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Hooks Institute Policy Fellows try to unravel Memphis' challenges

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On Oct. 9, community leaders, academics and students gathered at the annual Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change open house to address the lack of education, high incarceration rate and lack of job growth that plagues Memphis.

Hooks Institute Policy Fellows presented their contributions to the Hooks Institute's 2014 collection of papers, "Our Collective State: Memphis, Tennessee."

Elena Delavega opened the panel with a demand for better and affordable education.

If everyone in Memphis earned an associate degree, the economic impact would \$1.2 billion, the University of Memphis professor said.

"We're not going to attract jobs and companies without having the workforce that industries want," Delavega said.

Gregory Washington drew attention to the disproportionate number of African-American males who are incarcerated. His research found that half of incarcerated African-American males meet the criteria for mental illness, but that only 10 percent will receive treatment.

He believes closer attention and counseling to treat troubling behavior in high school — instead of resorting to suspension or expulsion — can address this issue. Washington also advocated "wrap around intervention," which pulls in coaches, teachers, parents and community members to help turn around a troubled student.

John Gnuschke said job creation is the most important thing that Memphis needs — there has been virtually no job growth in the past 15 years, according to his research.

Without opportunities for job growth, the "best and the brightest students in Memphis" will

continue to leave town, and the gap to reach middle class status will continue to widen.

Their research, and future events regarding social change in the region, can be found [here](#).