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Maya McKeever and Ralph Corbelle Interview

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Bucknell: Occupied
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Ralph Corbelle, student (RC)
Maya McKeever, student (MM)

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JT: Good evening and welcome to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. Last week we had a very great conversation with Rosalie Rodriguez about food insecurity, and particularly, how it affects college students and today we have a follow-up interview with two Bucknell students are here to talk to us about their experiences and that of others on campus with food insecurity and with issues specific to Bucknell itself. So in the studio with me is sophomore Maya McKeever from Posse LA and sophomore Ralph Corbelle, a Posse student here from Boston. So welcome to the studio to both of you, thanks for joining me.

[CROSSTALK]

MM,RC: Thank you for having us, yeah.

JT: So I'm wondering if I can ask you each to give us a definition of how it is that you understand food insecurity?

MM: Well, I would personally define food insecurity as the inability to afford proper nutrition for yourself and that could mean that maybe the dietary restrictions that you personally have aren't represented in the food spaces that we have on campus or also just that if you want to eat more healthily and you can't afford to eat healthily and just different things like that. All in encapsulate food insecurity. The inability to eat sufficiently like whether it's in the amount of times that you eat or what food you're eating.

RC: And I think food insecurity is very strongly aligned with the amount of flexibility that students have

JT: Hmm.

RC: With their own money on campus, everyone is locked into a certain plan. Even the minimum of \$700, so I think food insecurity revolves around the idea of where can students get food and what type of food is being supplied and what is the cost of that food.

JT: MmHm.

RC: Yeah.

JT: So can you talk to us a little bit about specific ways that food insecurity affects students here at Bucknell.

RC: Yeah, so I think food insecurity sometimes it's just thought of as athletes needing more protein or students needing greens and stuff like that, but I think a huge aspect of it that that is lost is the social

interaction of students can have. Especially with this food pantry coming out or this idea of freezing food in the works for students, which I think is a great Band-Aid. But this idea that students would then have to go to different locations, not the official dining areas on campus

JT: MmHm.

RC: And eat alone essentially, not having access into spaces with classmates and so I think there's these class markers that separate students and don't allow for intermingling. Because I think the campus is already pretty divided. So I think dinner is something that we want to bring students together and it's not happening.

MM: Yeah, I think that food and security shows up a lot of ways on a lot of college campuses, but especially ours. A way that I've seen food insecurity is that even if you get the \$700 plan that's really not sustainable for the whole semester as the food itself, like each meal is very expensive. So you're paying six to ten dollars each meal and if you want to have three meals a day or if you want to have different snacks foods, whatever it is, it's going to run out before the semester is over, and with that possibility. I think a lot of people find ways to get free food on campus, so if there is an event that someone's speaking at and they have free food there. People go to the event but not necessarily because they're interested in the event or they need to be there, but because they need food. And I think that's really that's really harmful that they have to take that time to go to something that they don't necessarily need to be at, but there's no other way. And so, like they want to eat, but they're losing time to do homework, losing time to maybe have a work shift different things that they have to sacrifice in order to get food and I think that's a really big issue. And that's how it's seen. And I know a lot of people will talk like "Oh, free food here, free food there" because there's really like there's no other way to sustain yourself sometimes. Because the money does run out and you can't like... not everyone has the ability to refill money whenever they have to.

JT: MmHm.

RC: And after your first year there really does have to be that intentionality, like where are you going and what food is going to be available? Like I know I've literally scheduled everyday on my Google calendar. Like I'm going to this place because there might be leftover food from an event or from like a faculty gathering which is what I had for lunch today [LAUGHS]. So I think that sort of disrupts like that schedule that students really got into the groove of first-year...

JT: Right.

RC: ...academically.

JT: OK, now, Ralph you're you're bringing in the personal a bit, which I wanted to ask you both about. Which is, we've talked in general about what does food insecurity look like here at Bucknell and how do students deal with it. Can you talk a little bit about the particular groups of students here on campus who are more likely to find themselves being affected by food insecurity?

MM: I... Well, personally I'm very involved or I interact with the people of color a lot on this campus, and I know like a group chat that we have on Group Me actually started a few years ago off of people wanting to say like "Oh, there's free food in Academic West or something." So that's how the group chat actually started...

JT: MmHm.

MM: The need for food. And I mean I think that it's a panel among a lot of people that I probably don't even know, and I probably don't even interact with, and that's very hard to think about, but I would say a lot of people that do come to Bucknell with scholarships, no matter what it is. I know Ralph and I both Posse scholars, and so I can get the point of view from that, but then also this Bower scholars, there's merit scholars for arts and sciences and things like that, and so I'm sure that... I mean Bucknell's a very expensive place.

JT: MmHm.

MM: And tuition is very high and so for the people that can pay tuition out-of-pocket. I'm sure I'm assuming that they don't have as much of an issue with food as the people that are reliant on the scholarships and on this financial aid and there's not much flexibility in terms of what they can do so... I think it for sure affects a lot of people and I think more than the University addresses a lot of the time.

JT: MmHm.

RC: I think seeing scholarships are widely affected, I think that's really accurate. I think anyone who doesn't hit that median of -- I think the recent median is like \$204,000 family income, that's the median average at Bucknell, and so just think about all the scholarship students who may be bringing that down, right? And so I think people who don't meet that line are going to be struggling, and I think that's a decent amount of students here, and I think the fact that the overwhelming majority may have the money to pay out-of-pocket for these things makes it less of a University issue,

JT: MmHm

RC: At least less willing to accommodate.

JT: So let's talk then a little bit about the mechanics of both class and financial aid, as they're working, as we can see them at work in this particular issue, right? So we can think about what does it mean if the median parental income is \$204,000 a year, right? And that means that University food budgets are premised around a certain idea of, you know, what these people want to eat and what they can actually reasonably pay in order to eat that, right? But then financial aid packages are not accounted around that information, right? What does the scenario look like for students who come here on financial aid and how did they have a budget for or not have a budget for food?

MM: I think that one of the issues with financial aid, and don't completely quote me on this because it's very... I mean the problem with me not knowing all of the information is that not all the information is given to us, and it's difficult to realize all of it, but I know a problem a lot of people face is with the maximum gift aid that you can get. So basically if you already have... Let's say I already have the Posse scholarship and I wasn't... or I already applied for all of the extra financial and I can get. But some of the financial aid came in loans until I take out all of those loans, I can't ask for more assistance, so you're basically forcing people to take loans that who knows when they're able to pay them back, just in order to potentially get more money in order to pay for food or to pay for books or whatever it may be. And so I think that barrier like with the maximum gift aid policy is very problematic, and I think, yeah, I just think that in general, it's difficult to navigate that because you don't know what... you just don't know

where you can get your money from, where you can get your food from, where you can get all these resources that you need as a college student so yeah...

RC: Yeah, and I think there is this idea that the school may give you a set amount of aid specifically for food and so they say use this for educational or food based needs.

JT: MmHm.

RC: And they may allot you, say \$2500, and they expect you to purchase the meal plan that corresponds with that so that you can lead a healthier life, right? So that... I that's one of the reasons why the University may think students are just not using all their aid for the correct purposes. Because students may still be purchasing a \$700 meal plan and trying to get the rest of that aid in another form. But I think that brings up the problem of having to buy dining dollars with this food aid. Why can't we go to a Giant or a Weis, and try to make our own food? And that would be much cheaper and probably healthier to be able to have agency to use our money in other places.

JT: So I want to go on that thread, but before that, Maya, I just want to clarify what you're saying. So you're saying that current financial aid policy requires students who are here on scholarship to indebt themselves to the maximum amount before they're allowed to receive more assistance.

MM: Yes, some some students that I've spoken to...

JT: MmHm.

MM: ...have said that before... like if they ask financial aid for assistance if they want food or whatever the case may be that they need financial assistance for, the first question they ask is basically "Well have you taken all of the loans that have been offered to you?" and so if you haven't taken those loans, they often don't look into giving giving you extra money because they feel as though you're not taking the opportunity that they already gave you even though that's not really much of an opportunity,

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

MM: if you have to pay it back with interest in the future.

JT: And these are federal loans or these are private loans?

MM: I believe. Well there's... I think they vary because I know that some are subsidized and some are unsubsidized so it depends on what you're offered in your financial aid package and that has to do with FAFSA and different things and it's also different for international students. And so the way that all of it works is kind of strange and then going off of something that Ralph said I know that you're speaking with some other students, and when they were, like for example with the \$2500 for food, but if you don't want to choose the \$2500 plan if they try to get a refund check out of that for some of the students they found difficulty from financial aid asking for that refund because they basically were wondering why they didn't spend all \$2500 on food. But it's also... I feel like that's kind of inconsiderate and that you don't know what they need the other money for. Like maybe that money was going to pay for their books for the classes. Maybe they need to help out their family at home, and so they thought that the extra money would be able to do that. So you don't know where they're coming from, but I feel

like not knowing that, but also not asking is an issue as well.

JT: So I'm assuming that a related issue to this issue, from the other side is that, you know, if you have let's say a student whose parents are paying there full way here, and that student also doesn't choose to get the full meal plan, chances are they're not being asked "Oh why did you choose..."

RC: MmHm.

JT: what you chose?

RC: Yeah. Cause there's that assumption if you're only choosing the \$700 meal plan, but you have other avenues of getting this food

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

RC: No matter the cost.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

MM: MmHm.

RC: Yeah.

JT: MmHm. So what are some very specific strategies that students here who are experiencing food insecurity use to actually get food? I know, Ralph, you talked about going to events and Maya, you talked about that as well. Are there other things that students try and do?

MM: Well, first years since they all have the unlimited meal plan, they also have extra guest swipes, so I think that a lot of upper-classmen will be like "hey do you want to swipe me into the Caf?" or also like "Oh hey, can you get me take out?" that kind of thing.

JT: OK.

MM: So I think using the students that have that opportunity with food, well, it's still very expensive for them, but [LAUGHS] while they have that...

JT: MmHm.

RC: Yeah, and I can't think of any other ones. And I think that's part of the problem like I don't know where else to get food than sort of the generosity of other people.

JT: Yeah.

RC: Other students on campus.

MM: Yeah, like I... yeah I know that there is like faculty and staff that are more than willing to help you out when you need it. Whether it's just like a snack here and there or what, but it's... yeah, it's very

difficult because I think... I don't think anyone's gotten the fool- like a foolproof plan of how to get food if they don't, if they're not able to buy it themselves, so.

JT: And I mean that seems to be one of the central issues here, right? Is like not having like having to even make these constant plans, right? And the way in which it interrupts like what you're actually supposed to be doing here, which is being a student, right? And actually absorbing new information. For those of you just tuning in, you are listening to Bucknell: Occupied. We are continuing the conversation about food insecurity and looking specifically at Bucknell. I have Maya and Ralph here in studio with me. Both are sophomores and both have been talking to us about the experience of students here at Bucknell with food insecurity. So in this next in this next stretch of time. I'd like us to think about specific institutional practices that are either creating food insecurity or making it worse for students here on campus. So I'm wondering, I know each of you have various ideas, but maybe we could start with just the food pricing.

RC: Oh yes. Well, we did talk about food pricing, and we are both RAs, so we were able to sit down with President Bravman in early August for RA training. And we did talk about... it was brought up, this food pricing and stuff like that. And he did bring to our attention that part of the reason why grapes are, say, four dollars in the Bison.

JT: How many grapes, by the way?

MM: It's a very small cluster.

RC: Maybe 15. Part of the reason that those 15 grapes are four dollars is because of this convenience fee that it's on campus. You don't have to go anywhere else for it. And I think that logic, while maybe it does make sense, we don't have to walk or try to drive to a Giant or anything like that, I think the fact that we're locking students into this convenience is the problem. Allow people who really don't want to walk 10 minutes to Giant to pay for that, but for other students who would rather not pay four dollars for grapes and get a full meal for four dollars, I think that it would just be reasonable from the University.

JT: MmHm.

MM: And going off of that conversation that we had with President Bravman, another thing that was addressed was how students don't really know what goes on financially on in the University. Like we are unaware of how... how deals are made, like in terms of our partnership with the food company that Bucknell has and that kind of thing. So I think making the students more aware of what happens in that negotiation, like, how those decisions are made when they're finalizing a contract or whatever is, I think that would be very important because in. And also just because I feel like the contracts are for a substantial amount of time where you can come into the University, and the contract with the food company was already made and it's not going to be renegotiated until you leave the campus. And so I think giving students the ability to have more autonomy in terms of what the University is doing with what will eventually... what the students will eventually have to pay for is kind of important because I feel like if it's just the administration that's talking like "Oh well yes, this sounds good" but they don't know what students are going to--

JT: MmHm.

MM: --see whether or not that actually is sustainable and is affordable. So... I think it be important to keep the students... like get the students informed and keep them informed about what goes into that food contract negotiation. Especially because if, like, in my ideal world, if we could find a food company that yes would provide like so still have the cafeteria we still have the Bison, whatever it is. But also allow us those dining dollars off-campus at Giant...

JT: MmHm.

MM: At wherever, like Ralph had said earlier, I think that would probably be much more sustainable than what is currently happening now. Or we can only use campus dollars, and I don't know about everyone else, but for me, my campus dollars are usually on a minimum because I just use them for laundry and saying that you can use them at Giant isn't really helpful because it's also doing the same thing as me using some cash or something.

JT: Can we just be really specific about the food pricing? Like if you want to go down... let's say you want to eat in the cafeteria and you want three meals in a day.

RC: Oooohh...

MM: I have never done it.

[LAUGHS]

RC: I... I... know... pricing

[CROSSTALK]

JT: Do we have an idea what this might be?

RC: Yeah... breakfast, I believe is either \$11 or \$12 to swipe in, and then it gets incrementally more expensive.

JT: Uh-huh.

RC: So lunch is about \$13 and dinner is a \$15 swipe, I know that for sure.

JT: So we're talking about, \$41-\$42 a day.

RC: Yeah.

[LAUGHS]

MM: Speaking on one of your questions from earlier.

JT: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MM: In terms of strategies that students have done, now that I think about it, a lot of people do something called Caf Sitting where they swipe in for that one time, so the \$12. Whatever it is and then

they'll just sit there the whole day.

JT: MmHm.

MM: So that they don't have to pay again and again. But the problem is like you literally have to plan your whole day around that. So if you wanted to go out and like see your friends or you want to do virtually anything, you couldn't for that day that you plan to Caf Sit, because you want to be able to eat sufficiently.

JT: So basically we're talking... I'm still stuck on his budget here. Basically, we're talking about spending \$1200 a month to feed one single human being, which is like three times more than I spend to feed my whole family,

RC: Yeah.

JT: A month. That's insane.

MM: I agree.

JT: That's insane. And I mean, to get into your conversation earlier, Maya, about the degree to which students should not only be informed, but I think should be involved in the decision-making process, right? I mean, if we can make the assumption which obviously we have no evidence of yet, right? Because there's not someone making these decisions in the room with us. But if we can make the assumption that the meal plan prices are based around the median Bucknell income, right? That's inherently excluding a fairly large percentage of campus from being able to participate, right? So is there some way in which you see an opening to push for students being involved in negotiations around food pricing? like have you seen any kind of indication like that yet?

MM: I can't really say that I have. I... yeah, I feel like this conversation is brought up at different times, but it's seldom continued.

JT: MmHm.

MM: Right now like a good group of students that clearly aren't here with us in the interview today, but like a good group of students are trying to facilitate conversation so that you can actually go with real plans and real strategies, but I think so far it's been pretty difficult to actually make something happen. Or make a real conversation that will lead to something happen.

JT: MmHm.

RC: Yeah and with this idea of like a student-centered push. I think that what I've seen from administrative response to some of the food insecurity problems is this idea that dining services is being student-centered by now offering grilled chicken every day... all day. This is a talking point that I've now seen a lot. Because, I think President Bravman has said that it's about \$100,000 that they've spent on this-- getting grills, training people on how to grill the chicken, yeah... And so offering it everyday, because on suggestion cards, apparently students were saying we really so I guess that that sorta outweighs the call for more flexibility in meal plans, and I think that if that can go through and the

student-centered approach can happen there, I think we sorta have to translate that or at least allow for more student conversation about other things like getting a bare minimum diet daily going on.

JT: What's the deal with the grilled chicken? It's just really popular?

[LAUGHS]

MM: I know last year when we were actually in the Caf, we were, you could order the grilled chicken from the station with like burgers and things like that. But you had to wait 15 minutes for something. So I guess maybe people got tired of waiting, and so their suggestion was just have the grilled chicken 24/7. And I mean they did it, so good that they listen, but also I would also like them to listen to other things as well.

RC: And so it went from that burger station like asking and waiting for two minutes to now it's always part of the entrée station.

JT: MmHm.

RC: There might be lasagna and then there's the grilled chicken every day. And so, I mean, they're pumping it out, but how else can we use this this idea of listening to students.

JT: Reciprocity.

RC: Yeah.

MM: And I also heard, and I think it was from one of the first years that I know that... well, last year we could, if we ate in the cafeteria for a meal we could also take a to-go container with us. But I heard from one of the first years that they changed the rule, and that now you can either eat there or you can take that to-go container. Which one I really don't think that goes with the whole "You can swipe in whenever" because you kinda can't if you can't do both. And also, like that kind of stop some people's plans and that like "Oh, you're at the Caf, like, could you get me a sandwich or something like that." They don't really have the ability to do that. I think that's kind of detrimental, and I don't know why that change was made because I don't know if they were really losing money off of it. Because I also know that a lot of food must be thrown away at the end of the day.

JT: A lot of food is just thrown away at the end of the day.

MM: I'm sure that them not being able to take to-go containers isn't really helping that issue either.

RC: And with the to-go containers... Last year, our whole setup was that you could swipe in and then when you're about to go, you got one swipe per meal for takeout, and we had a big container and then a smaller container, say like a salad sized container and then you could take a soup container, say, so then you could have three options.

JT: MmHm.

RC: And now it's limited to one, and so I don't know what the drastic change was about. Maybe the grilled chicken. I'm not sure, that's an assumption.

[LAUGHS]

JT: Paying off the grilled chicken.

[LAUGHS]

RC: But now it's this one size fits all, and you put soup in teacups, now I guess. So there's been this scaling back of the ability to take food out and I'm not sure how a \$15 swipe can equal one container of buffet food. Considering that all the pricing is assuming that people are gonna sit down and eat.

JT: Yeah.

RC: Sooo...

JT: So I mean, from all the angles that you both have been talking about, right? The experience, the trying to manage your day-to-day life, the financial aid policies, even down to this kind of policing of what you can and can't take out. Like it's so individualizing, right? Like it makes this problem of food insecurity, which is obviously fairly widespread, like, manifest as though it's just your problem. That just you need to deal with. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the way in which that has shown up in very real ways in people's lives this semester. Particularly in terms of those who chose to purchase a \$700 meal plan and the way that they were subsequently treated by the University.

MM: So quite a few people got emails from the financial aid office saying we noticed that you got a \$700 meal plan... Just like basically asking them to consider getting a higher meal plan and part of me understands that because I'm saying I'm thinking yeah \$700 isn't sustainable with the prices that we've discussed earlier, but at the same time you can't really ask someone like "are you sure?" when they might not even have the resources to change their decision. So I feel like it's kind of I've... I find the issue in that they're asking this question, but they're not... I don't think that they would follow up by saying "do you need extra money and like how can we help you with that?" I don't think they're doing that part of it. Also, there hasn't been very much clarity on who's getting these emails and... yeah, just the regulation of how it was sent out and who it was sent to. And even I got the email and I have \$1000 meal plan, and I was like "well it's not getting higher than this" and so I don't what you all thought this email was going to do for me [LAUGHS]. But I know a lot of people with \$700 meal plans got that and were pretty upset, which rightfully so because it's not like the University was offering to help them out with that money.

RC: Yeah, and even for that with consistency of who's being emailed. I've seen responses that it was only supposed to go to students who received a set amount of aid for the dining plan and they weren't using all that aid, but in Maya's case, like how does this apply? Like it seems like it wasn't thought out wholly, especially the wording, because, yes, there's the \$700 meal plan which they admit--dining services--that from their experience, it hasn't lasted students the whole semester. So practically, why would you be offering this option? And my recommendation isn't to higher the minimum to like \$2000, my recommendation would be to add more flexibility, so people can say "hey, I'll take \$400 dining dollars, but I'll use the rest of my savings more affordably and more economically. Through other avenues of getting food.

JT: You are tuned into 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. This is Bucknell: Occupied and Ralph and Maya are in the studio talking about food insecurity here at Bucknell. So I'd like to shift years, and if we can start talking about like actual ways to resolve this situation. Some ways forward, right. Just thinking about the University to start with, right? Like what are some concrete things that the University could do which would actually alleviate or eliminate food insecurity?

MM: Well, I know something that they did just implement was the B-Eats section of campus which is in the LC or the Langone Center, and if you wanted, yeah, if you wanted to get food, I think they have a few things available. So like a starch or like a protein... different things so that you can get a sufficient meal. And they also have the bags that come from the Bison and from the cafeteria, so that it doesn't look any different than anything else, which I think is very useful. But as Ralph said before, that kind of eliminates like the social aspect of eating. And that you're not like all at the Bison and you're all hanging out at the table, because you didn't get food that will that is going to look the same as everyone else's. And also that's kind of a Band-Aid approach, and I know when they were introducing it, even the Dean said, like, this is a Band-Aid approach, but I didn't really know what they plan to do. Following this. So I know that's something that the University has done now, which is good to alleviate some food insecurity like short-term.

JT: MmHm.

RC: Yeah, and I think with the idea of not knowing where the University's going to go next with knowing that they know themselves that this is only a banded approach. I think going back to that idea of transparency, and the fact that when the idea of administrative transparency was brought up to President Bravman, he did say "well if a student wants to come to an official with a complaint or question about something along these lines, we would be more than happy to inform them about our contracts or why we're doing certain things." Right? But I think that allows it to be very one-off kind of process. So I think allowing students to just to database, this is the contracts, this is where the revenue from Bostwick is going, because they said revenue is reinvested in the dining program, and if that's the case, I would love to see how that funding is being used. Because without that knowledge students really don't know why they should not be upset if things are... If the University is doing all they can to make sure students are having secure lines and avenues of food then we should be able to know about. But if there are ways that we can help the University and collaborate on ways that we can all benefit and have healthy day-to-day lives, then I think that would only be a plus for everyone. If the University said, here's all the documents, here's what's going on food wise.

MM: Another thing I would be interested in pursuing is I know... Well, for a lot of seniors, and I saw this last year as the year was coming to a close. If you have extra dining dollars, it kinda just went into the abyss. And so a lot of seniors would give their IDs to like Laura Glassman and just be like "Oh yeah, you go buy whatever you want because I have \$600 left to do anything with it. So for the people that did buy higher meal plans because, I mean, it most likely is what you need. But if you didn't end up using it at the end of the year, it kind of just doesn't go anywhere, but I think finding a way to implement that and to giving it to students in the lower classes that might need that extra money for the next year. I think that that could be very beneficial.

JT: MmHm.

MM: Just so that the money isn't going... Well probably back to University in some way or back into the food company in some way but actually going to students that need assistance. I think that would be very useful.

JT: So I mean, one idea that I've heard in talking to other students was the idea of having some sort of system that would actually like pull together all of those unused dining dollars and then students who needed it could go to, like, a charging station and charge their ID card with one swipe at a time, right? Coming off of this sort of like larger database of unused dining dollars that people have donated into the system and so then you do have access to all of the kinds of, like, communal eating experiences that you are talking about. Only you know it's coming because some people have extra and gave it.

RC: I think part... I think that's a really good idea, but I think part of that is founded on this problematic idea of having to allot \$1400 per year. Because this... saying someone \$700 is not enough to eat for, say, four months is reasonable at home for me. You know, like I think that I could survive on \$400 if it wasn't determined by the pricing of the campus.

JT: MmHm.

RC: And so it is this high pricing that makes people need a lot more than \$700 to survive. So if students were able to just decide where their money was going. Then I don't think there would be this need to have this communal pot of money that people saved up and are allowing others to take from. So if people... If students can have more agency in how they're buying their own food and where they can go instead of just being restricted to campus with that \$700 then I don't think we would have as much backlash from students.

JT: So I mean, one thing that I hear you both kind of thinking through is this issue of the problem with the structure of the system itself, right? So the problem with this idea that, you know, one central authority gets to decide what things cost, right? And then to force students to participate in that system, either to participate fully or to be excluded from that system, right? But there's all of the existing solutions, right? So either this idea of like pooling unused dining dollars or the B-Eats program, right. They're all still assuming that the system itself is OK to continue, right. So maybe we can push our conversation to the next level, right. So that what would be some ways to actually push beyond kind of the existing way that power and resources are allocated at this university, and actually come to sort of a more equitable and livable campus environment

RC: That's a good question. I think part of it comes from understanding pricing, and again going back to the idea of why are certain things priced the way they are. I think knowing that, or at least allowing students to understand that, not just saying it's convenient would be a step where students can then enter the conversation saying maybe we can lower some things, and then we'll be OK with this system because we will be able to afford things here. But in a bigger way, I think we should push back on this idea that students need to get a meal plan. Because I know other institutions allow you to just opt out and allow you to buy stuff on your own, right. And I think this is sorta like a big concept for the University, because the University has said that we want to ensure everyone is eating. We want to help these students, so we make you enter this meal plan. But if the meal plan itself is restricting the student's budget and not allowing for students to save up enough money to eat after the \$700 is gone, then I don't... I think it's having the reverse effect.

MM: I agree. I'm trying to think more... more from what Ralph was saying I know, I think. Yeah, having more knowledge choosing what is very important and I think just my struggle that I'm thinking of right

now is just wondering what it'll take for the University to truly make a change. Like how severe does an issue have to be before it becomes resolved? Because I know when I was doing some research with like with food insecurity last year and I was looking at like the experience of like students vs. student athletes like I know for the divisional student athletes here like they should have a secure meal plan every year. Because after like I really like a really good basketball player from a really good college team said like "I'm literally not getting enough to eat." They required all D-1 athletes to have meal plans that will give them enough to eat and like that's great, but then also all of the rest that also do not have enough to eat like what student has to come out and say like "I haven't been eating. I've... because I have to pay for my books I haven't been eating and I've been working 20 hours a week and I still don't have the money to eat." How many people will that take? Or like what person will that take for the University to actually make change, make action. Or like does it have to become a super public issue. I think thinking of when the change is going to be made is what I'm struggling with right now.

JT: Can you talk a bit about the way in which food insecurity connects with other kind of social justice issues here on campus?

MM: I would... That's a really good question. I would say the clearest is for sure just classes and that you are assuming that just because the typ... like the typical Bucknell student that you would see can afford however much money. This means that everyone else in the campus can't afford that same amount of money so I think that's for sure an issue. And then, I mean, I feel like typically within society classism is often tied with racism or sexism or like with homophobia or transphobia or that kind of thing. And that it's more likely for a person of color for a person from the LGBTQ community to be disenfranchised in society in general and that will translate to what class they're in. So I mean I think yes for sure it's always a multifaceted issue and I think it's important to see that. Because I'm at the same time like I know we're talking about food insecurity and not the inability to eat sufficiently at all times, but also it's thinking about the environments that people feel safe eating in, and that if you have encountered a lot of students that are very racist or very transphobic or very homophobic, but you identify in one of those social groups. Why would you want to go to the Bison to eat? When you might be like treated wrongfully. And so I think, yeah, a lot of those issues for sure come up in the University whether or not it's related to food or not. But I think in the case of food like it does make it very difficult for someone to be comfortable and also in terms of a lot of the people with scholarships or not even... I don't want to say a lot of the people, but a good amount of people with scholarships do identify as people color and I think that it could be a sticky situation. If the University could take that opportunity to kind of hold a scholarship over their head and be like "Well, I don't think you should talk back because we're giving you the money to go here." So I think there's a lot of like sticky situations that not everyone has to deal with, but the people that have to deal with them really don't have the power to do anything.

JT: Yeah. How would both of your lives be different here if you didn't have to deal with food insecurity?

RC: I think, like we were talking about scheduling. Just the fact that last year even though I had to take out loans for the minimum or maximum meal plan that we all had to get, it was easier meeting people and holding friendships and holding like group meetings I went to the Caf for group meetings because we were able to eat and work. And I think that's what the Caf really offers is the ability to walk in and out and sustain yourself but also being able to achieve academically without having to worry "Oh, I need to go to Carnegie for this meal and maybe the library, they might have food in there" And having to go all over campus searching for food instead of being able to meet up with fellow classmates. I think.... like I said, I think the social aspect is really big, but I also think that just like in other leadership positions and

this connectivity between say first years and upperclassmen. I think it would really help to just be able to have a communal space where you're able to interact. Kinda like we're both RAs and RAs don't have meal plans on this campus so I can't really interact with my students outside of "Hey how are you doing?" And then, that's about it. So I think this isolation that's caused by this insecurity is the biggest problem in my day to day life, yeah.

MM: I would honestly agree like with the scheduling and the interaction just because if I didn't have to think about where I could get free food, then I wouldn't have a problem just saying or telling my friends "Yeah let's all just meet in the Caf" or whatever it is. And then the same thing with interaction. I'm also an RA, I can't just say like "Oh yeah, I'll just meet you in the cafeteria." Like to my residence because unless they swipe me in, I'm not going to pay \$12 for the cafeteria. Especially when the food is subpar. So I mean I think yeah I think that food insecurity does give an additional amount of stress that students don't need because at the day, we're here for our education, we're here to advance our minds, and like we don't have the time or the energy for that if we're not getting a sufficient amount of food. And so I think it would be... it would for sure be a lot easier if I didn't feel like I had to have like four jobs on campus to sustain myself. And it's hard when like you might have friends that are like "Oh yeah, let's go to Sushihanna" or like "Let's go downtown and eat" like twice a week or something. And it's like if that's not tangible for you then that kind of creates a separation in your friend groups and I haven't personally had that happen, but I just thought about it because it's one of our RA scenarios during our training. But it's a real issue and it's like some people cannot afford to have the same lifestyles or habits that other people can afford to have. So I mean I think it can be very polarizing and very depressing because you don't want to feel like the odd person out, but I think that food insecurity often makes it that way.

RC: And I think, especially last year, like this idea of basketball players getting--like Division 1 athletes--I think last year I didn't mean a single person who questioned the number of swipes that people were allotted their first year. I think it is 14 that you're allowed with this all time access meal plan. And so I just wonder why. And can we not just give every student like maybe a swipe a day and would that be the worst thing? Would that plunge us into debt as an institution, I'm not sure. But maybe. But if not then is this not a tangible thing we can think of so that everyone can have at least one major meal a day that's secured for them.

JT: But I mean, I think it's also like you raised the issue of you know, what the priorities are here, right?

RC: MmHm. MmHm.

JT: And there's you know... if it really is a fixed budget.

RC: Yeah.

JT: Right? Like what is it that's actually being given precedent over like the day-to-day physical survival of students, right? And calling that into question, saying like "What are we really spending money on?" You've been listening to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 for WVBU Lewisburg. I've been talking with Maya and Ralph two sophomores here at Bucknell about food insecurity. In our last few minutes, I just wanted to ask each of you if you had something to say to other students who might be listening and and dealing with these same issues?

MM: I would say that it's important to find a community of people that understand where you're coming from and are going to like be with you in solidarity or like be willing to struggle with you. I feel like a lot of my... I guess what I would call like my success at Bucknell in the past year has been through the really beneficial friendships I've had and the interactions I've had with people who are very passionate about what they believe in, and like a lot of us have like common interests in that we might feel isolated in Bucknell as a whole, but together like we feel loved and we feel appreciated. And so I think finding that group for yourself is very important. And so if you can do that, like find it and try to keep it.

RC: And I think that it's really important to have students who aren't affected by food insecurity just thinking about it. Because I haven't spoken to anyone who isn't having a problem with this, who hasn't been sympathetic, and they're like "Oh this doesn't seem right." But I think just a widespread, a widespread dialogue between people who are affected and people who aren't. And a moment of unity and solidarity with this idea that everyone on campus should be eating. If I'm eating then you should be too. So that we can all achieve and succeed. I think that's the mentality that we should all be having right now. Yeah.

JT: Is there anything that either one of you wants to bring into the conversation that you think we didn't touch on?

RC: No

MM: I feel like we're good.

RC: We just need to eat, that's all.

JT: Thank you both so much for taking the time to come in and talk today.

RC: Thank you.

MM: Thank you.