

## **Addressing the Issue of Food Insecurity on College Campuses**

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Food insecurity among college students is becoming a more widely recognized issue across the country. Recent studies report between 30-50% of college students experience some level of food insecurity, a rate that is nearly two-fold higher than the general public.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Although food insecurity has likely existed among this population for many years, it has recently become more intensely studied potentially due to the changing demographic characteristics of the average student.<sup>1</sup> More than ever before, students are single parents, full-time employees, and/or first generation college students.<sup>1,2</sup> These non-traditional students often experience financial obligations that can impact their ability to access an adequate amount of nutritious food for themselves and their families.<sup>2</sup> This is especially concerning considering food insecurity among college students has been associated with overall poor health, poor eating behaviors, and adverse academic outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Demographic groups who are at a higher risk for food insecurity among the general population are also more likely to experience food insecurity as students.<sup>1</sup> While a study at a prominent historically black college/university (HBCU) reported nearly 78% of students surveyed had experienced some level of food insecurity over the prior 12 months,<sup>4</sup> more research is needed on student populations from HBCU, rural/small town settings, Hispanic institutions, community and technical colleges, and for-profit universities.<sup>1,5,6</sup>

Some academic institutions across the country have been internally addressing campus food insecurity by providing access to food pantries, meal swipe programs, and food scholarships to students.<sup>2</sup> Referring eligible students to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is another strategy to improve food security.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 2 million students in 2016 were SNAP-eligible but did not apply or receive benefits.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore,

only one-third of state agencies reported actively informing college students about SNAP eligibility.<sup>2</sup> Further research should assess how effective these interventions are at reducing the prevalence of food insecurity among this population.<sup>6</sup>

Nutrition professionals who are affiliated with colleges and universities across the country have the potential to lead efforts to improve food security status of college students by 1) raising awareness among students, faculty, and administrators about the extent to which food insecurity exists on their campus, 2) advocating for on-campus initiatives to improve access to and availability of food and nutrition assistance benefits for students, and 3) conducting research to determine long-term solutions to reducing food insecurity among this population.

## References

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