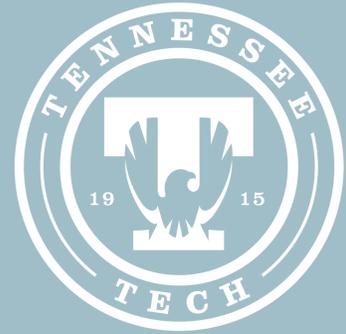


Perceptions College Communities Have About Using Campus Food Pantries



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Introduction

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life.¹ It is the lack of available financial resources for food at the household level.¹
- Food insecurity can be particularly harmful to college students' and their ability to achieve the educational and professional goals they have set for themselves.²
- In fall 2019, 167,000 students nationwide were surveyed through the Temple University's Hope Center for College, Community and Justice.³
- The study found that 39% of students at two-or four-year schools had experienced food insecurity in the last 30 days.³
- During the pandemic the situation changed to 34% of college students applying for emergency aid. While 32% actually received the emergency aid.³
- Students are 1.7 times more likely to experience food insecurity when infected with the virus.³
- A survey conducted in fall 2020, 52% of students were found to sometimes use off-campus food banks, while 30% used them monthly or more frequently.³
- Thirty-five percent of students said their hunger had impacted their ability to study at some point.³
- Students might have a feeling of shame or embarrassment about asking for help due to a stigma.³
- Students who are willing to seek help may not know where to begin.³
- The Hope Center found that 52% of students who faced food or housing insecurity in 2020 did not apply for any support programs because they did not know how.³
- The purpose of this review was to examine the perceptions college communities have about using campus food pantries.

Abstract

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life. Food insecurity can take an extreme toll on college students academically, socially and physically. Due to limited financial resources, rising cost of tuition, housing, and food make it difficult for students to avoid food insecurity. Making it essential for campus institutions to provide resources for food. However oftentimes certain barriers can stand in the way of students receiving the much needed help they need to combat food insecurity. The purpose of this review of literature was to examine the perceptions college communities have about using campus food pantries. Research used in the literature review was conducted through surveying and interviewing college students and directors of campus food pantries. Many barriers and solutions were found to combat the issue of food insecurity. Barriers that were found included social stigma and embarrassment, insufficient information on how the program worked and what determines eligibility, self-identity, or the feeling that the food pantry was not for them, and inconvenient hours of operation. It was found by the researchers that solutions could include creating a more socially supportive environment and providing educational resources were important in combatting these barriers. Much research still needs to be conducted about this topic overall and its effects on this population as a whole and how a campus food pantries can make an impact.

Methods

- The research that contributed to this literature review was focused on college students' perceptions about using campus food pantries.
- Databases used included the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, PubMed, and Routledge.
- The research from these databases included cross-sectional, mixed-methods, poster sessions, and cohort studies.
- Additional information was found and included through Google Scholar and by conducting a hand search from research articles already obtained. Statistics and additional definitions were obtained from the Feeding America, Forbes, and USDA.

Results

- The authors, Meza, et al. believe that it is critical that institutional/systematic create solutions to alleviate food insecurity and its impact on students physical, mental, and academic well-being.
- The authors, El Zein, et. al., study supported previous limited evidence that food-insecure students are at an increased risk of adverse health and academic outcomes.
- Authors, Cara Cilburn Allen and Nathan F. Alleman revealed how food insecurity can complicate students' experiences while attending college. Important for strong support systems, including social and mentors to help them be successful.
- The authors, El Zein, et al. indicated that 36.4% of students were using the pantry as a sole source of food. Those with a low and very low food security reported more barriers to using the food pantry. The main barriers found to using the food pantry were social stigma and embarrassment (36.8%), insufficient information on how the program works and what determines eligibility (33.8%), self-identity, or the feeling that the food pantry was not for them (17.6%), and inconvenient hours of operation (11.8%).⁷
- Authors, Jamie B. Daugherty and Matthew Clark, et al. found that participants were using the pantry secondary to their financial situations warranting it. The food pantry was found to allow participants to have enough of what they needed.
- Authors, Price, et al., found that better community practice among pantry staff and directors could be very beneficial to help reduce food insecurity in college students and share what types of programs they implemented to help other university pantries put those programs into practice if they see the need in their own universities.⁹
- Price, et al. found the pantry staff driven by two overarching goals of sustainability and student success.¹⁰

Conclusions

- Due to the growing number of food insecure students on campus, food pantries have become essential to combat this growing concern.
- It has been shown that when students are well nourished they do better academically.^{4,5}
- However sometimes biases and stigmas from society can get in the way of students seeking help when they need it.⁷
- Some government programs work to combat this growing issue, for example SNAP benefits are eligible for college students who work an average of 20 hours per week, enrolled in work study, caring for young dependents, or receiving Families First.¹¹
- Another is The United States Department of Education distribution of the Federal Pell grant, a need-based program that is awarded for low-income students for 12 semesters.⁴ However these specific qualifications can sometimes make it hard for college students to get the help they need.
- This makes it essential for campus food pantries to provide adequate food to students without such rigorous qualifications.
- More and more universities are finding this trend and developing campus food pantries that will help combat food insecurity on campus
- Researchers in this review found that it was important to provide a welcoming, collaborative, and inclusive support service.⁸
- Making students of the university more aware of the food pantries services is important in increasing the usage.⁸
- Providing educational resources that provide information about food insecurity, hunger, nutrition, and basic cooking skills would also be beneficial in combatting this issue.⁸
- Campus food pantry and administrators can work to help reduce food insecurity and stigma among college students by working together with other campus pantries to provide insight on what worked for them.⁹
- These administrators can also work to provide a structural and policy change among food insecurity in college students.⁹
- Tennessee Tech University, provides a campus food pantry and auxiliary pantry in the library for the students, faculty, and staff of the university since 2013.



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