

# TEXTBOOKS OR FOOD?

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Volume 1 / Issue 1

## FOOD INSECURITY

the state of  
being without  
reliable access  
to a sufficient  
quantity of  
affordable,  
nutritious food

### STUDENT HUNGER ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

The “Freshman Fifteen” seems to be the normal outlook on life in a student’s first year of college- an insurmountable number of swipes at the dining hall, late night runs for pizza, ramen noodle cups in bulk, and tubs of ice creams stocked up in the mini fridge. Shockingly, this concept is more of a challenge for some than a joke. Studies have shown that college students are far more likely to be food insecure than the general population and research also indicates that this negatively affects academic performance and student success.<sup>1</sup>

### How many students are going through food insecurity on college campuses?

In the United States, nearly half (48%) of college/university students are experiencing “food insecurity” - the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.<sup>2</sup> These findings were based on a survey done on more than 3700 students attending 26 four-year colleges and 8 community colleges in 12 states.<sup>3</sup>



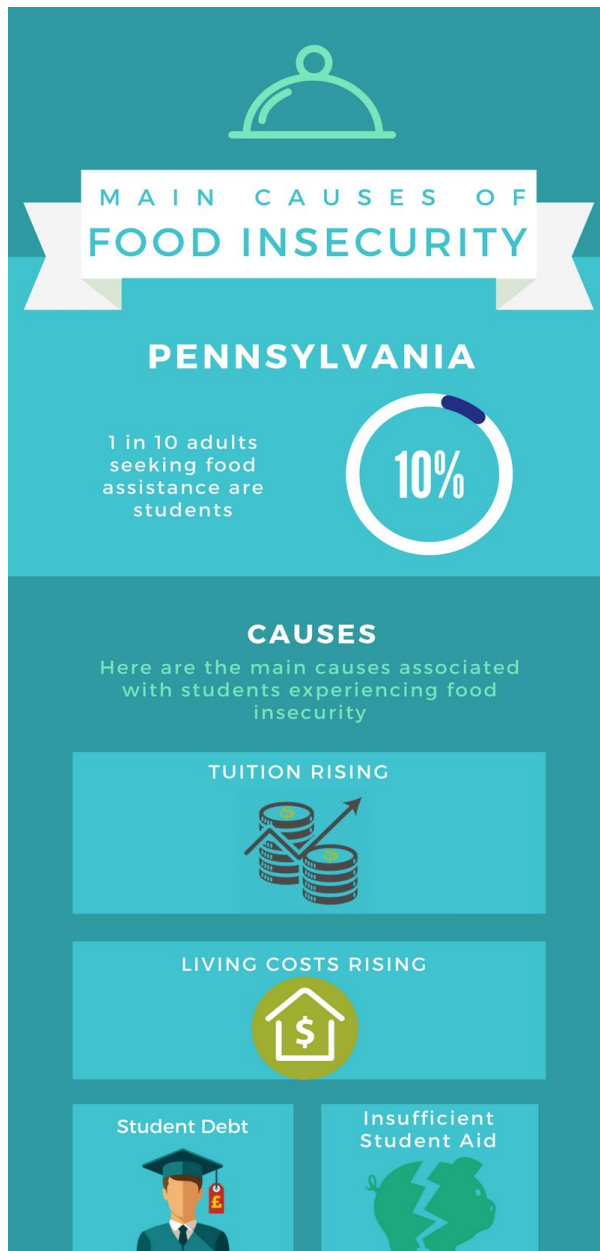
## A Closer Look: Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania

1.6 million individuals in the state of Pennsylvania - 14.3% - experience food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Hunger exists in each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.<sup>5</sup> In 2014, Feeding America found that 1 in 10 hungry adults seeking emergency food assistance were students, **2 million** being fulltime students.<sup>6</sup> This is the reason why there must be action taken by you, Senator Bob Casey and Senator John H. Eichelberger, Jr., to decrease the number of students who are

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MILLION

being hindered from succeeding because of a basic necessity in the state of Pennsylvania.



### What are the main causes of food insecurity in college?

Some causes as to why students are living a life of hunger in college are tuition and living costs rising, student debt, and insufficient financial aid.<sup>8</sup> Students may be working a job to try and pay for their necessities, however with low wages they are still are striving to afford school and lead a healthy life.

"We have all these students who are food insecure, despite the fact that they work significant hours at their jobs, they get financial aid, they're seeking out financial and material help from a lot of sources," said James Dubick, an organizer with the National Student Campaign against Hunger and Homelessness and one of the authors of the report. "It's still not enough. They're still trying to get by."<sup>9</sup>

At New York University, professors are discussing the "big squeeze" placed on their students due to high college costs. A recent report quotes a third year undergraduate student.

Figure 1 (7)

"I live on \$2-5 dollars a day. That means two meals a day, and incredibly unhealthy food. I'm hungry all the time. Being so hungry while you're trying to work two jobs to pay your rent and still keep up with your coursework is practically impossible and more common than you would ever think at a university like this."<sup>10</sup>

## Hungry to Learn: Why does Student Hunger Matter?

There are consequences not only to the students' well-being, but to their academic life. In the study done by the National Student Campaign Against Hunger & Homelessness with other campus based groups, it stated that one-third of food insecure students said their struggle to get proper nutrition or even eat at all has impacted their education.<sup>11</sup> Another study done in two community colleges in Maryland showed that 56% of students in the sample were food insecure.<sup>12</sup> These students were more likely to report a lower GPA (2.0-2.49) compared to a higher GPA (3.5-4.0).<sup>13</sup>

Students have had to make the decision to<sup>14</sup>:

- Not purchase a required textbook (**55%**)
- Skip a class (**53%**)
- Drop a course (**25%**)
- Opt not to join an extracurricular activity (**55%**)
- Not perform as well in academics as they otherwise could (**81%**)

These factors can really take a toll on a student's persistence to earn a degree.

If students have to potentially end up dropping out of their school altogether, it can be worse for them then when they even started school due to having to pay off their debt.

Food insecurity doesn't just affect education, but it can also impact the

mental health of the student. The findings of a survey conducted by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab with more than 48,000 students showed that there was a correlation between mental health issues and food insecurity<sup>15</sup>. It can contribute to high significant stress and distress<sup>16</sup>:

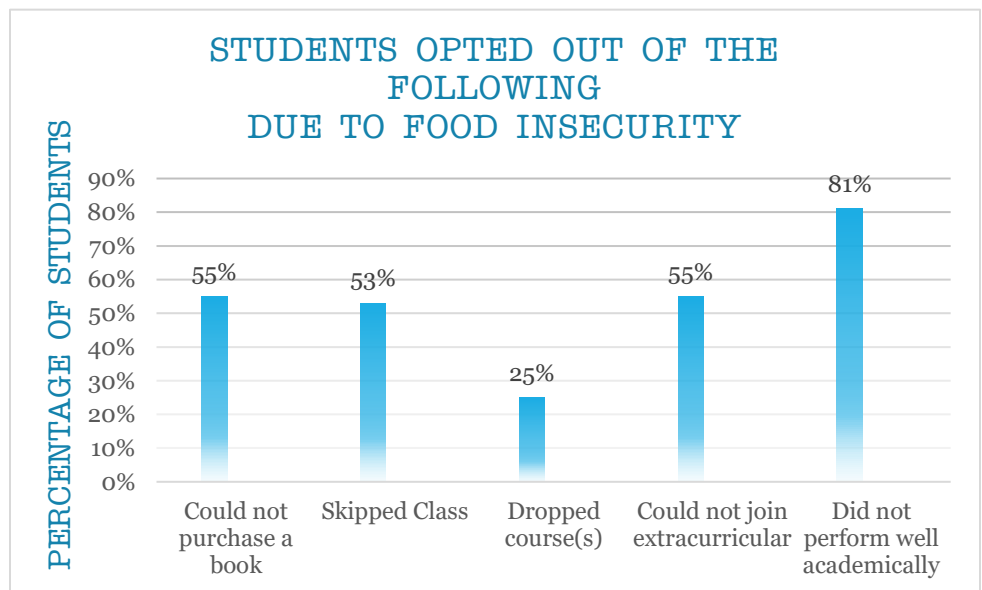


Figure 2 (17)

- More than half of the participants (**55%**) indicated very low levels of food security, while also reporting symptoms of probable clinical depression
- **52%** reported severe levels of anxiety
- **16%** reported symptoms of probable eating disorder
- **20%** reported serious thoughts of suicide in the past year

In comparison<sup>18</sup>

- **20%** of food secure students are depressed
- **18%** indicate severe levels of anxiety
- **5%** evidence an eating disorder
- **6%** exhibit suicidal ideation

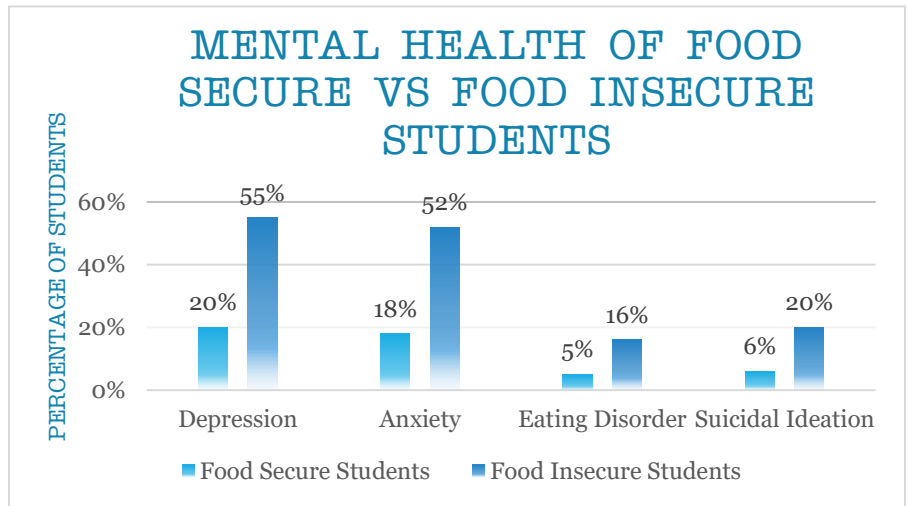
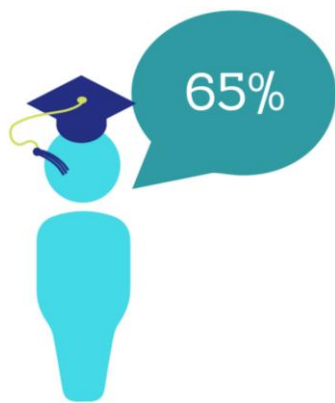


Figure 3 (19)

**“I LIVE ON \$2-5 DOLLARS A DAY. THAT MEANS TWO MEALS A DAY, AND INCREDIBLY UNHEALTHY FOOD. I'M HUNGRY ALL THE TIME. BEING SO HUNGRY WHILE YOU'RE TRYING TO WORK TWO JOBS TO PAY YOUR RENT AND STILL KEEP UP WITH YOUR COURSEWORK IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE AND MORE COMMON THAN YOU WOULD EVER THINK AT A UNIVERSITY LIKE THIS.”**

~ 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

### Future of Students



By 2020, 65% of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.<sup>20</sup> At the current rate of production, in that year the United States will face a shortfall of five million college-educated workers.<sup>21</sup>

Most undergraduates who have left college without degrees indicate that financial reasons are a key cause.<sup>22</sup> Tuition is but one contributor to the cost of a college degree—students must also purchase books and supplies, pay for transportation to get to classes, and cover living expenses. These costs are growing quickly as well.<sup>23</sup> Students from low- and moderate-income families often have a high price to pay, even after grants and scholarships

are distributed.<sup>24</sup> So, what happens to the students who enroll in college and these costs are beyond their reach? The result is primarily food and housing insecurity.

Below is a personal account from a Columbia University student:

“Every morning, as Christine Janumala prepares for her classes at Columbia University, she makes sure her bag is packed with all the essentials. Textbooks. Note pads. Pens. And at least one empty tub of Tupperware. Christine Janumala said she looks for free food to avoid going hungry. While the school supplies will help her get through her coursework, it’s the Tupperware that will get her through her day. After paying for tuition and other living expenses, Janumala often has no money left for food. She darts to club meetings between lectures to scoop up uneaten pizza or sandwiches. If she gets there early, she can grab enough to stow away for later.”

"Much of our population is below poverty level," Cherie Bromley-Taylor, who works at San Diego City College says, "so when they get a thousand-dollar financial aid check, it goes toward a backpack, class materials. Not food."<sup>25</sup>

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In order to allow all students to successfully complete their education and go on to contribute to our nation’s economy, there must be a way to align hunger policies with educational policies.

### What is Working

College and university administrations, student organizations, and nonprofit organizations are working on a wide range of programs designed to support food insecure students.

→ [Campus Food Pantries:](#)

One of the fastest growing movements to combat student hunger on college campuses is the development of campus food pantries.

In 2009, fewer than ten campus food pantries existed.<sup>26</sup> As of March 2017, there are 475 members registered with the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA), one of them being the Lion's Pantry from Pennsylvania State University.<sup>27</sup> The Lion's Pantry reported that, according to FAFSA, 90 Penn State students report being



*Figure 4 (51): Canned food at Pennsylvania State University's*

homeless, therefore not having any way to buy themselves basic necessities like food.<sup>28</sup> The numbers have increased as years have passed.

College food pantries are easy to establish due to the flexibility in operating styles and limited need for physical infrastructure. Also, because the food pantry is a campus-run program, students seem more likely to utilize its services because they see it as a student resource rather than a community program.<sup>29</sup>

→ [Dining Center Meal Donations](#)

In many schools, campus dining hall meal plans provide students with a set number of pre-paid meal dollars or points to spend on food.<sup>30</sup> If students end up with unused points at the end of the year, they are usually discarded. However, there are programs like Swipe Out Hunger that have aided students and dining halls in creating systems where students can donate some of their extra meal points.<sup>31</sup> It depends on the agreement made with the dining hall, but those points can be used to fund dining hall vouchers for food insecure students.<sup>32</sup> The Swipe Out Hunger organization currently has 26 chapters and has provided 125,847 meals to college students since 2010.<sup>33</sup>



→ [Human Services Resource Center \(HSRC\)](#)

This program is currently only located in Oregon State University; however its method is working very well and could perhaps be implemented in other colleges. The HSRC provides services to students who are low income, food insecure, and homeless.<sup>34</sup> They

also offer training and education about poverty, income equality, and socioeconomic class, and direct services to students in need.<sup>35</sup> Their services include a food pantry, a shower, laundry, assistance with completing SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance



Program) applications, on campus meal and health insurance subsidies, as well as emergency short term housing.<sup>36</sup> In 2015, the food pantry nearly served 3000 students with food insecurity by distributing over 40,000 pounds of food.<sup>37</sup>

## What is Needed

Although colleges and universities, alongside different organizations, are making an impact in helping food insecure students, there are some steps that they cannot reach without a more authoritative help. Policymakers are also needed to improve food insecurity situations on college campuses.

### → [Improving Access to Benefits](#)

Students often don't know where or how to access benefit programs that could provide them with valuable assistance with needs like food. Programs like Single Stop set up a campus location where students can stop in to learn about available benefits.<sup>38</sup> In 2012, Single Stop's community college sites drew down benefits and services worth over \$1,947 per student served.<sup>39</sup> Preliminary data indicate that those students who access Single Stop services are more likely to stay in school.<sup>40</sup> By pairing financial resources in the form of tax credits and benefits like food stamps and Medicaid with financial and legal counseling, Single Stop aims to provide students with the tools they need to achieve a higher education, good jobs, and economic mobility.<sup>41</sup>



### → [Expanding SNAP Eligibility for College Students](#)



College students who are enrolled in school for at least part-time are eligible for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).<sup>42</sup> However, they have to meet certain exceptions. The requirements keep many students from receiving the help they need even if they are economically eligible. The SNAP eligibility requirements should be simplified for students and rules adjusted such as allowing college enrollment to count toward SNAP work requirements.

### → [Add Food Security Measurements to National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#)

The National Center for Education Statistics implements the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) each year to

examine the characteristics of the nation's college students, with a special focus on how they finance their education.<sup>43</sup> Adding food security questions to the list of issues assessed by the NPSAS would be beneficial in providing policymakers and researchers with the data to determine the true importance of student food insecurity and assess potential solutions. Being able to identify students who experience high levels of food insecurity is key to understanding the role and limits of financial aid, which is the primary purpose for the study.<sup>44</sup>



→ [Expand the National School Lunch Program](#)



The National School Lunch Program supports students in elementary school and secondary school years. The free and reduced-priced school meals that were available for students in K-12 grade automatically vanish when a student enters college, leaving them fighting to make ends meet.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, this program should be expanded to colleges and universities in order to promote college completion.

## Conclusion

Although college and university administrations, student organizations, and nonprofit organizations are working successfully to combat student hunger on college campuses, it is unfortunately not enough. There are four recommendations for policymakers expanded upon in the previous section. However, one knows that it can be difficult to implement certain programs so quickly, let alone four. The following proposition is to start making a change in Pennsylvania.

## Proposal:

Senator Bob Casey and Senator John H. Eichelberger, Jr., we, as college students of Pennsylvania, implore you to digest this issue brief and consider the following proposal. It is evident that Pennsylvania needs to help its students just as much as other states. The course of action that should be considered for implementation in the state of Pennsylvania is expanding SNAP eligibility for low income college students. The current requirements inhibit students ages 18 through 49 that are in school half time and don't work at least 20 hours a week from receiving SNAP benefits.<sup>46</sup> Another requirement is for the student to not be on a meal plan, however 43% of students enrolled in meal plans in a four-year college still experienced food insecurity.<sup>47</sup> These requirements should be changed to allow students who are enrolled in a course of study to have their college studies count as SNAP employment and training activity. Many individuals today are not eligible because they are not working the required 20 hours



a week or receiving work study. Treating college as an approved employment and training activity would mean that the student would be eligible under SNAP rules.

Massachusetts has adopted this project successfully in community colleges, which allowed many of the students to access SNAP benefits who otherwise wouldn't have with the other requirements.<sup>48</sup>

Steps towards this **goal** could include:<sup>49</sup>

- Developing a statewide form to help state districts identify and verify Perkins-eligible students. The forms would get completed by the student's college and returned to the SNAP office.
  - Massachusetts' current form is:  
<http://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/CCE-1.pdf-requirements>.
- Inform local districts that they can expand access to college students by:
  - Including Perkins-eligible college study as an allowable E&T activity in their local employment plan
  - Giving the statewide form to the student.

The monthly SNAP benefit amount is calculated based on the student's countable income and their expenses. The maximum for one person (living alone, very little income) is \$200/month.<sup>50</sup>

**THIS COURSE OF ACTION WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING THE FOOD INSECURITY PRESENT IN COLLEGE CAMPUSES IN PENNSYLVANIA. PENNSYLVANIA WILL SERVE AS ANOTHER ROLE MODEL FOR OTHER STATES, FOR WE WILL BE TAKING ACTION TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF STUDENTS COMPLETING THEIR DEGREES SUCCESSFULLY AND HEALTHILY.**

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