

Corey Clafin
University of Maine
Food Insecurity on College Campuses in Maine

Food insecurity among college students is prevalent and is associated with numerous problems.. Between housing, food, supplies and personal bills students can be forced to decide between payments such as fixing their car to go to work and class and skipping meals. Lack of access to a healthy nutrition can lead to mental, physical and emotional side effects as well as decrease college retention rates and lower academic performance.

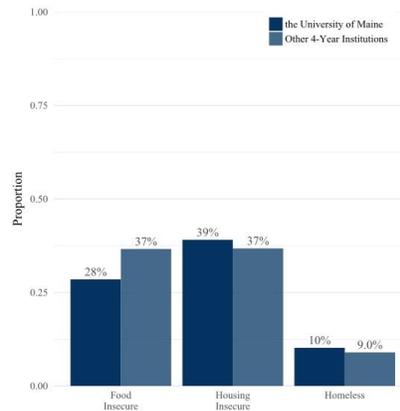
The HOPE Lab at the University of Wisconsin conducts extensive research on food insecurity and secondary education costs. The graph below is the results of a previous HOPE Lab nationwide survey of over 33,000 community college students from March 2017:

Census region	Housing Insecure	Homeless	Food Security	
			Low Security	Very Low Security
West	53%	15%	23%	36%
Midwest	48%	12%	23%	30%
South	46%	12%	22%	28%
Northeast	50%	16%	24%	34%

58% of community college students in the Northeast United States are affected by food insecurity in some form¹.

In Maine a significant number of students suffer from food and housing insecurity. Rising college costs in one of the poorer states in America puts a strain on student’s budgets. Unsustainable room and board costs are forcing students off campus where many find it hard to make ends meet. In fall 2017, the HOPE Lab conducted a study of four year universities which included the University of Maine, Orono campus, Orono’s results are shown below:

¹ Goldrick-Rab, Sarah, et al. “Hungry and Homeless in College.” *Wisconsin HOPE Lab*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Mar. 2017.



On the Orono campus, 28% of students are food insecure, while 39% are housing insecure². While Orono does not measure up to the average nationwide statistic, other Maine campuses also experience similar levels. Southern Maine Community College found that 31.5% of their students are food insecure according to a student senate survey³. Although a significant portion of students are considered food insecure, SNAP benefits are severely limited to college students. According to the organization Young Invincibles, while only 18% of college students are estimate to be eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP), only 3% actually receive them⁴.

I interviewed and corresponded with individuals at UMaine Orono, UMA-Bangor, UMaine Farmington, and the University of Southern Maine. Each campus features unique demographics and provided a different perspective on the needs of students which played a major role in the policy recommendations that I present. UM represented larger state universities while in contrast, UMA-Bangor is a small campus with a very unique population comprised of non-traditional, low income, and commuter students.

During the course of this project I observed that many campuses are attempting to make strides to address food insecurity and state policy however may not be the most effective and efficient route. At UMA Bangor, a campus with no dining facilities, the Good Shepherd Food Bank has a strong presence on campus with their food truck. Cooking classes and equipment have also been purchased to help individuals learn how to cook on a budget, and the campus is preparing to open their new food pantry. At UMaine Farmington, their food pantry has continued to see higher usage as well as UMaine Orono's Black Bear Exchange. On the Orono campus, Hilltop Dining has agreed to send leftover food with the help of numerous renewable initiative groups.

² Goldrick-Rab, Sarah. Food Insecurity at the University of Maine, Orono. March 30, 2018. Raw data. University of Wisconsin- Madison, Madison.

³ Pierce, Kathleen. "Students Fight Food Insecurity on Maine Campuses." *Bangor Daily News*, January 4, 2016. Accessed March 4, 2018.

<https://bangordailynews.com/2016/01/02/health/students-fight-food-insecurity-on-maine-campuses/>.

⁴ Allison, Tom. *Rethinking SNAP Benefits for College Students*. PDF. Washington, District of Columbia: Young Invincibles, February 2018.

Policy proposals

My proposals to address food insecurity on college campuses is multi-faceted and takes place mainly at the University System level.

- Campuses within both the University of Maine and Maine Community College systems should strive to work with the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA) to begin exploring the feasibility of an on campus food pantry. CUFBA provides resources and support that can be tailored to the needs of the campus demographics.
- Campuses with food pantries as well as dining facilities should work together to create food recovery programs, like the program recently developed on the Orono campus. Staff members of the food pantries should be ServSafe certified to handle food.
- Each campus should also explore the position of a caseworker. The University of Maine Bangor features such a position that is designated to work with students who deal with personal issues, many times hunger being one of them. Case workers point students in the right direction in terms of resources and services they may need such as food pantries.
- Campuses such as UM, SMCC, and UMF that feature functioning food pantries should engage in more robust publicity campaigns to make the student population aware of their resources and other resources available. UMaine Farmington recently altered their campus tours route to publicize their food pantry to prospective students. Efforts such as these make students more aware of resources available as well as combat the stigma surrounding food pantries. Making students aware of the resources available to them will help campuses better determine the amount and type of resources that students need.
- The creation of a University of Maine System food bank coalition with representatives from the various Maine colleges can help existing and potential food banks receive support and guidance. With a small amount of funding from the state or through a grant from the university systems, new food pantries on college campuses could immediately provide resources to students as well as subsidize existing food banks and programs during identified periods of low donations.

Food insecurity on college campuses is not only a widespread and overlooked problem on many college campuses, but it is also a byproduct of rising college costs that students and families cannot continue to afford. While addressing college costs is a major federal

undertaking, there are steps that we can take to ensure that college students have access to the resources and support they need to ensure successful college and professional careers.

Works Cited

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