



HUNGER ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Overview

Attending college has traditionally been associated with the “freshman 15,” the phenomenon of college students gaining weight freshman year because they have access to an abundance of food and opportunities to eat. Today, as more low-income students seek college degrees, they may also find themselves struggling to put food on their tables. The ramifications for this rise in college student hunger impacts health, school performance and ultimately, degree completion. In response to this growing problem, colleges and universities across the country are opening resource centers to help students with fewer advantages.

The Problem of Hunger on College Campuses

A study conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin HOPE Lab found that half of their survey respondents had been at least marginally food insecure over a 30-day period. Given that roughly half of American high school students receive free or reduced-price school meals, it was no surprise to lead researcher Sara Goldrick–Rab that food insecurity carried over into college life.

Their research also found that:

- **20%** of the students reported very low food security with “multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake”
- **22%** of students described cutting the size of their meals or skipping meals because there wasn’t enough money for food
- **39%** of students purchased food that didn’t last and they didn’t have money to buy more

Goldrick –Rab’s study began in 2008, and examined 4,000 undergraduates attending public two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Wisconsin. All of the students surveyed received the federal Pell grant – which is made available to low income students.

How to Get Help

Individuals who need help getting enough to eat can turn to the network of agencies that partner with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank – the food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and other non-profits on the front lines of feeding hungry neighbors. Visit www.brafb.org and click on “Find Help” to locate the nearest food pantry. Additional resources for assistance are also available here.

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank serves as a hub that acquires food from local sources, food retailers and our national organization Feeding America for distribution to clients through its partner agencies.

- The Food Bank serves 25 counties and 8 cities in the piedmont and western regions of Virginia
- The Food Bank works with 212 food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across its service area
- The Food Bank distributes 25.3 million pounds of food each year, which provides 21 million meals
- The Food Bank serves an average of 105,000 people each month
- The Food Bank helps those who are especially vulnerable – children and seniors – through multiple programs designed to meet hungry individuals where they are and promote good nutrition.

To have a lasting, positive impact on the health of our hungry neighbors, the Food Bank began partnerships to acquire more fresh produce, which packs nutrition into the diets of those who are at risk for food related illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. Last year, we distributed 6.2 million pounds of fruits and vegetables.

The Food Bank believes that hunger is unacceptable; that everyone deserves access to enough food; that food sustains life and nourishes health; and that we are called to serve neighbors in need without judgement. Students needing help through this passage along life's journey are encouraged to utilize our services without shame or worry. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank wants to feed their potential.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Additional resources for students needing help include **SNAP (Food Stamps)**, which provides long-term food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps). To learn more, students can call their local Department of Social Services (<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/benefit/food.html>).

Help for Other Needs

Students who struggle with food insecurity are also likely to face problems paying for housing and transportation.

Students needing assistance with utility bills or other services can visit 211 Virginia, one of the largest databases of health and human services in the state, located at <https://211.getcare.com/consite/>. They can also visit <https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/> for more Virginia social services assistance programs.

Telling the Story of Student Hunger on Your Campus

Access to nourishing food helps people living through difficult circumstances access their potential.

Just ask Jessica Wirtanen.

She is a graduate school student at James Madison University working towards a master's degree in the health sciences, but her journey wasn't always easy. She grew up homeless for much of her young life, but because of the Food Bank she was able to get enough to eat. She went on to attend Blue Ridge Community College before transferring to JMU where she completed her undergraduate studies. Now she is advancing her education and career prospects. She gives back to the Food Bank by volunteering her time and generously sharing her story.

Campus communicators have an opportunity to capture and share hunger stories to help struggling students understand that they are not alone and that resources exist to help them fuel their potential. In addition, hunger among college students is of growing interest to members of the media.

Take Action to Help Solve Hunger

If you would like to **promote an initiative, event or hunger study that your campus is conducting** to help solve and/or raise awareness of student hunger, let us know.

The communications team is able to collaborate on press releases and provide information and marketing collateral to help promote your activities related to hunger relief. Please reach out to Abena Foreman-Trice at 540-213-84-05, or aforemantrice@brafb.org.

If you'd like to **get your campus community involved in fighting hunger and you need ideas**, visit www.brafb.org and click on "Get Involved." There, you can learn how to mobilize a group to volunteer at the Food Bank, or obtain information on advocacy on behalf of food-insecure individuals. If you want to host a food or fund drive, look for the Food Bank's **Hunger Hero Toolkit** for ideas for your event.

A Local Contact

If you would like information on **how to help hungry students on your campus** or form a food distribution partnership, please reach out to the partner service coordinator in your region:

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Sources:

Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., & Eisenberg, D. (2015). *Hungry Too Learn: Addressing Food & Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab.

http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin_hope_lab_hungry_to_learn.pdf

Published in The Atlantic: <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/the-hidden-hunger-on-college-campuses/424047/>

US News: <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-07-13/to-cut-costs-college-students-are-buying-less-food-and-even-going-hungry>

Other college hunger news sources:

NYT: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/education/food-pantries-address-a-growing-hunger-problem-at-colleges.html>

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/07/education/edlife/what-to-do-with-those-leftover-meal-plan-swipes.html?_r=1

Huffington Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-hildreth/hunger-on-college-campuse_b_9934988.html

Everyone should have enough to eat.