to improve student outcomes. In doing so, RISE builds on the work of students, practitioners, policy makers, researchers and funders who have shed light on the student basic needs crisis and fought for solutions to ensure equity for all students.**





FIGURE 1

## The RISE Framework



### Individual Student Level

The individual student level of the framework considers the unique experiences, cultural and gender identities, strengths, and needs of individual students. In numerous research studies, the requirement for food, housing, mental health, and financial stability are well described to be fundamental to individual student wellbeing and academic success.<sup>2</sup>

#### Challenges:

Many students are faced with financial insecurity and may not have sufficient resources to afford food and stable, adequate housing. Although many students receive financial aid, they may still have inadequate funds to cover the costs of attending school.<sup>3</sup> Some students struggle with mental health challenges including anxiety, depression

and stress that are only exacerbated by basic needs insecurity. Basic needs challenges are well understood to have a negative impact on student success and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

#### Strategies:

- Basic needs services include meal vouchers, food pantries, short-term grants and emergency housing.<sup>5</sup>
- Evidence-based mental health services and support strategies provide individual students with support.<sup>6</sup>
- Students share their experiences and participate in research about basic needs and effective strategies.

## Interpersonal Level

The interpersonal level of the framework considers basic needs in the context of student social relationships with individuals in the higher education institution such as peers, faculty, staff and administrators as well as interactions with family, co-workers and others outside the school environment.

### Challenges:

Social interactions play a critical role in shaping the student experience of their basic needs challenges. Stigma is a powerful force that hinders student access to needed services and reinforces shame and isolation.<sup>7</sup> When faculty, staff and administrators seem indifferent to student basic needs challenges it reinforces student feelings of isolation.<sup>8</sup> Family pressures and expectations influence whether students seek out help.<sup>9</sup>

### Strategies:

- Academic institutions create an environment that normalizes students seeking assistance for personal and basic needs challenges.<sup>10</sup>
- Student basic needs staff and volunteers provide a peer-to-peer model of support and access to services.<sup>11</sup>
- Faculty and staff are supported and trained to serve as effective connectors to basic needs services.<sup>12</sup>
- Collaborative work between campus basic needs programs and affiliation groups (i.e., Pride Centers; groups for formerly incarcerated students, foster youth and veterans; race affiliation groups) link students' understanding and response to the intersection of identity and basic need insecurity.<sup>13</sup>
- Students, faculty and staff partner to conduct research about student basic needs that centers the experiences of students.<sup>14</sup>

## Higher Education Settings Level

This level of the framework considers the impact of higher education institutional policies and practices — i.e., policies and practices of individual campuses and/or higher education systems — on student academic achievement, well-being, and basic needs. The costs of tuition, meal plans, course materials, and textbooks all determine the financial burden of a college degree.<sup>15</sup> While institutional student success strategies, curriculum design, course pedagogy and academic policies shape the experience of students navigating the college experience in the context of the challenges of their daily lives.

### Challenges:

The cost to attend a higher education institution is beyond the reach of many students and their families.<sup>16</sup> Even students with financial aid may struggle to cover the costs of food and housing and tuition increases may exacerbate basic needs insecurity. Many institutions do not have articulated and consistent policies and strategies to support students who are struggling meeting their basic needs. There is tremendous variation between campuses in their investment and approach to addressing student basic needs challenges. Although many institutions may have basic needs services not all students are aware of campus and community resources.<sup>17</sup>

### Strategies:

- Institutions establish Basic Needs Task Forces. Students, staff and faculty play an active role in identifying how to improve institutional policies and practices.<sup>18</sup>
- Higher education institutions provide an accurate and transparent advertised cost of attendance that ensures students have a realistic view of the financial burden of their education.<sup>19</sup>
- Staff conduct outreach and provide linkages to public benefit programs such as SNAP.<sup>20</sup>

- Institution housing policies are “student centered” and take into consideration the needs of students with no other place to live and minimize stress related to finding and exiting housing. Institutions provide affordable on-campus housing and allocate access by student need.
- Faculty receive support and training to use pedagogical approaches, classroom practices and policies that center the real lives of students and do not undermine students with basic needs challenges.<sup>21</sup>
- Institution wide use of syllabi statements, course website statements and social media campaigns call attention to basic needs services and normalize students seeking assistance.<sup>22</sup>
- Visible, well-resourced and easily accessible Basic Needs Centers serve as hubs for services and support.<sup>23</sup>
- Academic Affairs and Student Affairs are united in a comprehensive and holistic effort to ensure student well-being and academic success. Institutions use the Culturally Engaged Campus Environments (CECE) or other models to create campus environments that foster a sense of belonging, academic dispositions, academic performance and college success outcomes.<sup>24</sup>
- Institutions support systematic and ongoing assessment of student wellbeing and basic needs coupled with meaningful program evaluation that allows for continuous improvement of interventions.<sup>25</sup>

## Community Settings Level

The wider community context for higher education institutions and students set the stage for the experience of basic needs challenges. Students are engaged in communities that include a wide array of actors beyond the campus including work, faith-based organizations, city and county government agencies, and civic organizations.

Many federal policies that have an impact on student access to affordable food and housing are enacted at the community level. This level is focused on community systems rather than interpersonal relationships that students might have in their community.

## Challenges:

Lack of community support for students who face financial, housing and food insecurity leaves students with few options. Public benefit programs and community services do not prioritize students enrolled in higher education and in some cases decline their participation entirely.<sup>26</sup> For instance, public programs that serve the wide array of people experiencing homelessness often regard students without adequate housing and food as relatively privileged with less pressing needs than other people who are unhoused.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, many campus-based basic needs support programs end when students leave school, doing little to address their ongoing battles with food and housing insecurity after graduation. Ignoring community factors can also lead to student exploitation in the private housing market where landlords often view students as a source of income in an environment of high housing costs. Furthermore, for students seeking affordable housing off-campus they may resort to living far distances from campus and shoulder the burden of extreme commutes.<sup>28</sup>

## Strategies:

- Policy and institutional leaders prioritize strategies that link campus-based resources, community programs and public social service infrastructures to establish a foundation of support that can benefit students and their families before and after graduation.<sup>29</sup>
- Students have community-based work opportunities that support their basic needs and link to their majors. These opportunities strengthen the bridge between academic departments and the community deepening those relationships and expanding how higher education institutions provide value to communities.<sup>30</sup>

## Societal Level

At the societal level student basic needs are seen in the context of historical, social, political and economic forces. State and Federal higher education, social and economic policies that have an impact on student basic needs challenges are considered at this level of the framework.

### Challenges:

Income inequality, exploitative labor practices, disinvestment in public education systems and structural racism set the stage for student basic needs insecurity. The combination of stagnant wages and rising cost of living and high tuition and fees makes college financially out of reach for many who would benefit most from a college degree.<sup>31</sup> Federal and State financial aid programs fail to meet the full cost of student and family needs while burdensome debt locks many students into long term financial struggles. Furthermore, students who receive campus supports for basic needs may have an impact on financial aid as financial, housing and food services may be viewed as income. In addition, Federal and State public benefit programs are largely not designed to support students in higher education and in some cases deny student participation.<sup>32</sup>

### Strategies:

- Reform satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policies and practices to ensure they support student success and are equity-focused.<sup>34</sup>
  - Investment in building and sustaining affordable on-campus and off-campus housing options for students ensures students have adequate places to live.<sup>35</sup> Policies require a definition of “affordable” that guarantees housing is within reach of students with significantly limited income.
  - Allocation of ongoing and protected dollars that support campus basic needs services provide a safety net for any student who needs support.<sup>36</sup>
  - Investment in research and evaluation of policies and practices that support student basic needs allows for leaders to make informed decisions and set priorities for funding and action.<sup>37</sup>
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- Students, policy and institutional leaders explicitly identify student basic needs as student human rights to forge the movement to other efforts to secure equity and justice for BIPOC communities, foster youth, LGBTQ people, immigrants and other marginalized peoples.
  - Significantly reduce the cost of higher education to enable more students to obtain a degree and reduce the burden of student basic needs challenges.
  - Reform financial aid such as Pell Grants and state grants so that students have the resources needed to fully cover the cost of their education and cost of living expenses while limiting debt.<sup>33</sup>

# Endnotes

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