

Food Insecurity at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities: Understanding students' experiences to shape a campus food pantry



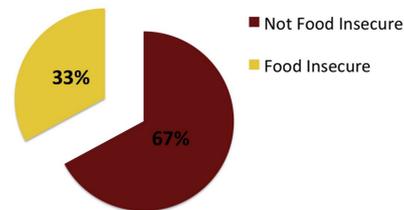
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INTRODUCTION

- Food insecurity on college campuses is higher among low-income, first-generation and racially diverse students.
- They are nearly four times more likely to leave college after their first year compared to students who are neither low-income nor first-generation.
- After 6 years, only 11 percent completed their bachelor's degree, compared to 55 percent of students without these risk factors.
- Many studies have demonstrated the increasing prevalence of food insecurity among college students, but no studies have looked at why this is happening on college campuses.
- The purpose of this study was to identify factors affecting food insecure students on a college campus. These data will be used to shape a college food pantry that will best meet their needs.

Average Rate of Food Insecurity
Among College Students



METHODOLOGY

- A convenience sample of 12 students who screened positive for low or very low food security based on the 6 item USDA screening tool was recruited.
- Twelve one-on-one, in-depth qualitative interviews with students were conducted.
- Codes were identified using transcripts from interviews and analyzed using NVivo.

RESULTS

Five distinct themes emerged from the interviews with food insecure students.

- **Barriers:** Transportation, time, cost of healthy food
- **Financial struggles:** Food security fluctuates with financial stability, budgeting for food is low priority for students, food insecurity was not an issue for many students before entering college
- **Coping Strategies:** Seeking out events on campus with free food, cutting the size of meals, skipping meals, choosing less nutritious foods
- **Consequences:** Stress, anxiety, headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, irritability, feelings of hunger, difficulty concentrating
- **Food Pantry Suggestions and Perceptions:** Convenient, central location, various times of operation, stocked with fresh produce and staple foods with some convenience foods available, little stigma associated with use of food pantry among study participants

SAMPLE QUOTES

"Getting healthy food is a cost issue. . . you decide between like getting a bag of apples which will last like four days for. . . \$6 and then get something that will last like two weeks that's like boxed."

"I skip meals . . . I mean there are days where I don't have to go out then I'll just not move so much so I don't get so hungry."

"I'll start stressing about the food. So then I'm taking my attention away from school and important things like that. I get tired and it sucks to go all day and not eat and come back from a long day of class and just want food and not have any."

"I suppose you just think about food a lot. You're hungry. You just don't work up to your potential because you're thinking too much about food."

". . . I don't ever eat meat or like vegetables . . . it's just expensive . . . I don't buy milk or butter or anything like that. Like, I literally just have, like, rice and beans and, like, eggs."



DISCUSSION

- There are many barriers to accessing healthy food for college students; they are unable to reach their full academic potential when they are hungry.
- This is the first time many of these students are experiencing food insecurity.
- Students have developed adaptive strategies to cope with being food insecure, but this is not enough to meet their needs.
- These findings demonstrate the need for an on campus food pantry to help students make ends meet.
- On campus food pantries should be stocked with a variety of fresh, wholesome foods that are currently difficult for students to access. A convenient location and various times of operation are key factors for success of an on campus food pantry.
- Limitations of this study were the small sample size of mostly female students and being limited to a single university.

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