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Rosalie Rodriguez Interview

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Bucknell: Occupied
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Jennifer Thomson, interviewer (JT)
Rosalie Rodriguez, interviewee (RR)
Kelsey Hicks, guest (KH)

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JT: Good evening and welcome to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. This is DJ [XXX] in the studio, and today we have a great conversation coming up around issues of food insecurity. This is something that's started to receive national attention over the past few years, and I have a really awesome guest in the studio to talk with me about it tonight. Rosalie Rodriguez is here. She's the director of multicultural student services at Bucknell University. Rosalie earned a Bachelor's degree in Biology and Community from Juniata College as well as a Master's in Community Psychology from Penn State. Her research focuses on addressing systematic inequalities within communities and has also focused on navigating barriers in food systems in particular. So, first of all, welcome to the studio Rosalie.

RR: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

JT: Thanks for agreeing to come in and talk with us about this.

RR: Absolutely.

JT: So we're here to talk specifically about an issue gaining increasing visibility nation-wide, and that's the issue of food insecurity; specifically on college campuses. But I'm wondering if we can back out a little bit out of the college context, and if you can just give our listeners who might be hearing this term for the first or the second time, just a basic working definition of what food insecurity actually is.

RR: So in the most simplest terms, food insecurity really just refers to not knowing where your next meal is coming from or if it will meet your nutritional needs. So sometimes that can be a result of not having... the technical definition is more that there is an uncertain availability of nutrition and the adequate or safe foods or the ability to acquire them in a socially acceptable manner. So certainly people can acquire food, for instance, from a dumpster, but that's not considered a socially acceptable manner, so you would still be considered food insecure even if you were able to access food that way. The most extreme cases of food insecurity does include hunger, but it does not--all food insecurity does not include hunger. Sometimes that can be a result of specific dietary restrictions, like only eating halal or kosher foods or having an illness like diabetes or celiac that significantly restricts your ability to eat available food. But most often in this context, we are talking about folks who are restricted financially from accessing healthy, nutritious food.

JT: And are there communities that are more likely to be affected by this in the United States?

RR: Often even relatively stable households can experience food insecurity for a brief time. If a provider, for instance, becomes laid off or sick or temporarily disabled. However, folks from low-income populations and especially those belonging to marginalized communities. So within that I'm talking about immigrant communities--especially undocumented immigrants; people of color--especially black people; LGBTQ folks--most especially transgender within that--and the reason that they are more

significantly affected is that in addition to the low-income within those communities, there are fewer safety nets. Both formal social services that are available to them and also informal friends and family that they can rely on to help when those situations arise. There are higher rates of chronic unemployment and lower employability. There's even a difficulty in accessing the resources that they need in, for instance, rural communities like Lewisburg without access to public transportation even if the services are available, it often is really difficult to even get to the places where the services are made available to folks.

JT: So, I know you mentioned a few when you were giving us the introduction, but can you take us through some of the different ways that food insecurity manifests itself. Right? I mean, you said sort of the most extreme or what we typically think about is something like hunger, but that's not actually...

[CROSSTALK]

RR: Right. That's not always the primary way. So what I'm thinking about hunger that's certainly the most extreme, but often that's more likely that folks are eating things that are shelf stable items.

JT: Hm.

RR: So we're talking specifically here like college students there's the college student surviving on Ramen noodles. And unfortunately, that tends to be true more often than it should be.

JT: MmHm.

RR: And the reason is that Ramen noodles are very inexpensive, but they're also nutritionally deficit. There's really nothing in it to help sustain the basic functions that everybody needs to be able to learn, in order to have enough energy to make it through the day. It's basically just filling your stomach so that you don't feel the pangs of hunger.

JT: MmHm.

RR: But you're not actually getting the nutrition that you need to learn, to manage your emotions, even to sleep enough. So there's all different kinds of ways that that shows up, but we don't often think about the fact that we need very specific nutrients in order to complete basic functions like not spend the entire day crying.

JT: So what are some of the consequences of experiencing food insecurity?

RR: So over time, shelf stable foods and other inexpensive options, like I said Ramen noodles that are full of fat, that are full of sugar and salt, can result in chronic illness. Folks are usually familiar with things like diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart attack, atherosclerosis, which is basically corroding of the arteries' lining with blockages, but when you're not--when your body is not getting the right food or the right balance of nutrition, it becomes stressed and produces an overabundance of cortisol. Now cortisol in and of itself is necessary every day to regulate all kinds of functions. It's a hormone that manages--that regulates immune function, sleep, and stress; but when you are stressed out, it kicks you into fight or flight mode.

JT: Hm.

RR: Now this is really helpful, let's say if you're in a jungle and you're about to fight a lion, right? You need to not be sleepy, you need to be very hyper aware.

JT: MmHm.

RR: You need to have your attention really focused in on that lion about to attack you. But if you're not fighting a lion every single day, that overproduction does take a toll on your body. And the overproduction can decrease your immune function over time, it causes higher likelihood to experience depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. And all of these things do not make for a healthy learning environment. Certainly for college students or anybody else for that matter.

JT: For sure. Just to take a brief break from this conversation, we do, actually have the honor of having another guest in this office who might actually have something to share with us about food insecurity. So, Kelsey, I just like to welcome you to the studio.

[CROSS TALK]

KH: Thank you.

JT: and ask if you wanted to share your thoughts on this.

KH: I know that a lot of times, specifically in my area, when we're talking about food insecurity. As the director of the Women's Resource Center, we forget that women are disproportionately--

JT: Mm.

KH: affected by food insecurity. Especially, as women are more likely to be the caregiver in a home. More likely to be the person that's responsible for the children in the home, and if you're in this space where you don't have access to transportation or you live in a food desert, it can disproportionately affect you in a way that other people might not really think about and have to sorta deal with. I know that when we have events like Empty Bowls, we are trying to spread that message on a more global-- from a more global lens, but a lot of time it still gets lost in the fact that well if women are not--if women are now working outside the home, then that access should change, and it doesn't.

JT: Hm.

KH: It doesn't mean that because women are still being paid less than men depending on the race or ethnic group that you're talking about, they're still getting paid less. A black woman is gonna get paid less than a white woman. A Hispanic woman is gonna get paid less. We're even talking Asian-Pacific islanders. When we, when we get to undocumented, then we're also

JT: MmHm.

KH: talking about the safety that comes from going out in public, being seen, having to address a variety of safety concerns. So that's really something that's important to me, and I think that even as Rosalie was talking, we don't think about the sorta health and physical tolls that it takes on a body. If you're the

caregiver, you're the person that's bringing in money to make sure everyone's taking care of. You can't afford physically or financially to get diabetes or any sort of ailment that will take you out of the home.

JT: But nonetheless, you're more likely to experience those things.

KH: Right.

JT: Thank you. So, Rosalie, I'm wondering if we can actually now focus on the issue of University students, right? Are there particular ways that food insecurity tends to show itself on college campuses? I know you talked about sorta the classic example of the Ramen noodles, right? And the starving student stocking up on Ramen noodles, and we all joke about that, but are there very, kind of characteristic ways that we can identify food insecurity on a campus.

RR: Sure. So, a couple of things. I think one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that there is this kind of double-edged sword of people generally thinking of college students as being well off or wealthy in general, as a population, and not thinking of this as an issue that affects those students. Or thinking that because most students either have or are required to have some type of meal plan, that those meal plans are adequate to meet their needs.

JT: MmHm.

RR: And so you kind of have a... there's a lack of awareness that it is affecting this population, and also the idea that it shouldn't affect this population because you have access to food right on the campus. There is Dining Services on every single campus across the U.S. in some form or fashion, right? As residential campuses, I'm talking about specifically. When in actuality, about 20% of college students in some studies, when I first started this research we're seeing about 20% of college students experience some food insecurity. The most recent study that I looked at came from the University of Wisconsin, which does a lot of really amazing work in this field. If you're interested in learning more about food and nutrition in general, and healthy eating, Hope labs at University of Wisconsin

JT: Hmm.

RR: is really a fantastic resource. But their most recent study, which actually was just published in April, showed that 36% of University students--that they, they did a study of 43,000 students across the U.S.--36% of them had experienced food insecurity in the 30 days preceding that study. When they looked then at community college students, it was even higher, it was 42% of those students, and 9%, er, 56% were also experience simultaneously housing insecurity, with about 9% of them experiencing homelessness. When we hear those statistics, it's really jarring. Because, again, we don't think of poverty and homelessness as an issue that is affecting this population. But it often has... conversation with students who do not have anywhere to go during a break, and need to find jobs and/or things to do on campus or take a trip with a group, because there isn't a home to go to during those down times, and there are not meals available for them during the breaks and over the Summers and things like that. Um, one of the studies that I looked at showed that about 59% of students attending mid-size, rural universities are experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, as I mentioned, some of those marginalized populations are experiencing it at a even higher rate, so if you look at African Americans, 57% of the students experiencing food insecurity are African American, versus only 15% of the college-going population. That's a huge disparity between those numbers. And of... there are still 40% who are white students, so this certainly isn't just a peoples of colors issue, but it is disproportionately affecting

populations of color. 56% of first generation student and still 45% of second generation students, so folks who are either the first in their family to go to college, or maybe the second person in their family to go to college are experiencing food insecurity across the nation. These are pretty startling numbers. What that looks like, then, for those students on campus, is this constant worry about where the next meal is coming from. When we think about college students' things that they're supposed to be thinking about are--studying, making sure you're getting a good GPA so you can graduate on time, hopefully, taking part in some clubs or activities on campus, hanging out with your friends, doing all those social things that an 18-24 year old traditional age, I guess, student would be doing. But these students are expending enormous amounts of energy, kind of figuring out where their next meal is going to come from. Time that could be spent studying. Time that could be spent in class, but in fact, many of these students are missing class. 53% in this last study that I mentioned have had to miss class, and 38% have said that they have not taken a class because they couldn't afford the books for the class. Because they had to make a choice between "do I buy books or do I use the money that I have to buy food for myself." While that's a really relative choice, it's not a real choice. You need the books to study, you need the food to live. So again, not a real choice or a relative choice, but many students are saying "well I'll buy the books because I can do it right now, and hopefully I'll make enough money working to be able to feed myself, or I'll work two or three jobs on campus." About 38% of those students work 20 hours a week or more while they're simultaneously going to school. I was actually talking in my mentoring program this morning about the amount of time that is generally expected for students to spend on coursework. And I say, you know, it's a rough estimate, but generally we say you should spend about three hours outside of class for every hour that you spend inside of class. If you're taking 3 or 4 classes, let's say 3 classes, and each one of those you're in class for 3 hours a week--I think I told them 4 hours a week--that's more than a full-time job! By the time you add up all those...

JT: Right.

RR: You have students then who are working 20 hours a week or more, and/or going to activities or lectures because they know that there's free food available whether or not they're a Physics major, like, I'm an English major, but I'm going to this Physics lecture because they're gonna give us pizza. Those are hours that really could be spent in the classroom, could be spent studying, could be spent joining a club or an organization that is going to help you build your resume so you can get a better job once you graduate. But instead you're spending a lot of energy and time kinda figuring out "where is that next meal coming from, where am I going to be able to get free food or can I find someone on campus who will bring me some food or be able to share their food with me?"

JT: You're tuned in... For people just turning on this radio, you are tuned into 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. This is Bucknell: Occupied, and we are talking with Bucknell's own Rosalie Rodriguez concerning food insecurity, and specifically how it shows up amongst University students. So Rosalie, you were talking about this very, kind of... the mentality of being food insecure and where it pushes people into living kind of in their headspace, right? Which is this very kind of like present crisis-oriented kind of thinking which doesn't mesh at all with the kind of mental skills it takes to be a successful University student.

RR: Absolutely. Yeah. I think one of the things I had mentioned before was just this lack of nutrition, right? And I don't want to get too much into the science of it, but when we talk about... There are some essential nutrients that help us regulate emotions that help us to regulate, to help us be able to process new information.

JT: MmHm.

RR: So for instance, protein is really, really important to be able to have the brain capacity to process new information, so if you're eating Ramen noodles, you're not getting any protein. Not only that, but you're eating excessive amounts of sodium that are really unhealthy, to the point that they become detrimental to your health over time. And if you cannot have the brain capacity to synthesize new information, you're literally undermining the entire reason that you're here. So those basic building blocks that you need to be able to function as a student and do all the things that you're here to do, are not able to be done without having adequate balance of those, of that nutrition here. I think one of the things that I mentioned already was this idea that students are--there's a perception that they already have the food, so the we're not really talking about this issue when it comes to them, but there is a huge social stigma as well and especially when we're talking about marginalized populations. We're having, what often is referred to as imposter syndrome. If I tell people I need help, if I ask for the help that I need then I will confirm their suspicion that somehow I don't belong here. That as a person of color, I'm not as worthy of being in this space, as a low-income person who has not had family members who have gone to school before me that I am not as worthy of being in this space as maybe some of my peers are to be here, so I'm not going to ask for help with the food. I'm not going to ask for help with the academics. I'm not going to ask for help with the books, because those would all give them reasons to confirm their suspicions that maybe I don't really belong here after all.

JT: So this is sort of a perfect segue into one issue that I think is kind of hovering around this conversation, which is what is it about the University environment that makes it difficult to say "OK, it's very clear to us that, for example, 25% of our students are not being able to eat the way they should.

RR: Sure.

JT: Right? Like what is it about this kind of an academic space that makes that hard to recognize.

RR: Sure, yeah. There's definitely a kind of mentality that students have parents at home who are going to send them money when they need it. So, again, it's not an issue that we're thinking about, it's something that we're concerned about, because they have someone else. But I often have conversations with students who are sending their work-study money home to keep the lights on at home, because there isn't somebody there who is able to keep those things running. And I think that happens more often than we care to believe, especially at elite schools, at private schools where the mentality is that you're attracting a wealthy population. That might be a majority of students, but certainly that's not every single student. One of the hidden reasons, I think, that affordable meal options are so scant is that food services is actually a major revenue generator on many college campuses. So most colleges are actually making money off of the food that is being sold on their campuses, even if they're parsing that out to other school--er to an auxiliary business of some sort. So according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nationally--in 2013-2014--which was the last time this data was collected, public universities, so larger institutions actually tripled their profits and made 2.3 billion dollars more in revenue than they spent. In their expenditures for the year, in 2013-2014. That's a huge revenue generator, so if you have a--if you are making that much money off of an auxiliary service which isn't even your main purpose for being there.

JT: MmHm.

RR: Especially, most universities and colleges are non-profit organizations, so they don't exist to make money, but if you have a service that you're providing on the campus that is making you money, that is really helpful to your bottom line, and certainly challenging that can be very difficult.

JT: MmHm.

RR: Getting around that topic, right? But it is a business model that does require catering to the tastes of those who foot the bill, which are those wealthier students. And we all know that the tastes of wealthier students is evolving, and it demands more variety, it demands more sophisticated options. Like vegan and gluten-free, and kind of Poke bowls, smoked salmon and quinoa kind of things, which do raise the overall costs of meal plans on college campuses. And that cost is shared among everyone who buys into the meal plan, but is really only demanded by a few students. It also makes universities look good when they have a lot of dining options and very sophisticated dining options, when prospective students, especially wealthier prospective students who are paying more of the tuition bill, are coming in, they're like "Oh well they have all of these fancy options that I can take part in." But they're not actually serving necessarily the majority, certainly not the lower income students who can't afford to buy into those meal plans.

JT: So you've brought up so much fascinating stuff here, I actually want to back up and just ask you two questions, and the first is--can you explain to us how an institution can make money off of a contracted meal plan, right? OK, like I mean for the last two weeks on this show, I've been doing interviews around prison issues. So two weeks ago, Dave Sprout was here from Lewisburg Prison Project, and he was talking very much about the privatization of services in prison and the way in which prisons make money off of subcontracting out. Feeding less than what they're actually being paid for the contract, and then keeping the rest for profit. Is that the kind of model we're looking at here?

[CROSSTALK]

RR: [LAUGHS] Pretty much. I can't speak to specific universities, I know I've worked with schools in the past who basically are pocketing. So let's say that the cost of a meal is 2 dollars, right? And then the contracted company sells it for 5 dollars to cover their labor costs to cover their profit that they need to pocket, but then it's actually being sold to the students for 7 dollars and that extra 2 dollars is going in the pocket of the university. And that is a big--according to this study--the Bureau of Labor Statistics has talked about the fact that that is one of the things that a lot of the auxiliary services the companies that are contracted in use to sell themselves to the university -- "come and pick us out of all of these different companies that you have to choose from," -- which are also not that varied. There are not that many folks kind of clambering down the door because it is not a huge revenue generator for most of those services.

JT: MmHm.

RR: But we can make it so that you are getting a kickback, so much money that's going to help the institution to be able to meet its cost analysis. Again, essentially what you just talked about, subcontracting it out and then getting a kickback in the difference of the cost.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

RR: Is what was described in the article.

JT: Another sort of basic technical question is, can you just walk us through it, and I know every institution is different, but if you can give us kind of a sense of how does a traditional university meal plan operate, right? Like what are students generally faced with in terms of what kinds of options they have and what kinds of obligations that entails?

RR: Sure. So most universities that have a residential meal plan

JT: MmHm.

RR: will have at least three if not more options for students. One might be a three meals a day, seven days a week kind of plan. So the first university I ever worked at, that was standard for all first year students coming in. You would automatically be placed into that meal plan, and then you would have that option to change it later on to a meal plan that might better suit your needs. And that means three times a day.

JT: MmHm.

RR: You can go into the cafeteria, whatever that central place is, and swipe your ID, and go in and eat all you can eat. Usually if it's in a cafeteria style, it's kind of like a buffet, and get whatever you need during that time period. Oftentimes what we're seeing more now is that there's some kind of declining balance or cash component to it, that isn't real cash, but it's kind of like a credit card that goes on your student ID that might be anywhere from \$50 to \$500, \$600, \$700 that is used for a la carte purchases. Which might be in a more restaurant style. I don't want to say restaurant style. But like, cafeteria style like you would go to a hospital or something.

JT: Huh. OK.

RR: And say, "I'm gonna grab a salad, I'm gonna grab a yogurt, I'm gonna grab a juice," and then you get charged for each item individually vs. paying one price and then walking into the cafeteria and then eating whatever you want.

[CROSSTALK]

JT: And then eating whatever you want. OK.

RR: So usually there's some, if there are various meal plans, there's some combination of those two things. Where you have some meals that are in the cafeteria or you might not have any meals in the cafeteria and all of them just be that declining balance of money that you use for a la carte purchases. Or you can purchase an entry at whatever the cash price is to go into the cafeteria. Does that make sense?

JT: Yeah. That does make sense. So I think that you've kind of sketched this out, but maybe you can just pull this all together. So we've talked about the ways in which it is difficult to identify food insecurity on college campuses. Can you pull together what are the factors of a university environment that actually make food insecurity worse?

RR: Well, certainly the contracting out is one of the pieces that increases that. I think one of the things that we often don't think about is just the mindset that we have that food is an auxiliary service.

JT: Hmm.

RR: Right? We would never think to send students a separate bill to use the pool or to use the gym. We expect that that is a part of their University experience. We're not charging students for every club that they join. Like if you join this many clubs it's this cost in tuition, if you join this many it's that cost in tuition, but we do that with food. But the reality is you can't do any of those other things. You can't swim in the pool, you can't go to the gym.

JT: MmHm.

RR: You can't go to class if you don't have food! But we think of food as a kind of, like, you can opt in or you can opt out. And a lot of that mindset is not necessarily nefarious, right? It's coming from a place of "we want to give students options." Many students don't want to eat in the cafeteria, or historically... notoriously college cafeterias are not known for offering--

JT: Exquisite cuisine.

RR: Right, exactly, and so students want to opt out of it, they want to cook their own food. They feel like it's unhealthy, there isn't enough variety. Especially when we're talking about some of these multicultural populations who are not seeing food with the same kind of spice palate and/or flavors and/or some of their religious restrictions or dietary restrictions, right? And so if I don't have one of these meal plans that covers all of these meals, then the expectation is "I will then cook for myself, I will go back to my room, and hopefully I live in a place where there is a kitchen, if I'm on a residential campus, I might have the option of having an apartment that has a kitchen in it that I can cook my own food." But what we're not taking into consideration there is that many times students are opting for that lower, that lowest cost meal plan, if they're required to have one. Which many universities that are residential require students to have some level of meal plan. That we're requiring them to have a meal plan and they're essentially taking the money that they would have spent on food and buying books and/or buying other expenses--covering other expenses like transportation to and from school. Things that are not necessarily covered in their tuition, but they might be considered for financial aid.

JT: MmHm.

RR: So they're still eligible to receive money for that, so they might get a refund check even from their Stafford loans because they might've had scholarships or other things that covered all of their tuition costs and because they selected the lowest meal plan they might get a thousand-fifteen hundred dollars back for the semester then to cover their other expenses like books and food and so they're like "well, I'll use that and plus my working to cover these other expenses, right?"

JT: MmHm.

RR: So that whole scenar--that whole mindset that food is a negotiable item, that somehow students will figure out on their own, is to me requires some re-thinking about all of these pieces.

JT: MmHm.

RR: About how we piece them together, how we make sense of them as a community, because again, that's the lowest--many people are familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs--that's at the lowest base. You can't do any of the other stuff... I saw a meme recently which is really fantastic--if you're an academic it will make a lot of sense to you--but we need to remind folks that in order to do all of the Bloom stuff, we have to take care of all the Maslow stuff, right? And so we're referring kind of to Bloom's taxonomy, that's talking about you know, self-actualization.

JT: Right, right.

RR: understanding, and critical thinking and all of those things. You can't get to that place where we're having those conversations if students are struggling to feed themselves, house themselves, purchase the books that they need to even read about those theories in the classroom at all.

JT: So for those of you who are just tuning in, you are listening to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. Rosalie Rodriguez is here in the studio talking about food insecurity on college campuses. If you have a question for either one of us, feel free to call in to the studio. The number here is 570.577.3489. Now, Rosalie, can I ask you to talk maybe about a few specific cases of strategies that students who are food insecure deploy in order to try and meet their needs.

RR: Sure. So I mentioned before students kind of identifying and going to lectures that they really are not interested in just to get the food. I think that's pretty common. That's probably one of the most common.

JT: Hmm.

RR: There were actually some phone apps that were designed at a lot of different campuses, that are used on different campuses to be able to share that information, even when there is leftover food after an event or that there is food available at an event, that if you go--all you have to do is go to the event and you'll get free pizza or whatever it might be. Pizza is usually the most common thing, right? But there are certainly a lot of informal networks, I know a lot of the students I talk to use group messaging apps to share whenever there is leftover food or an event that food can be found at. Many times students will ask to use the ID of someone who does have one of those "any time access" meal plans. So somebody who has three meals a day, but maybe is only going to the cafeteria once that day, they'll have extra swipes or declining balance dollars to be able to use and they'll use the ID of those students to kind of go in. Asking students who do have those meal plans to bring back food for them. And also, talking with faculty and staff who are sympathetic to their situation who will bring them food, invite them over to dinner, take them out for a lunch, those kinds of things. I have had students tell me that they have stolen food before when it has been convenient.

JT: MmHm.

RR: I think... I had a conversation with a student once who told me that she was literally negotiating the days in her schedule in which she had the fewest classes and would pick that as one of the days to swipe in to the cafeteria. So she would take all of her books, all of her materials that she needed to work on her stuff for the day, and sit there in the cafeteria. Go in, only have to use her student ID once to go in,

but stay all day so that she could eat free meals while she did all of her work. She could not do that on days that she worked because that meant that she was negating the purpose by not making money, and certainly could not do that on days when she had two or three classes and would maybe missing too many classes that would then stress her in another way, or couldn't do it on days when she had an exam or something like that. Again, so we're talking about expending the energy

JT: Yeah.

RR: to kind of figure out what days can I use one of my balances of swiping into the cafeteria or using my meal plan to come in and just basically stay there. Camp out all day, eat whatever I need, and still get work done. Which is not something that we necessarily want students negotiating. I think it's, again, coming back to this idea of some of the barriers that--if you're missing a class that day, oftentimes faculty are going to be apt to think that you're just slacking off. Not because they're evil people, but because that's what they're used to seeing in the classroom.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

RR: Students are being irresponsible, maybe they partied too much the night before, whatever it is, and really, what you're doing in that situation is making the best possible decision for you and your situation. Which might be missing class today so I can eat and get all of my work done and make it to class tomorrow. And I think sometimes it does require us to kind of shift our thinking in the ways that we understand who might be missing out on our classes or what reasons students might be missing out on our classes and the assumptions that we make or the activities that they miss on the staff side. You know, not showing up for some of those things and why they might not be showing up for some of those things.

JT: Can I ask you to talk about ways that colleges can actually positively address food insecurity among students [LAUGHS], right? Like what are some of the various things either that might work or that have already actually been put into practice at different institutions.

RR: Absolutely. There are a lot of really fantastic things happening on college campuses. So, I mentioned, I don't know if I mentioned this already or if it was just in my head.

JT: MmHm.

RR: But in 2012, there was an organization that was started called--let me look at the--College and University Food Pantry Alliance--and in 2012, they had a handful of schools that had food pantries on their campuses that were registered with this organization. That was, what, six years ago, there are now over 500 universities and colleges that are listed on, just on their database. That's not all the ones that exist, but the ones that are registered with them that actually have food pantries on their campus to serve the needs of students. I was talking with some colleagues about I believe it's Kutztown University has a really fantastic food pantry. So there's a lot of issues with food pantries in terms of, again, providing some of those really shelf-stable items that can be detrimental to health, over time. But the food pantry at Kutztown University actually has fresh produce, meat, and dairy in addition to the bar shelf stable items available for students to take, and that's huge. I've not seen another food pantry that really does to that level--

JT: MmHm.

RR: take care of that kind of level of need. I think, again, just opening that level of conversation with students, and not assuming that because they're students that do have access, but allowing for that to be something that can, you can open the door to. That you're open to hearing about student's experience that you can be a resource for anybody--faculty, staff, students--to be signaling to people "I'm here and I'm willing to listen to what it is and to help you kind of find the resources" so that when students are in need they know that there's a friendly ear there to hear that. Even things like, that might seem on the side, like maintaining a career closet, or having a book exchange even within your department, within your major... or if you're a faculty member that is assigning books, thinking about the cost of the books that you're assigning. Are you really going to fully utilize a \$200-\$300 text in its entirety or are there pieces of it that you can make available, legally, for students to use? Is there a way for you to order a desk copy or a reference copy that maybe sits in the library? I know the school that I used to work at had a... what was just called a reserve.

JT: Hm. Yeah. We have the same thing.

[CROSSTALK]

RR: And students could go in and check out. You have the same thing.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

RR: Yeah. So if you could keep a copy of the textbook on reserve in the library, that means students who really can't afford to make the choice between the food and the books don't have to. They can go and borrow that book for the time that they need it, do whatever they need to do, and then put it back so that other students can use it. Same thing, kind of with a desk reference copy or something like that. If you don't have to update to the brand-new edition that isn't available used, you know, thinking about those kinds of things even in planning; some of those things. One of the best and most comprehensive examples that I have seen so far about addressing this issue really holistically has been at the University of Maryland. And you can go on their website and just look at meal, like if you Google meal options University of Maryland. They go really well into depth not just about what's available, but the reason why it's available, which I think is really interesting. So in 2015, they participated in a study that asked students about their dining experiences, because they were hearing the same kind of things we're talking about, right? That students were not having adequate food to get through the semester, that there were not enough healthy options to be able to provide for their needs. And they were basically saying "what is here? the retail dining options that we have--which is a lot of a la carte options--were not meeting their needs at all." And so what they did was shift to everyone on the campus having an anytime dining so that three meals a day is not just actually not just three meals a day, but anytime you were hungry, you needed a snack, you could go into the dining hall, and get what you needed. And it... they really talk about the idea of moving that, like a mentioned, from that business model.

JT: MmHm.

RR: Of making money for the university, of having some type of revenue, to a service model, right? That we are here, that this, the food is here to... as a service to the students because they need it to be able to do all the other things, and we need to find other ways to make money, if it's not meeting the needs of the students who are really what the main concern is, right? So instead of selling those individual

food items, they provided students with not just the services and the meals all day, every day, but they really structurally changed the way the dining hall was set up, so that it was more socially friendly.

JT: Hmm.

RR: It was more group friendly. They even have separate quiet spaces for students who want to study and do their homework at the same time, and not be in a rowdy cafeteria or restaurant kind of area. They also even go into depth about how it has allowed them to become more sustainable. They have a significant less amount of waste, food waste on their campus, because students aren't kind of squirreling away more food than they can consume before it goes bad, and they've nearly eliminated to go containers in a lot of their venues, because students know that any time they're hungry they can go into one of the dining options on campus and utilize--get whatever they need at that time. They don't need to take it with them.

JT: Right.

RR: And then have that food become wasted later. They even mentioned that they have some future plans to include amenities like charging stations, gaming stations, and even lounge areas, right? So much of the student experience is socially driven, and so having those spaces where you can study with your group and have a round meal, and you're not worried about being the only person in the group who has to fake not being hungry at the moment while everybody else is having lunch because they decided to meet in the cafeteria. Because everybody else had the meal plan or had the money to go in. That they're having all of these spaces that are set up so that students can have that social time, can have that integration that is really essential, not just the student experience, but also when we talk to multicultural communities. When we talk to folks, especially... I come from a Puerto Rican heritage and dinner time was a really, really important, it wasn't just like "come in and eat" you sat down with the whole family and you caught up from the whole day. And it was a longer process.

JT: MmHm.

RR: It didn't happen in 15-20 minutes, it was an hour, maybe more where you were sitting there and discussing things. And that's very common, we hear that a lot from international students, that it's really bizarre the way Americans eat and how quickly they eat. There's a word in Spanish called la sobremesa.

JT: Mm. MmHm. Yeah.

RR: Which is really like that dinner conversation that happens after. We don't even have a word to translate that to in English because it's so different. But that's a huge part of that inclusion, of making students feel not just welcome, but that they're welcome in all of the ways that they are themselves. And I think the University of Maryland is really doing quite a bit to make sure that they are addressing all of those. That really holistic picture of how students experience campus, and dining as a part of that.

JT: So just thinking about the finances of what you're talking about. How does that work--on a campus like that--how does that work in terms of what people's budgets are. To have an anytime meal plan.

RR: It's definitely more expensive than the lowest meal plan options. So when I talk about this, I don't take it lightly that we have to shift our thinking--all of our thinking.

JT: MmHm.

RR: Right? To me, in a perfect world, we would be able to not have that be a separate cost that shows up on a bill at all, that it is rolled into your tuition. If everyone is going to have anytime access, that's not even a separate bill that you're getting. The way most universities have it now, you have a charge for tuition, room, board, and then you might have like a technology fee or an activities fee or something like that, which is pretty common on residential campuses. None of those fees are negotiable [LAUGHS] right? So getting back to this idea of food not being negotiable does require students to also shift, like, this is not money that I will then have for books, right? So how are we making sure that students are having financial aid packages that are able to meet their needs that they're having. The dining services can't just stay the same, too, if they're not meeting the cultural needs or religious needs, the dietary needs of all the students. Having an anytime meal plan access isn't going to fix everything, it's actually going to make things worse. So, again, it has to be very holistic. It has to have that full approach of all of the moving pieces. I think out of all of this kind of system. Whenever I think about systems, it's like cogs in the wheel of a clock. All of them have to be able to move in tandem, 'cause if any one piece of that is jammed up, it's going to affect all the rest, and the plan would never work.

JT: Right.

RR: The cost of those meal plans, however, from the research that I've done, on the campuses that have them is not any more expensive than the campuses that don't.

JT: Hmm.

RR: And in many cases, the cost is actually lower. And that comes because they're not catering then to the more expensive taste, they're catering to a kind of lower common denominator that meets all the dietary needs and restrictions, but doesn't necessarily have all the bells and whistles. And maybe they come out sometimes, but maybe we're not having smoked salmon and quinoa every day. [LAUGHS] I know you're laughing, but I look at some of the dining options and I think "OK".

[CROSSTALK]

JT: No, I hear you. I hear you. We are going to take a very brief break for a public service announcement, and then we will come back and continue the conversation.

[INTERLUDE] MUSIC CUT 00:46:49-00:47:51

JT: You're on the air with Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. We are rolling into our last 10 minutes here, talking about food insecurity amongst college students with Rosalie Rodriguez. So I just wanted to ask you... we were wrapping up our conversation about ways that campuses can actually begin to proactively address food insecurity, and I think when we were talking previously you mentioned even incorporating health screenings. When students go to student health services being asked various sorts of questions so I'm wondering if you can talk about how that might help.

RR: Some campuses do this as a matter of course. When students come into the health center, they'll do a screening for different eating disorders or disordered eating. So typically we think of eating disorders as either over-eating or under-eating, anorexia, bulimia, but disordered eating at all, so that might

include food insecurity. That's a piece of that. But also even faculty or staff just even signaling to students that you're open to having some of those conversations. Not that you need to necessarily need to be trained to be able to say "you are food insecure and here's..." But knowing what the resources are...

JT: MmHm.

RR: And what's available. There are a number, for instance, knowing whether or not your campus has a food pantry and where it's located. We just opened one here at Bucknell, on Monday, which is fantastic. It's a huge step for us to be able to allow students who do have that need to be able to access that. But being able to know where that is and that that's a resource that is available to folks and whatever other resources. One of the things that I think I should mention is that depending on the county that you're in, there might be different laws governing whether or not students can access off-campus services like food stamps, EBT, or even access a local food pantry or food bank. Many times students have to either meet a residency requirement and/or show need. And depending on where you are, if you have a meal plan, regardless of whether it's meeting your need, you may be ineligible for any of those services. And so knowing what the laws are in your county and whether or not those are things you can reach out to, and if there are, for instance, local churches or non-profit organizations that provide those things without an income requirement and be able to send students if they're within walking distance, or you can provide transportation there. Those are all very important skills and tools to have at your disposal.

JT: Now you mentioned that Bucknell just opened one on Monday, I'm wondering, can you tell us where that is?

RR: It is in the Dean of student's office.

JT: Which is...

RR: On the second floor of the Elaine Langone Center

JT: Wonderful.

RR: It has a sign on the door, you just kind of go in, take what you need, and mark down what you took for the day.

JT: Is there any kind of... if someone's feeling self-conscious or embarrassed, is there any reason they should feel that way or is it a pretty sort of anonymous process.

RR: It's completely anonymous.

JT: Gotcha. Awesome.

RR: Yes.

JT: So in our last few minutes, I just want to back out to maybe one of the bigger picture issues here, which is the way food insecurity on college campuses is really tied into larger questions of socio-economic and racial diversity. Particularly as it relates to the diversity agenda of many universities. So

within this framework, right? What are the larger implications of universities not acknowledging and then seeking to rectify food insecurity.

RR: Sure. So I'm going to tell a short story to kind of contextualize this. When I was interviewed for my first position--overseeing diversity efforts--over twenty years now, I had to learn to kind of talk the business end of diversity, and make it a case consistently about why it was important for schools to become more diverse and inclusive, to have a more racially diverse background, and that included things like being able to talk how it increases the college and universities' rankings in publications like US News & World Report, the Princeton Review, the Fisk Guide to Colleges. Also to recognize that demographically the traditional white upper middle class student base, especially here in the Northeast is significantly declining and colleges that don't diversify and don't reach out to non-traditional population, significantly impact their ability to be relevant years in the future. And also this idea that employers expect students to have the ability to compete in a global marketplace. They expect you to have the skills that should be learned in undergraduate school of how to interact and talk to people who are different from you. And you can't do this with a homogeneous population. You really need to have diversity in your place. And that's why it's important in all of these diversity guides and all these kinds of things, right? During that interview only one person asked me why students of color would want to come to a place like this and what would they get out of it. And I had responded that I felt like the opportunities and the education that I had at that same institution were top-notch and they should not be out of reach--and I still believe that--or unknown to students of color. But to be admitted to this school and even to graduate from the school is not enough, that's not the whole picture, and I think that's where we tend to focus a lot of our attention is like how do we get those students to even be interested in a place like us. Whatever that us is, right? So we're creating students who don't have the means to navigate the campus, whether that's social capital, whether that's actual, physical, monetary capital, the onus is on the campus to be able to provide those resources and tools necessary for those students to be successful. For marginalized populations to thrive and not just survive, not just make it across the finish line to graduation. But to be able to be there. And also to make sure that the rest of the student body who is not a part of that marginalized population receives the training and the background and the education they need to be able to interact with people who are different from them in a way that is not harmful to those people or to themselves. Right? Study after study shows that these spaces that are really homogeneous and who are not doing this work are actually harmful to marginalized students and place undue burdens and stress on them. There's an article just last year in the Journal of Higher Education that found that students' negative diversity experiences actually hindered cognitive development. So they had done a study of 2500 students at four-year universities and 43% of African-American, 37% of Hispanic, and 40% of Asian students reported having a high number of negative diversity interactions. Negative experiences might include hostile, hurtful, or tense interactions with students who are basically different from you. And all of those things they found in the study, led to an impaired development of critical thinking skills and cognitive development. Those are what we're here for. If we are not able to provide a safe learning environment for the marginalized students that we are recruiting to our campuses, then we are, in a sense, basically saying that we're bringing them here to do all of those things that I mentioned in the business pieces--to increase our rankings, to make sure that the traditional age population are getting the skills that they need to be successful in the marketplace--but not focusing on the needs of those marginalized populations to be successful. Both here on campus and beyond their experience.

JT: That's pretty damning. Not your words specifically, but the implications.

RR: Yes.

JT: Right? If you think about, what is it that universities are really up to when they have some understanding that they're diversifying their student body?

RR: Right. Yes. And you know, some of it is lack of awareness, some of it is ignoring what those issues. We've seen over the last 5-10 years where students are really rising up on a lot of college campuses and demanding change. And seeing even high level administrations being pushed out because of protests and things like that, because of the negative climate and experiences of some of those students. And I think that's a testament to just how important it is to make sure that we are checking all those boxes, that we're doing right by those students who we're bringing onto our campus and making sure that their experience is one of inclusion and participation and not just representation. Not just numbers in a pool, but actually having an integrative fulfilling experience that is full of development and leadership and learning by the time they graduate.

JT: So we have one minute left together, and I'm wondering for anybody who might be listening to this show, particularly people who might be listening from the campus here, who are food insecure, right? What do you want to say to them at this point?

RR: You're not the only one. I think that's a huge burden that a lot of students carry is that they can't talk about it, because they're embarrassed or that somehow they will confirm the fact that they shouldn't be here, they can't afford to be here, whatever it might be. But there are a number of students who are experiencing the same things and there are mechanisms, there are resources to be able to help you both on and off campus. Find those people, find those spaces that have the knowledge and the information that you need to be able to help you navigate what those things are. They are here at Bucknell, and they are here at other universities. You just need to make sure that you are asking the questions and asking for the help that you need.

JT: Well thank you so much for coming into the studio tonight. This interview's been really, really great.

RR: Well thank you for having me.

JT: Next week on the show, there will be two students coming on to talk about food insecurity on this particular campus -- Bucknell University -- to talk about their own experiences and to talk about ways that they've been strategizing to move forward both in conversation but actually in material life for students. So please tune in and I will talk to you next week.

END

[00:58:47, MUSIC CUT]