

MSCF Minute



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Changing to Stay the Same

by Matt Williams, MSCF Vice President

When students tell us they are not just hungry for change, but *starving* for change, we must listen. At the LeadMN scholarship gala last week, that was precisely the message delivered by the student leadership, who shared with us stories about their struggles securing the very basic needs of living. Given the sobering national statistics on food insecurity among college students, they are far from alone. Last spring, researchers from the University of Wisconsin and Temple University found that 36 percent of students at the colleges they surveyed (and some 46 percent at two-year schools) experienced food insecurity as a higher-education student, and a similar amount experienced housing insecurity. The researchers also made clear that these numbers likely underrepresent the actual problem – precisely because it is hard to get data from students who are already on the margins.

Even though there is a dizzying amount of wealth being amassed by a small group of people in our country, we are yet again asked to confront the question of how it is that anyone – let alone a college student – is going hungry in the United States. As educators, there is no escaping this question. Students living in dire precariousness simply cannot learn well, let alone succeed.

Queue Reimagining Minnesota State – and the title of this article. There is a particular model of organizational change that has become so prevalent that it's almost invisible, accepted as a given. But it is not. It is the model championed by consulting groups such as McKinsey and Bain and celebrated at elite "thought leader" gatherings including Davos and the Aspen Ideas Festival. And so far, the Reimagining initiative has, in many ways, proceeded like a McKinsey-type model – and that's a let-down for our students and for our institutions. Among the common facets of this model are:

- A belief that the people in command of the structures of power are the best

people to think about how to change those structures of power; the voices of people experiencing the problems caused by these structures are left out.

- People do not need to have any expertise in an area to offer solutions in that area; they only need to know how to use various tools of "issue analysis."
- By not looking at a problem holistically and from multiple perspectives, the focus can be placed on one small area in the hope that some tweaks will create outsized results — all while preserving the fundamental structures that were already in place.
- Avoiding any solution that asks the people in power to relinquish any of that power.

At the end of the day, what results from this model are proposed "solutions" that don't alter the dynamics that caused the problem in the first place.

Applied to problems such as student food and housing insecurity, the McKinsey model would avoid all deep investigations into *why* students are facing such struggles. It wouldn't talk about who is behind the massive divestment in public funding for education and it *certainly* wouldn't entertain the idea that the rise of concentrated wealth in this country is absolutely the cause of the rest of us having to make do with less.

Instead, this model would try to find a "solution" that avoids asking the extremely wealthy to pay their fair share or to relinquish some of their control over our democracy. This model would look for solutions like a technological "app" that would automate advising or an electronic repository for documenting informal learning so that we don't have to pay for instruction with a highly qualified educator in a classroom--small tweaks compared to a robust public reinvestment in education. Again--changing to stay the same, all while many of our students go hungry or wonder

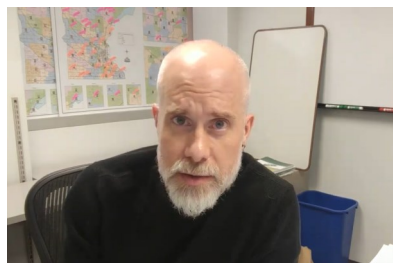
where they will sleep tonight.

We hope the Reimagining Minnesota State initiative can go beyond the McKinsey model and be an invitation to focus our attention on the root causes of the real problems we face, because that's what we're already doing. Given the outcome of the 2018 elections both in Minnesota and across the nation, we believe it is time to talk about ways to ensure the basic needs of college students are met while not driving them into debt. We believe it is time to have real conversations about how we can bring time tested and data proven programs that focus on student success to our campuses so that more students get the support they need to graduate. And we're already having conversations with our elected leaders about making sure our policies and budgets truly reflect our values. These solutions may not be as flashy as some new bit of technology, but they are the changes we are striving for. They are the changes we and our students need.

To register for the Reimagining MinnState second forum please see the link below: <https://www.minnstate.edu/board/reimagining/index.html>

If you cannot attend or watch the streaming of this event but would still like updates and opportunities to be a part of this initiative as it unfolds, you can still sign up on this page <http://www.cvent.com/d/wbqh6p>

I look forward to seeing many of you there for these sessions, and thank you for your commitment to the work we do with students.



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