



Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators

Section 9

Public Higher Education in Minnesota



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Introduction

Minnesota's college students have borne the brunt of policy decisions made at the Minnesota Legislature over the past four decades. They now face tuition rates that have skyrocketed and graduate carrying higher and higher levels of student debt, debt that for many will not be paid off over the course of an entire career. The state's recent policy trend, one that leads to high tuition and high levels of aid in the form of increasing spending on the Minnesota State Grant Program, has hurt the students it was intended to help, and has increased debt loads and locked some of our neediest students out of college altogether. The myth that the Minnesota State Grant Program helps those who most need assistance needs to be challenged, and the State Grant Program needs to be recognized for what it is—a program that drives up tuition at our public institutions and doles out the largest grants to the students who least need assistance, while leaving those most in need of help with fewer and fewer options short of assuming massive amounts of student debt or forgoing college altogether.

Public Higher Education by the Numbers

APPROPRIATION

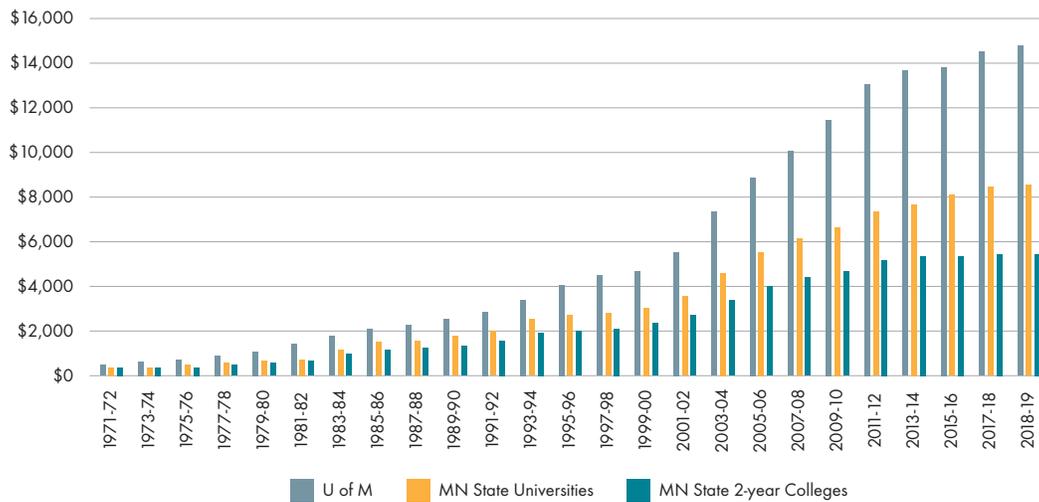
For over three decades, Minnesota ranked in the top 10 states in terms of per-student appropriations to higher education, before the Minnesota Legislature started to appropriate less and less of its budget to higher education in the 1980s and 1990s (Star Tribune Editorial Board, 2017). Minnesota was already well on its way to a massive disinvestment in higher education when the Great Recession hit, causing most categories of spending in the state's budget to shrink. Since then, higher education is one of the only categories of funding that has not bounced back, and instead, continues to decline (Star Tribune Editorial Board, 2017). In 1995, 12.2% of the state's budget was spend on public higher education. By 2011, that percentage dropped to 7.5% of the state's budget. Now, in 2018, higher education accounts for 4% of the state's overall expenditures (Minnesota Management and Budget, 2018). In just 23 years, the state has disinvested in higher education as a percentage of the total state budget by over 66%.

To understand the disinvestment in higher education more fully, we can look at the state's appropriation in terms of per-pupil funding. In fiscal year 2008, before the recession, Minnesota spent \$8,288 in constant adjusted 2017 dollars per full-time equivalent student, or FTE (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2017, p. 27). In fiscal year 2017, we spent \$7,182 per FTE. That's a reduction of 13.3% in nine years. The \$7,182 per-pupil funding puts Minnesota \$461 below the national average (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2017, p. 33).

TUITION

Tuition at our public institutions increased dramatically as institutions were cut off from state appropriation dollars. Minnesota's pre-recession, 2008, net tuition revenue, calculated in constant adjusted 2017 dollars, was \$6,463. In fiscal year 2017, it was \$9,142, an increase of 41.5% in just one nine-year period (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2017, p. 30). But to best see what students and their families are facing, it is important to look at what Minnesota has chosen to do to its public institutions over time.

GRAPH 9.1 MINNESOTA PUBLIC TUITION AND FEES

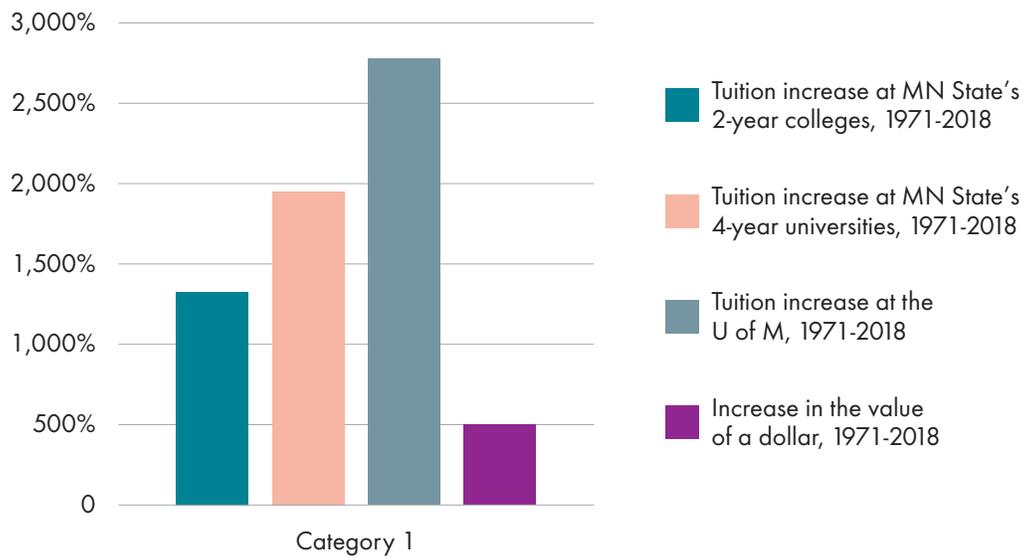


Minnesota Office of Higher Education, System-Level, 2019

The large timeframe represented above, 1971 to 2018, reflects an increase in tuition and fees at the University of Minnesota of 2,711%. It reflects an increase in tuition and fees at our Minnesota State four-year universities of 1,948%, and it reflects an increase in tuition and fees at Minnesota State two-year colleges of 1,303%. But even if we take a shorter view and look only at what the state has done in the past 18 years, the data are still grim. From 2000 to 2017, tuition and fees at Minnesota’s public two-year colleges increased from \$2,480 to \$5,419, an increase of 118.5% (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2019). During that same time span, from 2000 to 2017, tuition and fees at Minnesota State’s four-year universities increased from \$3,258 to \$8,521, an increase of 161.5% (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, System-Level, 2019). The cost of educating a student at our public institutions has stayed relatively constant. The two variables that have changed are the erasure of support from the state and the subsequent increase in tuition to make up for those losses.

To put this historical increase in tuition into perspective, it is helpful to compare it with the value of the dollar over the same period of time. As mentioned above, between 1971-2018, tuition and fees increased at the University of Minnesota by 2,711%, at the Minnesota State four-year universities by 1,948%, and at Minnesota State two-year colleges by 1,303%. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index, the value of a 1971 dollar in 2018 is \$6.20, which is an increase of 520%. Tuition at Minnesota’s public institutions of higher education has outpaced the cost of living by three to five times, depending on institution type. If we look back only as far as 2008, pre-recession, the costs of attending a four-year college are up 23 percent over 2008 levels (American Federation of Teachers, 2018).

GRAPH 9.2: MINNESOTA COLLEGE TUITION INCREASE AS COMPARED TO INFLATION



Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2019

Why does this matter? Here is a snapshot of who attends Minnesota State:

- Total students served: 259,549
- 58% of students are from Greater Minnesota
- 24% are American Indian or students of color
- 37% are 25 or older (the average age is 26)
- 55% are female
- 19% are the first in their families to attend college (50,000)
- 51% are from underrepresented groups (133,000)
- 10,500 are veterans (Workgroup on Longterm Sustainability, 2016)

And here is a snapshot of the students at the University of Minnesota:

- Total students served: 44,405 (including graduation students)
- 25.9% of undergraduate students are the first in their families to attend college
- Students represent all 50 states
- Students represent 136 countries
- 1,903 of current students are African American
- 424 of current students are American Indian
- 3,755 of current students are Asian (University of Minnesota, 2018)

These are the people the Minnesota Legislature has left to figure out how to pay tuition that has increased at a rate greater than four to five times the rate of inflation. And we will never know how many people have had to forego college altogether because of those same policy decisions.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

As the state appropriation to higher education was slashed and tuition rose, student debt loads, to nobody's surprise, also increased. The average student debt load carried by a baccalaureate-level graduate of Minnesota's class of 2017 was \$31,734, ranking among the states with the highest levels of student loan debt (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2018, p. 8). Further, the percentage of students who have to take out loans to pay for college ranks even higher when compared to other states. Sixty-eight percent of Minnesota graduates have had to take on debt to pay for college, the fourth highest percentage in the country (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2018, p. 9).

GRAPH 9.3: AVERAGE MN STUDENT DEBT FOR GRADUATES WITH A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE



If an average Minnesota graduate from the class of 2017 carries \$31,734 in loans with a ten-year term, monthly payments are quite high. One of the most common reasons teachers give for leaving the profession or leaving teacher preparation in pursuit of a different profession is the fact that teacher pay does not compensate teachers such that they can pay the average student debt payments and their family health care premiums.

If the student gets one of the best interest rates at 6%, the monthly payments are \$352. Whereas, if the student gets one of the highest interest rates offered by Sallie Mae, the monthly payments rise to \$452.

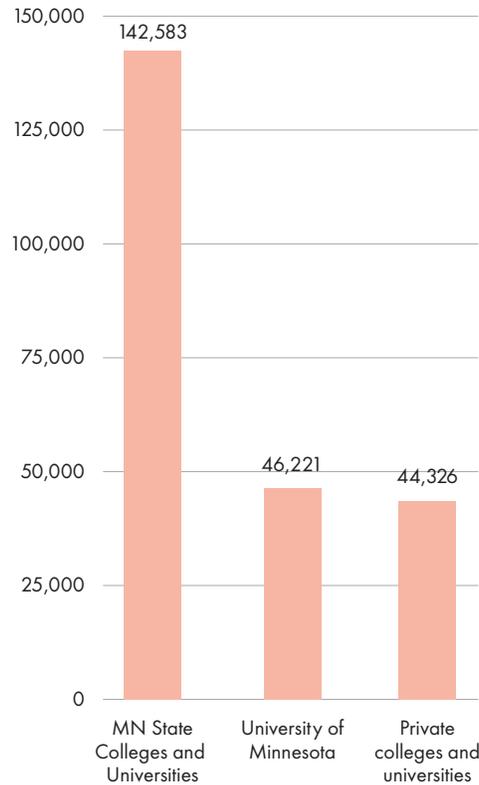
Students Shut Out of College Altogether

It is very difficult to get specific data on the number of students who would attend college were it affordable, but cannot because of the high tuition model that Minnesota has adopted. In a recent national study that examined 2,000 colleges and universities, researchers found that half of those institutions were affordable for families whose income is above \$160,000 per year. For students from lower income backgrounds, the analysis found that only 1 to 5% of the colleges were within reach: “The college affordability problem is fundamentally one of inequity [...]. This inequity enables a wealthy student to attend essentially any college while effectively shutting out many of her peers” (Bidwell, 2017). Faculty at our public institutions can tell countless stories of students who drop out because of financial hardship, or who fail because their need to carry two or three jobs to afford tuition overwhelms them, and they are ultimately unable to successfully complete their school work.

ENROLLMENT

In the fall of 2017, the University of Minnesota enrolled 46,221 undergraduate students at its five campuses (University of Minnesota, 2018). The number of undergraduates in the Minnesota State system was 142,583 in the fall of 2017 (Office of Higher Education, 2018). Total undergraduate enrollment at Minnesota's private colleges and universities in the fall of 2017 was 44,282 (Office of Higher Education, 2018).

GRAPH 9.4: MINNESOTA UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT, FALL 2017



There were 44,326 undergraduates enrolled in Minnesota's private colleges and universities in the fall of 2017, while over four times that number, 188,804 undergraduates enrolled in Minnesota's public institutions of higher education (Office of Higher Education, 2018).

The Structure of the Minnesota State Grant Program

The Minnesota State Grant Program is structured so that the maximum grant award is ostensibly aimed at 50% of the cost of attending college, and the cost of attending college is capped at the highest public tuition at a two-year or four-year program. Following is the formula used for calculating grant awards:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Tuition and fees + Living and miscellaneous expenses} \\ & = \\ & \text{Award calculation budget} \\ & \text{(This is prorated by number of credits in cases where a student attends part-time)} \\ & - 50\% \text{ assigned student responsibility} \\ & - \text{assigned family responsibility} \\ & - \text{Pell Grant dollars} \\ & = \\ & \text{State Grant Award} \end{aligned}$$

(Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota State Grant, 2018)

Since 2016, the calculation has established the tuition and fees number, no matter whether the student is attending a public or a private, a for-profit or a not-for profit institution, at the highest public institutions' current tuition rate.

DISTRIBUTION OF STATE GRANT DOLLARS BY INSTITUTION TYPE

In order to understand how heavily the State Grant Program is skewed toward the private sector, it is helpful to examine the distribution of state grant dollars by institution type. At the lowest income levels, the total amount spent in awards to students is relatively equal across types of institutions with the exception of for-profit private institutions: with \$5.49 million in grants to students at Minnesota's two-year colleges, \$3.76 million to students at Minnesota State's four-year universities, \$5.46 million going to students at the University of Minnesota, and \$6.07 million going to students at Minnesota's private, non-profit institutions (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota State Grant, 2018). The largest amount goes to private, non-profit institutions at all income levels. However, for higher and higher income brackets, greater and greater amounts go to students attending Minnesota's private, non-profit institutions, and when we look at the income bracket of an adjusted gross income of \$90,000-\$99,999, the amount that goes to private non-profit colleges is nearly equal to the total amount that goes to all of the public institutions combined.

CHART 9.1: DISTRIBUTION OF STATE GRANT DOLLARS BY STUDENT INCOME

ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME	MN STATE 2-YEAR COLLEGES	MN STATE 4-YEAR COLLEGES	U OF MN	PRIVATE NON-PROFIT COLLEGES	PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES
\$10,000-\$19,999	\$5.49 million	\$3.76 million	\$5.46 million	\$6.07 million	\$1.16 million
\$20,000-\$29,999	\$8.01 million	\$4.73 million	\$6.68 million	\$6.94 million	\$1.65 million
\$30,000-\$39,999	\$6.02 million	\$4.78 million	\$6.93 million	\$7.3 million	\$1.09 million
\$40,000-\$49,999	\$3.88 million	\$4.14 million	\$6.55 million	\$6.86 million	\$.74 million
\$50,000-\$59,000	\$3 million	\$3.52 million	\$5.79 million	\$6.29 million	\$.52 million
\$60,000-\$69,999	\$2.23 million	\$2.78 million	\$4.98 million	\$5.63 million	\$.33 million
\$70,000-\$79,999	\$1.16 million	\$1.93 million	\$3.60 million	\$4.39 million	\$.25 million
\$80,000-\$89,999	\$.64 million	\$1.28 million	\$2.45 million	\$2.9 million	\$.16 million
\$90,000-\$99,999	\$.23 million	\$.57 million	\$1.52 million	\$2.08 million	\$.04 million

(Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota State Grant, 2018)

Policy Interventions for Public Higher Education

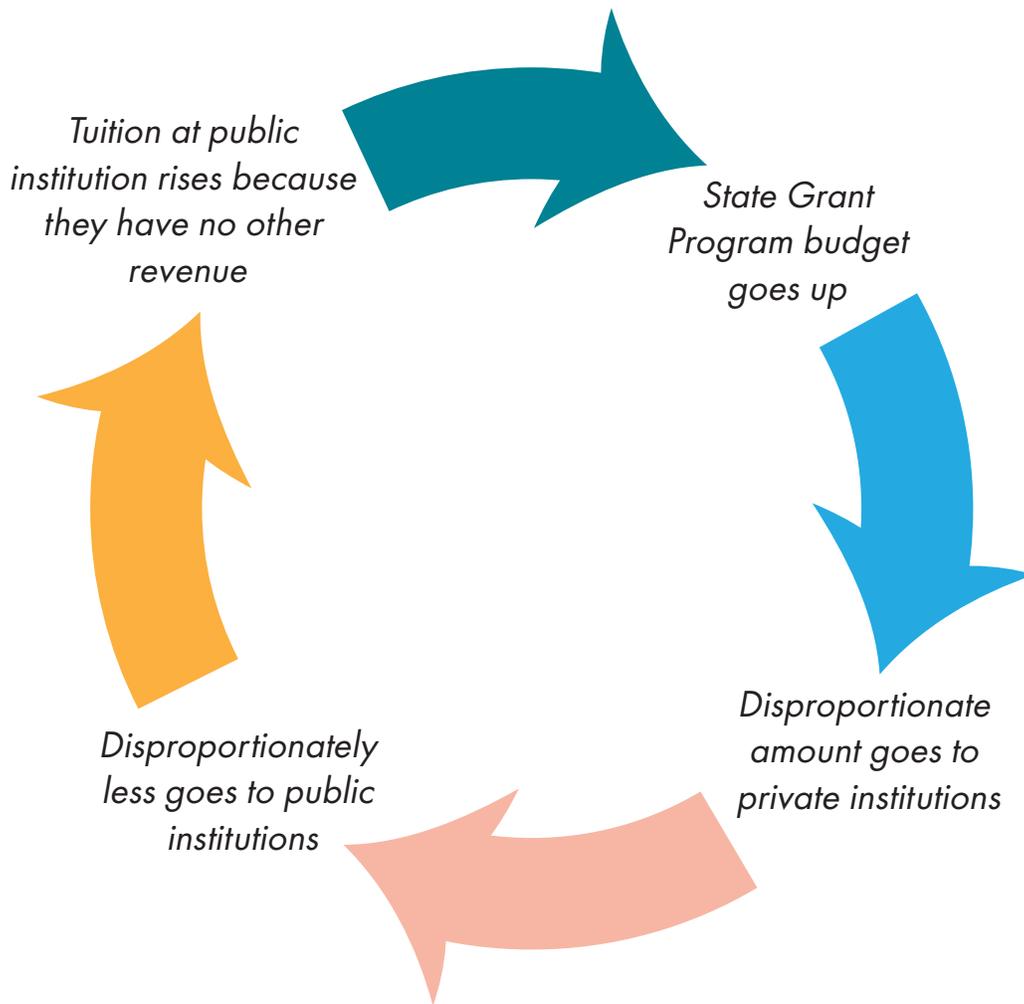
Minnesota has both dramatically disinvested in public higher education over the past two decades, and at the same time, it has sent more and more of the money it spends on public higher education into the State Grant Program and less and less of it on our public institutions. These two policy decisions, coupled with the structure of the State Grant Program, have had devastating consequences for the students most in need of assistance.

Each year, the state's allocation to higher education is split into three categories: 1) the University of Minnesota, 2) Minnesota State, and 3) the Minnesota State Grant Program. The overall allotment to higher education each biennium is a finite amount. The more of that money that goes to the State Grant Program, the less goes to the institutions themselves, which means that the only way those institutions can make up the difference is to raise tuition.

Grants from the State Grant Program, which can be used at public or private, for-profit or non-profit institutions, are capped according to the highest public tuition at a two-year or four-year institution. Minnesota's private colleges and universities, therefore, have a vested interest in tuition at the public institutions going up, as that increases the size of the grants that students attending private institutions can get. This creates an ever-worsening situation for students at public institutions and at lower income levels, and it has a doubly-negative impact on the students who most need assistance to access and complete a college program. Private schools push for more of the higher education budget to go into grants that follow the students rather than to the public institutions, which in turn forces public institutions to continuously increase tuition, which makes it harder and harder for students in low and middle income brackets to get through college without increasingly overwhelming debt loads.

State policy has created a vicious cycle. First, the state dramatically reduces its overall allocation to higher education as a percentage of its budget. Then, the state puts more and more of that money into the state grant program, which in turn forces tuition at public institutions to rise, which in turn leads to larger max caps on grant awards, which leads to more money going into the grant program, and so on.

IMAGE 9.1: THE VISCIOUS CYCLE OF THE HIGH TUITION, HIGH AID MODEL



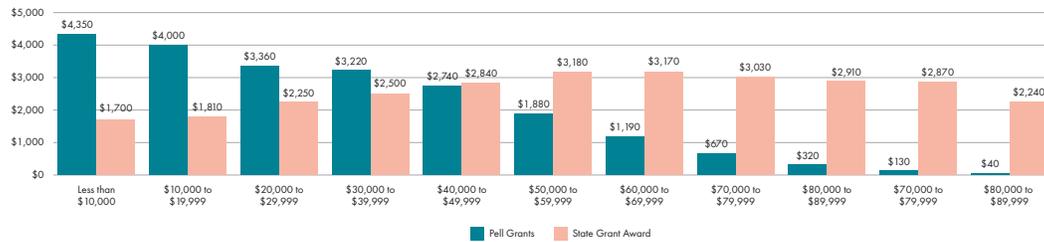
Because of the structure of the State Grant Program, a choice to increase its budget is also a choice to both disproportionately send grant dollars to private institutions and to increase tuition at our public institutions. Minnesota has chosen to create a grant program that actually increases the tuition students need grants to pay for in the first place. The winners in this model are our private institutions and private student loan lenders. The losers are Minnesota students, particularly those at our lowest income levels.

Our State Grant Program is called a needs-based program, and on its surface, it appears to be just that. And if we compare how much money Minnesota spends on its needs-based program, we rank ninth in the nation. But one need look no further than where money goes to understand the problem. The structure of the program is such that it is actually bleeding the public systems of the dollars they need to keep tuition low while it sends its largest grants to private institutions with students from the highest income brackets.

When the public hears that the State Grant Program is a needs-based program, a reasonable assumption to make is that the money is going to people who need it most. In the past several years, the Office of Higher Education has presented data showing where the State Grant Program money goes in such a way as to imply that the neediest students at our public institutions are getting most of the money. That is a distortion of the facts.

GRAPH 9.5: GRANTS BY FAMILY ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME

Average combined federal Pell and State grant award received, by family adjusted gross income, fiscal year 2017.



Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2018, p. 12

As we see in the chart above, most of the aid for students whose family adjusted gross income is below \$40,000 comes from federal Pell grants. The State Grant Program is actually doing very little for them. In fact, the average State Grant award that goes to someone whose family adjusted gross income is over \$100,000 is greater than the size of the award that goes to students whose family adjusted gross income is less than \$10,000. The grant program sends larger awards to students whose family adjusted gross income is higher than \$40,000.

This award calculation model would make sense if the total aid package were enough to allow someone in the lower income brackets to cover their costs. However, that is by no means the case. The Minnesota Office of Higher Education calculates two categories of costs for students: 1) tuition and 2) living and miscellaneous expenses. In 2017, tuition for a full-time student at a two-year college was \$5,736, and living and miscellaneous expenses were \$9,320. Tuition at a public four-year college was \$14,186, and, again, living and miscellaneous expenses were \$9,320. That means that the total amount needed for a student to attend a public two-year college full time in 2017 was \$15,056. The total amount needed for a student to attend a public four-year university was \$23,506. And, as the chart above shows, the highest total aid package, including Pell Grants and State Grant Awards, is less than \$6,000.

The HOPE Lab publishes a report each year assessing the basic needs of our nation's college and university students. The report assesses the prevalence of food insecurity, homelessness, and housing insecurity among college students. Food insecurity is defined as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods in a socially acceptable manner" (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 4). In its most recent report, *Still Hungry and Homeless in College* (2018), they report that 36% of four-year college and university students are food insecure, and that the percentage of students who are food insecure at community colleges this year is closer to 42% (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 3).

Almost "one third of community college students and one-quarter of university students said that because of a lack of money they skipped meals or cut the size of their meals, with 22% of community college students and 18% of university students doing this at least 3 days in the last 30 days" (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 10). Thirty-six percent of four-year students and 46% of two-year students are housing insecure (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 3). Not surprisingly, basic needs insecurities are associated with poor academic outcomes. College students who have to skip meals or days with food are more likely to earn lower grades in college (El Zein et al., 2017). Researchers have also linked basic needs insecurity to "poorer self-reported physical health, symptoms of depression, and higher perceived stress" (HOPE Lab, 2018). And, even when campuses provide services such as food shelves to help alleviate food insecurity of students, the stigma attached to accessing such services prevents many students from making use of the opportunity. According to the most recent HOPE Lab study, 50% of students who responded to a large survey at a Midwestern university reported that they did not want to be served by their peers at a campus food pantry.

The HOPE Lab report also assesses the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness among college students. Housing insecurity includes challenges such as the inability to pay rent or utilities or the need to move frequently. Almost half of community college students and 35% of university students in the HOPE Lab study experienced housing insecurity in the last year (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 13). Nine percent of four-year students and 12% of two-year students are homeless (HOPE Lab, 2018, p. 3).

A State Grant Program that pays its smallest awards to students at the lowest income brackets is leaving those students with the choice to either take on debt that equals or exceeds their gross adjusted family income or forego college altogether. It should be noted that on a national level, bachelor's degree recipients who received Pell Grants, "most of whom had family incomes of \$40,000 or less, were more than five times as likely to default [on their student loans] within 12 years as their higher income peers" (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2018, p. 5).

It is true that most of the money in the grant program is being spent on students who attend our public institutions, but students in the lowest income brackets receive small grants, leaving them with a combined Pell Grant and State Grant award that is less than half of what they need to cover the costs of attending college full time. In essence, the State Grant Program has become a vehicle for diverting dollars meant for public higher education into the private sector, leaving the vast majority of Minnesota students to face a decision of taking on greater and greater debt or forgoing college altogether.

According to the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, by 2020, our economy will have grown such that it will require and sustain 165 million jobs. Sixty-five percent of those jobs will require post-secondary education. But instead of preparing our students for that future, we are locking them out of college or burdening them with high levels of student debt. Why should legislators care?

- Student debt stifles spending. It slows the automotive industry, and all other aspects of spending.
- Student debt slows the housing market: “Among student loan borrowers, 41 percent have delayed homeownership. Meanwhile, 27 percent haven’t even managed to make it out of their parent’s home yet” (Kirkham, 2016).
- Student loan debt holds back new businesses. Twenty-five percent of “new graduates with loans more than \$25,000 “are delaying their plans to start a business due to those loans” (Kirkham, 2016).

The operations of Minnesota State alone support a total of 67,717 jobs in Minnesota. And for every \$1 in appropriation, Minnesota State generates nearly \$12 in economic activity. And that’s just Minnesota State.

The State Grant Program has been designed in such a way that it bleeds dollars from our public institutions, leading to a cycle of ever-increasing tuition and ever-increasing student debt loads. And, Minnesota has moved more and more of its higher education allotment into this program at the same time that we have decreased the percentage of the state budget that goes to higher education at all by over 66%. A choice to increase spending on the State Grant Program is a choice to increase tuition and student debt loads.

Future funding decisions should recognize the disproportionate nature of the State Grant Program, which skews toward private institutions and higher income levels. If Minnesota is serious about providing meaningful aid to families at the lowest income levels, there are other models to consider that would make a much more meaningful difference for our students and our economy.

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