

## **EPISODE 5: “Educated and Unhoused” TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations**

**KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER:** Hey, it’s Kacie. If you haven’t listened to the rest of this season, go back and start with episode 1. Things will make more sense.

**KLB:** Imagine it’s 2016 and you’re scouring the internet for fashion and beauty tips.

**ALEXANDRA PASQUALONE:** Okay, yes. I am there.

**KLB:** You have articles with thigh high boots, off-the-shoulder everything, thick bushy brow tutorials, and an odd resurgence of 90s-inspired chokers.

**AP:** All *AMAZING* looks.

**KLB:** And then you come across the face of twenty-three year-old Brooke Evans and her cat Kiki under a *Glamour Magazine* headline that reads “I Didn’t Even Have an Address” In the article, Evans speaks about her experience as a college student facing homelessness on and off over the course of six years.<sup>1</sup> From overnights in her car and hiding out in campus bathrooms, to disguising her odor using perfume samples from the very magazine that covered her story. Evans did what she could to survive as a struggling college student.<sup>2</sup>

**AP:** And Evans wasn’t just any college student, but a fellow Badger who experienced homelessness right here on UW-Madison’s campus.

**KLB:** Those who don’t know her story may think her situation is unique, but the article points out that, in fact, it’s not. In 2015, over 59,000 applicants for federal student aid identified as homeless, a number that nearly doubled from 2009.<sup>3</sup> Today, over 1.5 million college students in America face homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

**AP:** You may be wondering how this is possible. How does a young philosophy and neurobiology student end up sleeping in her car over the course of several years? More importantly, how did her struggles go unnoticed for so long?

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address,” *Glamour Magazine*, August 9, 2016.

<https://www.glamour.com/story/i-didnt-even-have-an-address>

<sup>2</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>3</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>4</sup> Bryce McKibben, Jiayao Wu, and Sarah Abelson “New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity,” The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, August 3, 2023.

<https://hope.temple.edu/npsas#:~:text=Overall%2C%2023%25%20of%20undergraduates%2C.more%20han%201.5%20million%20students.>

**KLB:** Perhaps Evans was successful at hiding her homelessness from her classmates and professors. Also possible... the University and those who wield power within it are very much aware of students such as Evans and turn a blind eye to those quote-unquote “rare cases.”

**[THEME MUSIC]**

**KLB:** From the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History, this is *Reorientation*, a podcast exploring the history of UW-Madison you won't get on your campus welcome tour. I'm Kacie Lucchini Butcher.

**AP:** And I'm Alexandra Pasqualone. This season we've been focusing on student housing, and in this episode we're honing in on one of the most dire consequences of a complicated housing landscape—students experiencing homelessness.

**KLB:** What are the factors that put UW students at risk of homelessness? How has the problem changed over the decades... or stayed the same? And how has the university responded?

**AP:** So I think it's fair to say that the history of homelessness in a place is kind of hard to talk about.

**KLB:** I mean it's complicated, right? People have a mix of beliefs about how people come to experience homelessness. When we think about homelessness as a failure of the individual, we're less responsible for thinking about how we have created conditions where someone could not have a permanent home.

**AP:** And these views toward homelessness have implications for the way we've documented it over time. When people feel a lot of shame over something, they're not always excited to talk about it, let alone display their struggles publicly.

**KLB:** And sometimes it can be difficult to hold multiple truths. Madison is a beautiful place with a wonderful campus, filled with people who care about others *and* there are people (including students) who experience extreme hardships here in ways that should be acknowledged.

**SARA GOLDRICK ROB:** I can still picture that intersection between, you know, State Street and Bascom. And I can still picture the people experiencing homelessness who would sit on the ledges or on the curb or in front of the stores and the ways in which they were policed.

**AP:** Sara Goldrick-Rab is a higher ed researcher.

**SGR:** I am currently an independent consultant working in Philadelphia. I'm a writer, and a speaker and a teacher at the Community College of Philadelphia.

**KLB:** Sara was also a former professor of Educational Policy and Sociology at UW-Madison. And she spent 20 years researching more equitable ways for students to finish college. Whether for students or anyone else, she thinks a lot about how stigmatized the issue of homelessness is.

**SGR:** And depending on whether Madison was having a family weekend or whether there was a Dane County Farmer's Market or whatever, they were pushed away. And... you know, overlooked by students. Or maybe somebody dropped some free food on them. But, you know, not, not a lot of care and respect shown to these individuals that, you know, if you think that that is what homelessness looks like, and you think that everybody who's homeless has been drinking or has mental illness of the ways that get exhibited down there and so on, then I can see why people would not want to believe this is possible for the students.

**AP:** I love the farmer's market as much as the next guy, but it paints a pretty bleak picture when you think about who gets pushed to the fringes.

**KLB:** Her point about people not wanting to believe homelessness is possible for UW-Madison students is a really important one. At a large, research-intensive university, where we have access to an abundance of resources, and some of the most dedicated, bright students, it feels like the math isn't mathing.

**AP:** Unless you think about how close many of us really are to homelessness. Somewhere between 30-60% of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck.<sup>5</sup> We've spent the last four episodes exploring what makes finding housing so difficult for students... unaffordable rents, limited options, cramped spaces... It makes sense the right combination of difficulties could become *insurmountable*.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** So it's clear that with less and less space available and rent skyrocketing, homelessness and a lack of basic needs is a threat some of Madison's college students face. But there are sooo many reasons students end up with nowhere to live.

**AP:** Yeah it's often a slippery slope. Dangerous conditions are one reason students turn to public spaces in desperate times. A recent investigative piece from a local community radio

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<sup>5</sup> Clara Haverstic, "57% of Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck in 2025," MarketWatch Guides, May 14, 2025, <https://www.marketwatch.com/financial-guides/investing/paycheck-to-paycheck-statistics/#:~:text=Catey%20Hill%20is%20the%20managing.Daily%20News%2C%20Meredith%20and%20SmartMoney.&text=Cos%20ts%20have%20increased%20for%20just.consolidating%20debt%20for%20faster%20payoff.&text=Fifty%2Dseven%20percent%20of%20Americans.report%20living%20paycheck%20to%20paycheck>.

station reported on several UW students who chose to sleep in campus buildings or in their car because of quote “precarious or unsafe living conditions.”<sup>6</sup>

**KLB:** That can be physical concerns or the people you’re living with. The article details encounters between police and students found storing their belongings in library bathrooms or sleeping in Alumni Park. One student told officers of his struggles with a roommate whose sleeping and gaming habits made their place unlivable. When he couldn’t stay with his girlfriend, his only other option was sleeping outside.<sup>7</sup>

**AP:** Breaks in the academic year and odd leasing seasons also mean some students face periods where they are left in the lurch.<sup>8</sup> In 2022, a student between leases was charged with sleeping in a campus building. The reason... They had 10 days to wait out before the lease started on their new apartment.<sup>9</sup>

**KLB:** The line dividing those housed and those facing homelessness can sometimes be razor thin for students. Unexpected events, emergency situations, and other abnormalities contribute to students sleeping in public or in their cars. In some cases, students arrive on campus already at risk of experiencing financial burdens. This is because more low-income students are enrolling in school. Well paying positions—often ones requiring degrees—have perhaps motivated many of these students to enter college. While that’s good news, it also means more students on campus face financially precarious situations.<sup>10</sup>

**AP:** This was the case for Brooke Evans. Growing up in poverty with a mother suffering from alcoholism meant Evans began working at the age of 13. Meals included fried hamburger buns and sugar for dinner.<sup>11</sup>

**KLB:** Once accepted at UW–La Crosse, Evans quickly realized that even at a local state school, tuition and living would require significant funds.<sup>12</sup> Evans said, quote: “I never thought about how I was going to pay for it. It was such a small world where I came from. I didn’t know how to apply for financial aid or scholarships, and ended up taking out loans.”<sup>13</sup>

**AP:** And even for students who are successful at navigating the financial aid process, they may face public four-year institutions that fail to keep up with the rising cost of tuition and living expenses.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sara Gabler and Chali Pittman, “[UW Anti-Camping Rule Rarely Used Before Police Raid](#),” October 3, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Gabler and Pittman, “[UW Anti-Camping Rule Rarely Used Before Police Raid](#).”

<sup>8</sup> See Gabler and Pittman.

<sup>9</sup> See Gabler and Pittman.

<sup>10</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>11</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>12</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>13</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

<sup>14</sup> Brody, “I Didn’t Even Have an Address.”

**KLB:** By the time Evans transferred to UW-Madison her sophomore year, she was knowledgeable about financial aid, but that didn't solve her problems. In the fall of 2012, after totaling work-study and grants and subtracting tuition costs, Evans was left with a little over 1000 dollars for the whole semester... to pay for food, housing, utilities, and other basic needs.<sup>15</sup> With no family support, Evans found herself in a position where housing was no longer an option.

**AP:** Talk about the math not mathing.

**KLB:** Yeah... The costs catch up to these students pretty quickly. Compounding over time, it's no wonder students end up with little-to-no options.

**AP:** So what do these students do?

**KLB:** Sara Goldrick-Rab says for many students, dealing with homelessness means hiding it.

**SGR:** **The majority of college students in this country who are homeless are couch surfing. Most of them do not have a mental illness that would play itself out like we see on the street, although certainly some. But you know, this is why it means that students, particularly those at Madison, talk to me so much about their attempts to pass... to do the things that would help hide the homelessness.**

**AP:** For Evans, she survived on cold cream-of-mushroom soup from city food banks, used perfume swatches in magazines, and washed in the public library. Her means of shelter was her car.<sup>16</sup>

**KLB:** Some may wonder... Why, with everything against them, do students put themselves through school? Why not ditch the heavy tuition costs for something more financially supportive? An obvious answer noted earlier, is that many well-paying positions these days require college degrees. A simpler reason... These students, like most college-goers, are aspiring for more.

**KLB:** Evans said, quote: "I still remember being pulled aside in kindergarten and told I'd gotten into the gifted program and thinking, Oh my God, no matter how fat and poor or 'white trash' I am, I will always be smart—I might be able to get out of here. If college is only for people who can afford it, then we're only reproducing the same inequalities we're supposed to be equalizing by getting an education."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Brody, "I Didn't Even Have an Address." "In the fall of 2012, Evans received a combination of work-study and grants totaling \$6,367; her tuition was \$5,193. The roughly \$1,174 remaining had to pay for food, housing, utilities, car costs, health supplies, phone and Internet service, laundry, textbooks, and lab fees, but in Madison the \$1,174 would barely cover a studio apartment for one month."

<sup>16</sup> Brody, "I Didn't Even Have an Address."

<sup>17</sup> Brody, "I Didn't Even Have an Address."

**AP:** A 2024 basic needs survey from the Hope Center at Temple University found that 79% of student respondents previously dropped out or were considering stopping because of basic need insecurities or financial reasons.<sup>18</sup>

**KLB:** The desire to avoid the economic conditions of their childhood kept Evans and perhaps other students from dropping out.

**AP:** A full course-load is stressful enough, add in the daily struggle to survive and it's remarkable that some students manage to graduate.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** No matter how hard students like Evans try to mask their daily challenges, reports of students found sleeping in public suggest their efforts to go unnoticed are often unsuccessful.

**AP:** So if that's the case... then what is the university doing to address these issues?

**KLB:** According to an article in 2016 apparently... not much. Vice Chair of the Associated Students of Madison between 2014 and 2015, Derek Field, criticized UW administration for virtually ignoring the issues. Field said:

*"The university not checking to make sure we're not food-insecure or housing-insecure demonstrates that they don't really have an interest in providing any kind of support in those areas."<sup>19</sup>*

**AP:** More shockingly, when confronted with stories like Brooke Evan's, the response from university leaders has been disheartening. Sara Goldrick-Rab personally knew Brooke Evans and she remembers bringing this issue to then Chancellor Rebecca Blank.

**SGR:** You know, I had a day where I had to go visit her in her office, at my request, actually, and I brought Brooke Evans with me, and Brooke Evans stood with me as Becky told me to my face that I was wrong. We didn't have homeless college students, we just didn't have any. And I had a human being standing next to her who was insisting otherwise. I don't know how you deny people's existence.

**AP:** Clearly there are several things going on here. Either university leaders don't see housing struggles as a valid problem; they don't want to acknowledge the problems many students face;

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Kasie Strahl, CCH, May 20, 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Brielly, "In the Shadows: UW's Homeless Students Struggle to Succeed," *The Badger Herald*, February 16, 2016,

<https://badgerherald.com/news/campus/2016/02/16/in-the-shadows-uws-homeless-students-struggle-to-succeed/>

or they haven't found a proper solution. Moreover, individual cases like Brooke Evans' can be written off as just that—individual cases.

**KLB:** A problem when discussing homelessness is the habit of placing blame on the individual. It's something you see often with this issue. People are blamed for their circumstances. *They* are the reason they are homeless, not systemic failures that got them there.

**AP:** It may be a comforting thought to administrators—there aren't *that* many students facing homelessness. And in the grand scheme of thousands of students, it may seem unimportant or overly burdensome to prop up systemic support for these individual cases.

**KLB:** But this thinking won't help the many students facing homelessness, and while their cases may seem few compared to the thousands of students who are, say... registering for classes or changing majors, this issue needs to be addressed. Because as uncomfortable as it is to acknowledge, some UW-Madison students *are* homeless.

**AP:** So if that's the case, the university has a lot of work ahead of itself when it comes to supporting students in their quest for affordable housing.

**KLB:** It's not to say that these issues are *entirely* unaddressed by the university. There are new campus efforts to ensure students meet their basic needs.

**AP:** We talked to Kasie Strahl back in episode 1.

**KASIE STRAHL:** My name is Kasie Strahl.

She's the Assistant Director for Student Engagement in the Office of Student Financial Aid. She heads up efforts to connect students to basic needs services:

**KS:** **So in my opinion, it is, it's a critical role in helping students to meet basic needs. If we think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, you are not gonna be as successful if that very baseline, that bottom tier is not met. You need to have food, you need to have shelter. And so it is the institution's... part of their role is to help students meet their basic needs.**

**KLB:** Strahl also offers up some solutions:

**KS:** **If students aren't making— meeting their basic needs, they're not gonna be a successful student, right? So it is our role, it is our responsibility to do that. I think as an institution, we can do that in a number of different ways, and our roles shift and change as a university. So it could be... with housing. So if we think about the amount of on-campus housing that we offer, is it nearby, is it affordable? What is the connection to the meal plan in that process? And then we also could have a role in advocating for off-campus housing. So Madison being this college town, we have a lot of students that**

**live off campus in the community. We can be advocates for what that looks like. The OLiv, I think is a really great example in the...in the right direction.**

**AP:** Strahl is referring to the OLiv Madison, a student residential mixed-use development project. It's located at the corner of Gorham and State Street.

**KLB:** A quick look at the OLiv's webpage and it's easy to see this off-campus housing is marketed toward students... sort of. A short walking distance from campus, amenities mimic what students might experience within student centers on campus.<sup>20</sup>

**AP:** I would argue their rooftop deck, pool, grill setup, lounge areas, fitness center, and spa-esque amenities, possibly surpass typical campus spaces.

**KLB:** While aimed at attracting a particular demographic, collaboration with the university has ensured some students from low-income backgrounds have access to this rental property.

**KS: At the OLIV we have a, a collaboration and a connection that students that are from low income can have reduced housing or more affordable housing in that space.**

**AP:** These partnerships however are small and frankly insufficient. The partnership with the OLiv is providing units for just 112 students.<sup>21</sup>

**KLB:** These initiatives also don't address the needs of faculty working on campus. Like students, faculty and staff require a place to live and if they are spending time worrying about fulfilling their own basic needs, it means they are spending less time focusing on showing up for their students.

**AP:** Overall, collaboration with private housing such as the OLiv is one *very* small step to providing low-income students viable solutions for combating homelessness. But more affordable rent and endless amenities, while attractive, aren't going to cut it. Students need more affordable options across the city for places to live... a need the university and the city have yet to provide.

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<sup>20</sup> OLiv Madison,

[https://www.olivmadison.com/?switch\\_cls\[id\]=66770&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20070368386&gclid=0AAAAApYg5bsbQeggPggGqCWxtVnWs5W2E&gclid=CjwKCAjw0sfHBhB6EiwAQtv5qeI2MNZGi\\_w9v5iVP3UzGqScwq0zTTdXpq1XsTysslGfFkRqU4qeXRoC6xcQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.olivmadison.com/?switch_cls[id]=66770&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20070368386&gclid=0AAAAApYg5bsbQeggPggGqCWxtVnWs5W2E&gclid=CjwKCAjw0sfHBhB6EiwAQtv5qeI2MNZGi_w9v5iVP3UzGqScwq0zTTdXpq1XsTysslGfFkRqU4qeXRoC6xcQAvD_BwE)

<sup>21</sup> This statistic was provided by Jeff Novak, Director of University Housing in an interview for the *Reorientation* podcast.

**AP:** There are some support systems in the city that aid those experiencing homelessness.<sup>22</sup> But how many of these options cater to college students?

**KLB:** The answer... not many, so students are often left figuring things out on their own.

**AP:** And we haven't even addressed the quote-unquote "unprecedented times" that compound these problems... COVID, the current administration's gutting of social services, and President Trump's most recent rhetoric lumping homeless communities into unsubstantiated claims of rising crime in D.C.<sup>23</sup>

**KLB:** Homelessness in Madison is not a problem to be addressed by the city alone. As much as the university would like to maintain the image of a picturesque campus filled with college students thriving in elaborately decorated spaces, the reality is much bleaker. Some students are left without a place to eat or sleep, let alone a safe space to complete their studies. Without substantial support, we are likely to see more students turning to their cars or public spaces in the absence of safe and affordable housing.

**AP:** Madison's students are struggling and as rent continues to rise and space continues to shrink... What are the solutions to solve this growing problem? That's on the next episode of *Reorientation*.

## [MUSIC]

**NAMA PANDEY:** You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at campus history dot wisc dot E-D-U. That includes links to some of Sara Goldrick-Rab's research and that *Glamour* article about Brooke Evans.

*Reorientation* is written by Kacie Lucchini Butcher, Alexandra Pasqualone, Nama Pandey, Taylor Dickson, and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode.

Additional help from Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

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<sup>22</sup> For additional resources for those experiencing homelessness see Tenant Resource Center, <https://www.tenantresourcecenter.org/>; Giles Bruce, Tiny homes, Big Dreams: How some Activists are Reimagining Shelter for the Homeless," NPR, Feb 6, 2022, Tiny Homes in Madison, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/02/06/1077791467/tiny-homes-big-dreams-how-some-activists-are-reimagining-shelter-for-the-homeless>; "Mission & History," Porchlight, <https://www.porchlightinc.org/mission-history/>; Samantha Haas, "Nonprofit Spotlight: Porchlight, Inc.," Mad City Dream Homes Realtor Executives Cooper Spransy, Oct 20th, 2022, <https://www.madcitydreamhomes.com/blog/nonprofit-spotlight-porchlight-inc.html>; See also "Madison's Tent City," <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/madisons-tent-city/>; See also Reid Kurkerwicz, "A short history of McPike Park's 'Tent City,'" Tone Madison, March 29, 2021. <https://tonemadison.com/articles/a-short-history-of-mcpike-parks-tent-city/>;

<sup>23</sup> National Public Radio, "How Trump's D.C. takeover criminalizes homelessness," August 20, 2025, available at <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/20/nx-s1-5502655/how-trump-dc-takeover-criminalizes-homelessness>

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