

# Interview with Sara Goldrick-Rab

Professor Sara Goldrick-Rab, Professor of Higher Education Policy & Sociology, recently visited the Faculty Senate Steering Committee to discuss the issues of food and housing insecurity on university campuses. Later I was able to get her response to a few questions for the *Faculty Herald*.



Sara Goldrick-Rab

**Paul LaFollette: How did you become interested in this subject?**

Professor Goldrick-Rab: My research team was studying financial aid and how students receiving the Pell Grant were faring. One day, a student told us that the trouble she was having in college was that she was hungry. She hadn't eaten in two days. We were stunned. No one was writing about this, studying it, etc. So we started exploring, and have found it's a big problem that's been overlooked for years.

**PL: What have your major findings been?**

SG-R: We find that food insecurity affects between 1/3 and 1/2 of undergraduates, and similar numbers of students are also housing insecure. Also, around 1 in 10 undergraduates has been homeless in the last year. Rates are similar at Temple, but grossly unequal by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, foster care status, and along other typical lines of inequality.

**PL: Are there any issues with regard to food (housing) insecurity that are particular to Temple?**

SG-R: No. Both our data and my experience with students suggest the issues are very similar to those we see around the country. The cost of attendance is beyond the reach of many of our students, even after financial aid is taken into account, mainly because the state has cut our budget, so tuition has gone up and because the cost of living in Philadelphia is substantial. Work that is stable and pays a decent wage is hard to find for our students, as they compete with other workers not in college. Many come from families with relatively few resources, especially after shelling out for college. When they fall short, they have few people to turn to who are in a position to offer up money.

**PL: Beyond studying these problems, tell us about some of the activities in which you have been involved to directly address them.**

SG-R: I've taken many steps to not only assess how prevalent these problems are and for whom, but also to study ways to address them. For example, my team is leading experiments at several colleges where we are trying out meal vouchers, housing vouchers, and food scholarships to support students. We also have both a project on emergency aid, and I run a nonprofit administering emergency aid to students (we have a site at Temple). The College and University Food Bank Alliance and its founder, Clare Cady, are now part of my team at Temple as well. Every week we spend time advising colleges how to improve practice to help students with food and housing, and often travel around the country to do site visits and provide technical assistance, and also to support policymakers at the state and federal level. And then, of course, I also support students 1:1— both Temple students and those around the country who reach out for help. It makes for a very busy life.

The Temple Association of University Professors (TAUP) has recently honored Professor Goldrick-Rab's request to administer the FAST Fund at Temple University. See the TAUP website for more information and to donate to the fund <http://taup.org/fast-fund/>.

## The Temple University FAST Fund

*"[Students] ... will fail if they have no books, no pencils, no gas money to get to school, and no food in their stomachs. ... Covering living costs, at least enough to ensure that their basic needs are met, is a productive investment of resources. ...."*  
Sara Goldrick-Rab

There is a gap between financial aid and the cost of attending college, and because students experience economic emergencies such as a lack of food, car breakdowns, job loss or a reduction in work hours that threaten their ability to stay in school, the FAST Fund was founded to offer quick financial relief from incidents that might keep undergraduate students from continuing their studies and completing their degrees.

TAUP will be administering the FAST Fund (Faculty and Students Together) at Temple University at the request of Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, creator of [FAST](#), and Founder of the [Wisconsin HOPE Lab](#) and [HOPE Center for College, Community and Justice](#). She is a Professor of Higher Education Policy and Sociology at Temple. Norma Corrales-Martin, TAUP Treasurer and Associate Professor of Teaching and Instruction in CLA's Spanish and Portuguese department will oversee the Fund at TAUP.

The FAST Fund offers emergency assistance to Temple University undergraduate students, and all funds collected are used exclusively for this purpose and are tax deductible. Some common requests at other institutions' FAST funds have been to secure housing for homeless students or to help students avoid eviction, purchase textbooks, secure glasses, purchase gas, and help pay car repairs.

We hope to help students from all programs at the University, and eventually would like to include graduate students. Many TU students are economically disadvantaged. Homelessness among students is a major problem in higher ed, and has been the single biggest reason students have contacted the FAST Fund in other institutions.

The University runs an emergency grant fund through the Office of Student Affairs and we will be coordinating support for individual students with them. The FAST Fund is less restrictive and its application procedure is less involved than those of the Office of Student Affairs. It is designed to move quickly to help students. The University's fund operates only when classes are in session, and the summer or winter breaks are when many students experience serious problems. The FAST fund will be available to students throughout the year.