



Statement from Hope Center President & Founder Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab: Congratulations to #RealCollege Champion and Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal

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This week, a bipartisan majority of the U.S. Senate wisely confirmed James Kvaal for the role of Under Secretary of Education, and [not a moment too soon](#). James is a highly-qualified leader who has spent a career putting students first and brings to the Department a deep understanding of the financial and other barriers facing #RealCollege students and a firm commitment to rectifying them.

The role of the Under Secretary is crucial in [addressing](#) the interrelated crises of college affordability, basic needs insecurity, and student loan debt. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis have revealed what we have long known: #RealCollege students, their families, and student borrowers need support and a willing partner in government. [Nearly 3 in 5 students](#) are experiencing basic needs insecurity, while millions are navigating a patchwork system of emergency grant aid and a complex web of public benefits programs that often excludes students entirely and reduces college attainment.

James steps into this role at a time of tremendous peril and opportunity for millions of students. Our nation's wellbeing depends on us creating a higher education system and set of safety net programs that are mutually-reinforcing and do not force students to choose between eating, paying rent, and getting an education. Now is the time to make programs like emergency aid work for students, including those who have dropped out or cannot fill out a FAFSA, while we have unnecessary and counterproductive barriers in programs that help students afford food, housing, childcare, transportation, and more.

Much of this work will require the Under Secretary to work [across](#) federal and state agencies, and with colleges and universities, to creatively and aggressively prioritize student basic needs.

Today, we congratulate James and the Department of Education and look forward to the hard and necessary work of enacting systemic change for #RealCollege students. We believe James will be an exceptional partner in that work.