WHEN STUDENTS ARE HUNGRY

An Examination of Food Insecurity in Higher Education

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Foreword

As Bon Appétit learned with *The Inventory of Farmworker Issues and Protections in the United States*, a report it coauthored in 2011 with United Farm Workers and Oxfam America, the first step to begin solving a pervasive, complicated problem is to study it and define its scope, and begin gathering resources and examples of ways to address it.

When Students Are Hungry: An Examination of Food Insecurity in Higher Education was conceived, researched, and drafted by food service provider Bon Appétit Management Company starting in early 2018. It draws heavily on previous research and work performed by the Bon Appétit Fellows, its waste programs manager, and one of its nutrition project managers, a registered dietitian. Those projects inspired Bon Appétit's senior leadership to recognize campus food insecurity as one of the most pressing issues facing our guests and clients and to dedicate resources to studying it.

Bon Appétit operates more than 1,000 cafés for corporations, universities, and cultural institutions in 33 states. It serves more than 100 higher-education clients and has been recognized by multiple awards for its industry leadership in socially and environmentally responsible business practices.

Food insecurity on college campuses first appeared on the company's radar in 2014 when Bon Appétit began partnering with the Food Recovery Network to set up food recovery programs on its college campuses, and began looming larger in fall 2016 when it received the first of several requests to help university administrators establish food pantries. In January 2017, the waste programs manager created and disseminated a food pantry setup guide for Bon Appétit's college dining teams with examples and best practices. One of the company's registered dietitians, whose college roommate had struggled with food insecurity, attended a Presidents United to Solve Hunger (PUSH) conference and began advocating internally for proactive steps to combat the problem. Inquiries about whether its mini-market locations could accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits followed. (Under current government regulations, the answer is no.)

In June 2018, when researching *When Students Are Hungry*, Bon Appétit National Marketing Manager Cheryl Sternman Rule interviewed Assistant Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education Anthony Abraham Jack, Ph.D. as an expert source and quickly realized he would be a valuable collaborator. Dr. Jack agreed to share his extensive knowledge and contribute examples from his research to the paper.

Introduction

Food insecurity on college and university campuses is not new.

Long before headlines publicized the problem, and decades before studies quantified its scope, students on campuses throughout the United States did not know how, when, or from where they would get their next meal.

That this issue is now receiving long overdue attention makes it *seem* new, but what has changed is only an increased urgency to quantify, address, and (ultimately) find remedies for this complex, multifaceted problem. The good news: Both small-scale, highly localized correctives and further reaching, larger-scale initiatives have taken root on a wide spectrum of campuses. The bad news: Broader structural changes in policy are still lacking.

Only when confronting food insecurity on multiple fronts will stakeholders—everyone from administrators and faculty to food service companies, policymakers, advocates, and students themselves—be able to address such a chronic, crippling problem, giving food insecure students the relief they deserve.

What is Food Insecurity?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers two categories of food insecurity:

Low food security, also known as *Food insecurity without hunger*
Individuals in this category report "reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet" but with "little or no indication of reduced food intake."

Very low food security, also known as *Food insecurity with hunger*
Individuals in this category report "multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake."[1]

Importantly, food insecurity is not the same as hunger. The Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies offers this important distinction: Food insecurity "is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity."

The Wisconsin HOPE Lab, which focuses its research on students in postsecondary education, adds additional nuance to focus on individual students' experience with limited to no access to food. It defines food insecurity as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate

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[1] For a discussion of other definitions and measures of food (in)security, see United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Online at https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx.

and safe foods in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied with physiological sensations of hunger."[2]

In sum: Students who are food insecure have *inconsistent* or *intermittent* access to meals marked by periods of *uncertainty*. When food is available, it may not be *affordable*, *nutritionally adequate*, or *safe to eat*. Food insecurity is a *physiological*, *economic*, and *social* condition, one that Susan Blumenthal M.D. and Christina Chu—co-authors of Food Insecurity on College Campuses—rightfully call "a significant public health concern."[3]

The Scope of the Problem

Despite the findings of several seminal reports—among them Hunger On Campus (2016),[4] the Student Food Access and Security Study (2016),[5] and, the most recent, Still Hungry and Homeless in College (2018)—researchers acknowledge that a lack of comprehensive federal data makes it difficult to determine how many students suffer from food insecurity nationwide. In the absence of a nationwide dataset, survey data from the University of California and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab offer especially revealing windows.

Between 2015 and 2016, researchers at the University of California used two online surveys to assess the prevalence of food insecurity among 66,000 students across the University of California's 10-campus system. They discovered that 42 percent of the 8,932 respondents (a 14 percent response rate) reported that they had "very low" or "low" food security due to limited resources.[6]

In 2018, the Wisconsin HOPE Lab administered a national survey reporting on 43,000 students at 66 institutions of higher education in 20 states and the District of Columbia. They found that 36 percent of university students were food insecure in the 30 days preceding the survey.

Food insecurity does not affect all students equally. Groups that tend to be disproportionately food insecure at colleges and universities include students of color, community college students, first-generation students, older students, students who work longer hours at their jobs, students from the foster care system, veterans, and students who identify as LGBTQ.

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[2] Sara Goldrick-Rab et al., "Still Hungry and Homeless in College" (Madison, WI: Wisconsin HOPE Lab, April 2018), 4.

[3] For a discussion of food insecurity on college campus, see https://www.clasp.org/press-room/news-clips/food-insecurity-college-campuses

[4] James Dubick, Brandon Mathews, and Clare Cady, "Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students," October 2016, https://studentsagainsthunger.org/hunger-on-campus/.

[5] Suzanna M Martinez, Katie Maynard, and Lorrene D Ritchie, "Student Food Access and Security Study" (Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2016).

[6] Suzanna M Martinez et al., "No Food for Thought: Food Insecurity Is Related to Poor Mental Health and Lower Academic Performance among Students in California's Public University System," *Journal of Health Psychology*, June 25, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105318783028; Suzanna M. Martinez et al., "Food Insecurity in California's Public University System: What Are the Risk Factors?," *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1374901.

Moreover, food insecurity is not relegated to state and community colleges. It also exists at wealthy, well-funded, "elite" institutions, especially for students from poor backgrounds, emancipated students, and international students. Although these students' experiences with food insecurity are largely episodic, happening around recesses and school closures, they are not immune from this national problem.[7]

Root Causes

Why is food insecurity so prevalent? Reasons are varied.

Costs, both tuition as well as ancillary expenses, have risen. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "Between 2005–06 and 2015–16, prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions rose 34 percent, and prices at private nonprofit institutions rose 26 percent, after adjustment for inflation."[8] Meanwhile, enrollment by low-income students has surged.[9]

Financial aid may fall short, leaving a gap between the money students receive and what they need to survive and thrive. In any given academic year, in other words, students may simply run out of money before that year ends. Institutional grants also tend to drop as students proceed through their college years or if their family situation/support changes, further exacerbating the problem over the course of their educational careers.[10]

At many colleges, dining halls and other eateries typically covered by the meal plan close during holiday, summer, or university breaks, leaving students who cannot afford meals at local restaurants, groceries from local stores, or tickets to go home without reliable sources of food. In addition to these economic hurdles, students who do not have a home to go back to for various reasons are left without adequate options for food.

Although being on a meal plan and living on campus can help shield students from the effects of being food insecure, they are not a cure-all: 26 percent of students with a meal plan and 26 percent of students living on campus still reported experiencing food insecurity within the past

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[7] Anthony Abraham Jack, "It's Hard to Be Hungry on Spring Break," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2018, sec. Sunday Review; Deirdre Fernandes, "Even at Elite Colleges, Students Going Hungry," *BostonGlobe.com*, February 5, 2018, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/02/04/even-elite-colleges-students-going-hungry/GMDfGe89ocg31Fm1cmzR2J/story.html.

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2016* (NCES 2017-094), Chapter 3. Online at https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=76.

[9] Sara Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2016). See also, http://www.aei.org/publication/college-enrollment-surges-among-low-income-students/

[10] Rochelle Sharpe, "Why Upperclassmen Lose Financial Aid," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2017, sec. Education, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/education/edlife/why-upperclassmen-pay-more-they-may-get-less.html.

30 days due either to closures on college campuses or to the limited number of meals offered by affordable meal plans. [11]

Students, especially those who travel great distances for school or who work multiple jobs on or off campus, may have limited time to eat, forcing them to skip meals.

Part of the knowledge gap that exists around meeting students' basic needs is that students who are the most economically vulnerable, and therefore most susceptible to food insecurity, are also the least likely to ask for help.[12]

Furthermore, when financial aid does not explicitly cover food but is instead delivered as a monetary credit, some students face near-impossible choices. They may use this money to feed themselves. Or, as has been documented on a variety of campuses, they may skip meals and instead send this money to financially strapped family members, subsidize their own rent, use it to buy a winter coat, apply it to urgent medical or dental needs, or hold it in reserve for emergencies.

In addition to barriers to securing food when on campus, students face other destabilizing hurdles. Lack of familial financial support, a stagnant minimum wage with less relative buying power, onerous requirements around accessing federal benefits like SNAP (to qualify, full-time students have to work at least 20 hours per week if they don't have children), and insufficient Pell grants may all contribute to food insecurity.

What's the Toll? Exploring the Physical, Psychological, and Academic Impacts of Food Insecurity

Students at all levels of education, from elementary to graduate school, can be too hungry to learn. Research has long documented the effects of hunger and food insecurity on young children's ability to concentrate and learn when they enter school. Although causal data on what happens to food insecure students in college is not yet available, early studies have revealed correlations between food insecurity and similar difficulties as their younger counterparts. They include: being distracted in class, poor mental health, dropping a class or discontinuing one's education entirely, and lower grades.[13]

Moreover, the strategies that college students take to combat food insecurity can add to their stress levels, further undermining their socio-emotional well-being. For example, some students report stealing food from their own cafeterias, reducing their food intake to one meal a day, or relying on local food pantries or soup kitchens. Another strategy, more prevalent among women,

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[11] Goldrick-Rab et al., "Still Hungry and Homeless in College," 21.

[12] Anthony Abraham Jack, "(No) Harm In Asking: Class, Acquired Cultural Capital, and Academic Engagement at an Elite University," *Sociology of Education* 89, no. 1 (2016): 1–19.

[13] Diana F. Jyoti, Edward A. Frongillo, and Sonya J. Jones, "Food Insecurity Affects School Children's Academic Performance, Weight Gain, and Social Skills," *The Journal of Nutrition* 135, no. 12 (December 1, 2005): 2831–39; Martinez et al., "No Food for Thought."

was to use online dating platforms to secure dates in the hopes that the person would buy them a meal.[14]

Socially, the stigma associated with food insecurity can take a toll on students' self-esteem. Stigma around being food insecure can also hamper well-meaning advocates, chilling their efforts to identify students in need. When college officials do not know which students are in need, they cannot market available resources to them or make them aware of targeted interventions. How college officials approach students on such a sensitive issue is as important as they resources they offer.

Ultimately, more data is needed to measure the effects of both episodic and chronic food insecurity on college students' brains and bodies. More data would help ensure that individual solutions on college campuses as well as more system-wide initiatives are appropriately calibrated toward mitigating these inequalities, and that their effectiveness can be assessed and scaled. With data, success can be quantified and programs can pivot if they miss the mark.

Solutions and Best Practices in Play at Bon Appétit Campuses and Beyond

Despite the many challenges, institutions of higher education have made great strides in a relatively short time. Often with the help of student activists, a wide range of programs—from food pantries to swipe shares to the establishment of emergency funds—have taken root at schools that are public and private, large and small. Enterprising nonprofits have sprung up and opened campus chapters. And leaders of community-based hunger organizations, long at the forefront of addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, have lent their expertise to campus stakeholders seeking solutions.

Below are some approaches worth noting. Keep in mind that most initiatives are relatively new, and some are still in a period of active evolution as campuses evaluate early-stage programming.

On Campus Initiatives to Address Food Insecurity

Community Building

Community colleges like **Bunker Hill Community College** (BHCC) in Boston see a disproportionate number of food insecure students. (The population they serve tends to include students who are more likely to be from poor families or work in low-wage jobs, are first-generation college students, are commuters, are parents, and are older.) In fact, 56 percent of their students report being food insecure.[15]

BHCC is also one of the community colleges leading the charge to combat food insecurity. It takes a multifaceted approach not only to food insecurity but also to other inequalities that hurt

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[14] Jack, "It's Hard to Be Hungry on Spring Break."
[15] https://www.bhcc.edu/voh/

students' chances of both persisting and graduating, while focusing heavily on community building across different agencies. For example, working with the Greater Boston Food Bank and Food Link, BHCC set up a non-perishable food pantry on campus as well as a mobile food pantry that goes into the community once a month. It also provides tax preparation support and financial literacy courses alongside a host of other services aimed at giving students the resources they need to succeed. In 2017, BHCC hosted a statewide convening of educators, Voices of Hunger on Campus, a first-of-its-kind of meeting to discuss not only the problem facing students, but best practices for addressing them as well.

Food Pantries

While also tackling longer-term remedies to food insecurity on-campus stakeholders at an Oregon college set up a food pantry, which soft-launched in the summer of 2017. The group, which included the Assistant Dean for Multicultural Affairs, the Community Engagement Office, the Bon Appétit General Manager, and representatives from the faculty, Student Senate, Student Services, Business Office, Alumni Programs, and even the bookstore, invited a staff member from the Oregon Food Bank to come in and consult with them on their efforts. And with the support of an end-of-semester, Bon Appétit-supported drive to encourage students to donate their leftover board points, the pantry received non-perishables without a huge cash outlay.

Columbia University in New York, NY, opened its first food pantry during finals week in 2016. It was the first in the Ivy League to do so. Considered a "beta test," it was a pop-up located in a shared closet, according to an article in the *Columbia Daily Spectator*.[16] After encountering initial resistance, the Food Bank has since relocated to a more permanent spot three times as large. This resource, as well as others like a swipe share program and an anonymous digital platform where students could see where they could get free food, began with students. Columbia student Gavrielle Jacobovitz writes: "The initiatives to address food insecurity on campus follow a coherent trend: Student leadership creates a program, and once it has been well established, Columbia adopts it or helps support it in other ways."

As the first school to establish an on-campus, student- run food pantry, **Michigan State University** in East Lansing, MI, founded the MSU Student Food Bank in 1993. Recently, MSU has begun screening for food insecurity during routine visits to its campus health center.[17]

The foundation for the "RamPantry" at **Virginia Commonwealth University** in Richmond, VA, began in 2012 when Terrence Walker, an administrative assistant at VCU University Counseling Services, saw that food insecurity was an issue for students in the VCU community. He worked

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[16] August Gweon, "Student-Run Food Bank, Now Located in Lerner, Will Rely on Donations to Grow," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, September 11, 2017, columbiaspectator.com/news/2017/09/11/student-run-food-bank-now-located-in-lerner-will-rely-on-donations-to-grow/; Gavrielle Jacobovitz, "The Student-Led Fight Against Columbia's Food Insecurity," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, September 27, 2017, columbiaspectator.com/the-eye/2017/09/28/the-student-led-fight-against-columbias-food-insecurity/.

[17] Caitlin Dewey, "The Hidden Crisis on College Campuses: Many Students Don't Have Enough to Eat," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/04/03/the-hidden-crisis-on-college-campuses-36-percent-of-students-dont-have-enough-to-eat/.

with local charities and community members to begin a food pantry. With the support of the school, the food pantry moved from its temporary location to a permanent home in the University Student Commons. It stands as an exemplar of community building and strong relationships that cross the "town/gown" divide: "over 90% of the food given out by the RamPantry is from donations from the VCU and Richmond communities."[18]

Food Pantries That Target Key Constituents

Paying particular attention to the most disadvantaged on their campus, Bon Appétit client **Lesley University** in Cambridge, MA, opened a Commuter Student Food Pantry offering snacks, coffee, and meals in 2017. The 255 commuters who registered for the pantry during the fall semester logged a total of nearly 2,000 visits during that period, with many commuters visiting multiple times. In a write-up on the university's website, Director of Commuter Student Services Linda Elliott observed, "When you have to carry your books and supplies for the day on your back, sometimes you have to make a decision between your chemistry book or your lunch."[19]

Food Recovery Program

Piloted in Spring 2018, the Bon Appétit team at **George Fox University** in Newberg, OR, partnered with the Student Life Office to offer excess edible meals and supplies to food insecure students on campus. The Bruin Community Pantry–Leftovers Program, which will continue in the 2018 – 2019 year, provides fresh, usable food to students or staff who are looking to supplement their food budget. The program works with interested departments in reducing the amount of wasted food by packaging up what is usable, in good condition, and immediately bringing it to the Student Life Office to be redistributed to anyone who signs up to participate.[20] The food is kept refrigerated in Student Life, where it can be reheated on electric warmers provided by Bon Appétit. Participants in the program sign a waiver exempting all participating providers of liability.

Meal Plan Scholarship Funds

A working group at **Brown University** in Providence, RI, discovered that after having to apply work-study and summer job earnings toward meal plans, many food-insecure students had insufficient funds for academic necessities like textbooks. In response — to ensure that students do not sacrifice on food by skipping meals and securing a refund to use toward other academic costs — the university adjusted its dining policy for first-year students: all first-year students will now be required to maintain a full meal plan, which includes 20 meals per week. For students from low-income families who cannot meet this new financial demand, Brown will provide

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[18] See http://vcustudentfoodpantry.com/about.php.
[19] "Food Pantry provides comfort and opportunity" (3/8/18). Online at https://lesley.edu/news/food-pantry-provides-comfort-and-opportunity
[20] See Bruin Community Pantry—Leftovers Program: Application & Food Service Waiver Form.

additional scholarships and grants to make up the difference for the full costs of the required meal plan.[21]

Resource Hub

In October 2015, the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) at **Otterbein University** in Westerville, OH, brought together students concerned about socioeconomic barriers to college success. Students talked about difficulties paying for textbooks, interview-appropriate clothing, transportation, and food, all of which impeded their ability to feel like full members of the university community. With the support of the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Office of Residence Life, the Bon Appétit team, an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, and donors, the CCE opened Promise House in April 2016. This student-led community resource center and food pantry is staffed by volunteers 60 hours per week and averages 150 visits each month. To learn more about how Promise House operates, see Appendix A.

School Recess Food Options

As recently as 2015, **Connecticut College** in New London, CT, charged students $70 to stay on campus and $40 to eat on campus during spring break. Working with the Dean of the College and members of the faculty, Harvard Graduate School of Education Assistant Professor Anthony Abraham Jack [this paper's coauthor] lobbied administrators to reverse this policy for its burden on financially strapped students. This campaign was successful; students on campus now receive meals during spring break. Going beyond reversing the decision, administrators at Connecticut College have also created enrichment programming and sponsored outings and activities during breaks.

In 2003, **Harvard University** in Cambridge, MA, enacted the Harvard Financial Aid Initiative, a no-loan financial aid program to recruit and support lower-income students. This major change in financial aid increased the number of poor students by 30 percent from 2008 to 2014. It was not until 2014, however, that Dr. Jack successfully lobbied administrators at Harvard to open the dining halls to support students who remained on campus during recesses. In that year, Dr. Jack showed that 1 out of 7 students at Harvard were without a source of food during spring break, with most of those students from poor families.[22]

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[21]"Brown to address meal plan, textbook costs for highest-need students." May 4, 2018. Online at https://news.brown.edu/articles/2018/05/support

[22] Laura Pappano, "First-Generation Students Unite," *The New York Times*, April 8, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/first-generation-students-unite.html. Although the problem of food insecurity came to administrators' attention in 2014 through successful lobbying, it should be noted that food insecurity affected generations of students at Harvard before the enactment of the Harvard Financial Aid Initiative.

Swipe Share and Swipe Donation Programs

Bon Appétit clients Carleton College, Emory University, and Washington University in St. Louis have all established Swipe Out Hunger chapters to facilitate the sharing and/or donation of meal swipes. (Learn more about Swipe Out Hunger in the next section: Select Organizations Addressing Food Insecurity on College Campuses.) Programs vary by chapter.

Carleton College, Northfield, MN: Towards the end of each quarter, students can skip one lunch and donate the funds they would have spent to support another student facing food insecurity. Donated funds are disbursed through the Dean of Students office.

Emory University, Atlanta, GA: First-year students are notified that they can sign up online to donate up to two guest meals from their campus meal plan to support classmates facing food insecurity. Meals are distributed through Student Success Programs and Services.

Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO: A food bin drive is held at the end of each semester. Students can make cash donations and provide grocery items from the campus market to be donated to fight local food insecurity.

Topical Classes Promoting Food Literacy

After a food insecurity working group at a large East Coast university assessed the problem on its campus, it concluded that a coordinated approach, which included improving education on financial literacy, budgeting, and cost-effective cooking was necessary. (It also proposed several other initiatives.) The Bon Appétit team led several such classes for graduate students and their families in the 2017-2018 academic year. With topics like how to prepare a meal for $10 or less and how to make five meals from a 3-pound chicken, classes are free to students and generally draw 12 to 18 families.

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As evidenced above, colleges and universities adopted initiatives after investigating what obstacles their students faced. After documenting the prevalence and severity of the problem on their individual campuses, they piloted programs, which they later modified and, in some cases, expanded. Consequently, each of these individual interventions should be viewed in the context of a campus' broader, holistic approach to food insecurity. Other campuses looking to follow suit should be mindful of some key takeaways: Solutions to food insecurity should be tiered strategically, meaning they should comprise short-term, medium-range, and long-term solutions. They should also engage multiple stakeholders and funding streams. Finally, to assess their effectiveness and impact, interventions should be tracked *both* qualitatively and quantitatively so their successes and failures can be measured over time.

Select Organizations Addressing Food Insecurity on College Campuses

College and University Food Bank Alliance
Started in 2012, CUFBA (https://sites.temple.edu/cufba/) was co-founded by the Michigan State Student Food Bank and the Oregon State University Food Pantry to connect individuals working to alleviate student hunger on campus. Today, CUFBA provides "support, training and resources to campus-based food banks/pantries and other food insecurity initiatives that primarily serve students." It offers four membership types, and though it has primarily focused on food banks to date, the organization seeks to expand into other hunger-related interventions to benefit college and university students. In 2018, CUFBA became part of The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University (see below).

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University
Led by sociologist Sara Goldrick-Rab, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (http://hope4college.com/) in Philadelphia is the new iteration of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab. It is a research and advocacy center focused on examining and advancing policy changes to address how poverty and inequality shape persistence at colleges and universities. One part of its advocacy is to host #RealCollege, a "no-frills" convening of scholars, agencies, and activists focused on addressing food and housing insecurity at colleges across the country. The 2018 #RealCollege event will launch the Hope Center, with a specific focus on finding creative ways to "Create affordable housing, including for community college students, prevent food insecurity with efforts that go beyond the campus food pantry, shape state and federal policies to improve food and housing resources available to students" and a host of other hurdles that make graduation less likely for those most disadvantaged.

Swipe Out Hunger
Started in 2010 as a grassroots movement by then-UCLA student and now Executive Director Rachel Sumekh, Swipe Out Hunger (http://swipehunger.org) was originally focused on converting unused meal swipes into funds for the homeless. Now, it's geared towards alleviating on-campus food insecurity and operates in 23 states, with 46 university and college partners. "When we first started, people never took the issue seriously," Sumekh said. "They thought I was some idealistic millennial." Eight years on, Sumekh was recently invited to testify before the California State

Assembly: "The public is now ready for policymakers to act on this. This conversation is now happening."

Share Meals
Created by New York University student Jonathan Chin in 2013, the Share Meals app facilitates meal sharing among those willing to donate extra swipes and those who need them. Using geolocation, it also connects students with free food events near them. In May 2017, the NYU Stern School awarded Share Meals a $300,000 grant. Chin's goal: "To build community, end social isolation, and ensure that no student goes hungry."[23]

Big Orange Meal Share
Launched in 2016 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the program allows students to donate some or all of their five unused guest meals to fellow students through a simple online portal.[24] Meals from a FLEX Plan or Dining Dollars cannot be donated. Those not on a meal plan, including alumni, may contribute funds directly to the program through the Office of Alumni Affairs.[25] A partnership between the Office of the Dean of Students, Student Government Association, Office of Family Engagement, and Volunteer Dining, the program was founded by a junior in conjunction with the associate vice chancellor of student life and dean of students.

What is Still Needed: Looking Ahead at the Structural Hurdles

Although local solutions to food insecurity are gaining significant traction on campuses throughout the United States, structural, policy-based overhauls would more effectively create long-lasting, meaningful, reliable change. Here's what's still desperately needed:

On the federal level:
- Increase the maximum dollar amount of Pell grants in order to cover both how much money students actually need to attend college (e.g., tuition, supplies) and their basic expenses (e.g., food, housing) while they are there.
  - Expand SNAP eligibility requirements so full-time students without children are not forced to work untenable hours in order to qualify for benefits.
  - Expand SNAP definition to include additional retail outlets. Food service companies like Bon Appétit have received inquiries about whether their convenience stores or cafés may accept SNAP, but current regulations prevent them from doing so due to the high proportion of prepared food revenue. This, too, could be changed.
- Expand or extend the federal School Breakfast Program and/or the National School Lunch Program to cover students enrolled in an accredited, nonprofit college or university.

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[23] For Share Meals, see https://sharemeals.org/; "NYU Teams Win $300K in the Stern School's 2016-2017 Entrepreneurs Challenge." Online at http://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/news-events/300k-entrepreneurs-challenge-final-pitch-and-awards-ceremony
[24] See https://dos.utk.edu/big-orange-meal-share-donation-form/
[25] See http://volstarter.utk.edu/s/1341/utk/volstarter/interior.aspx?sid=1341&gid=2&pgid=8639

On the campus level:

- Colleges, universities, and food service providers need to make sure students who remain on campus during times when dining halls are closed (holidays, vacations, summers) still have consistent and affordable (or free) access to three daily meals or their equivalent. Or, alternatively, dining halls need to remain open, accessible, and in service for food-insecure students any time these students are on campus.
- The majority of colleges and universities partner with food service companies to operate their dining halls and provide their meals and catering under varying profit-sharing arrangements. Typically the school sets the pricing and participation requirements for its meal plans, and alone has the discretion to waive them or subsidize them. Colleges could explore automatically enrolling high-need students in full meal plans and covering their costs through increased grants and scholarships.
- Alumni-giving online portals and mailers could include options to support food-insecure students or on-campus food insecurity initiatives.
- Where technology allows, colleges could take inspiration from the Share Meals app (see p. 14) and create a map, updated in real time, indicating where free food may be found on campus. The institution could encourage computer science majors to design and integrate this feature into the college's app and/or website.
- Faculty, administrators, coaches, and other staff who work directly with students need to be fully briefed not only on the prevalence of food insecurity on campus, but also on what resources are available and how students can access them. They can do this via:
    - A small note at the end of every course syllabus inviting students to talk with the faculty member about food concerns.[26]
    - Making sure all campus stakeholders have information they can distribute to students that directs students to food pantries or other resources on campus
    - Hosting campus-wide conversations around inequality in higher education to bring food insecurity out from the shadows, thereby reducing stigma and encouraging dialogue
- Partner with schools of social work on campus and non-profit social service organizations to assist students applying for SNAP and other government benefits
    - For local agencies, this university partnership could lead to shared resources to cover costs for support services and expanded networks.
    - For social work students, such an initiative can be taken for course credit (e.g., practical or field training) or for pay.

Food insecurity on the college campus cannot continue to be a silent epidemic. And with the help of vocal, engaged students, it will not be.

To address this multifaceted problem, one that not only undermines students' academic performance, but also undercuts their emotional, physical, and psychological well-being, a host

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[26] Goldrick-Rab, Sara. "Basic Needs Security and the Syllabus." Online at
https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9

of actors must commit themselves to the cause. In that vein, we hope that this investigation into food insecurity in higher education provides insights into the nature of the problem and invites others to find inventive ways to reduce inequalities that hinder the progress of thousands of students across the country.

Appendix: How Otterbein University's Promise House Came to Be

In October 2015, the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) at **Otterbein University** in Westerville, OH, brought together students concerned about socioeconomic barriers to college success. On large pieces of paper hung throughout the room, students documented, then discussed, these barriers, which included paying for things like textbooks, clothing for interviews, and transportation to internships. "And food," said Associate Dean Dr. Melissa Kesler Gilbert. "Food was key."

Many students, she said, spoke of buying textbooks instead of lunch, and paying for tuition instead of for groceries. Two-thirds of the students at that meeting were Pell eligible (in 2015, 32 percent of Otterbein freshmen were Pell eligible[27]); work-study students attended, too. The issues surfaced during this meeting, combined with the vocal efforts of a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer and revelations following a campus-wide reading of the book *Hidden America* by Jeanne Marie Laskas, all soon coalesced. "It made us really think about the hidden lives of our students," Gilbert said. "We learned that hunger was a significant part of that story."

The CCE next invited a different group of Pell eligible students to gather at a Chili Chat to share their experiences and brainstorm strategies for breaking down socioeconomic barriers faced by students. The Bon Appétit team provided the chili. "This was our qualitative look at economic disparity on campus," Gilbert explains. To gather quantitative data, Otterbein added questions about food insecurity (drawn from a question bank from the USDA) to its residence life survey. The results were eye-opening.

In April 2016, with the support of Vice President for Student Affairs Bob Gatti, the Office of Residence Life, Bon Appétit, another AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, and donors, the CCE opened Promise House. This student-led community resource center and food pantry is staffed by volunteers 60 hours per week and averages 150 visits each month. To use Promise House, students become "members," but anyone who volunteers or supports Promise House is a member, too, giving the space a sense of communal ownership. When shopping from the pantry, students complete a checklist, which helps with tracking and inventory. Different departments on campus adopt Promise House each month, hosting food drives and facilitating educational programs.

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[27] "Hidden Lives Hidden Challenges." *Otterbein Towers* (Fall 2015). Online at https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1032&context=towers

Community-building, educating campus stakeholders, and reducing stigma are important parts of its mission.

A simulation called SWIPES has helped the campus community understand that those with low food security cannot afford food that is as nutrient-dense as those who are more food—and financially—secure. And an end of semester meal swipe donation program run through Bon Appétit allowed students with extra swipes to donate them to support their peers. Bon Appétit turned these swipes into vouchers that were distributed by Promise House to be redeemed at the campus cafeteria. "We've had thousands of donated meal swipes over the past year," said Bon Appétit General Manager Amanda DeWitt.