



# UNDERSTANDING FOOD INSECURITY

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# Presentation Overview

- WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?
- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
- IMPACT ON INTERSECTIONALITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

# WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity is the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” as a result of resource accessibility and financial stability, among other reasons (Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, & Arria, 2018, p. 349). At the average four-year degree granting institution, roughly 44% of students will experience food insecurity during some point in those four years (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019). How we address this issue is developmentally important for determining the success of these students throughout their time seeking the degree. This is not just an issue of resources, though, but an intersectional concern that impacts students of different identities in a variety of ways.

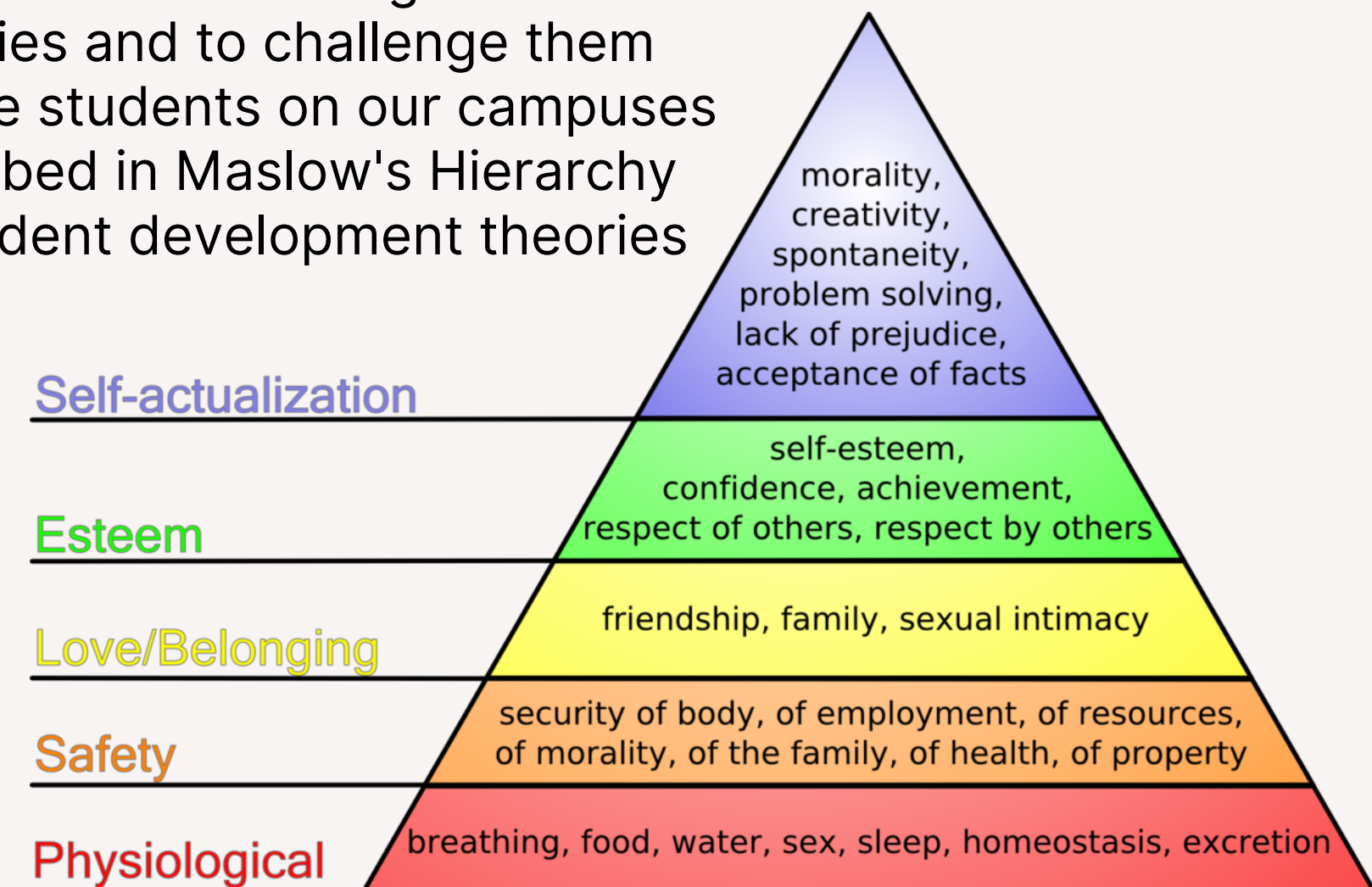
The financial instability that college students may experience can lead to becoming food insecure. There are students that may qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but the lack of education surrounding how to apply for it or how they may qualify leads to a low number of students utilizing this resource. Additionally, low-income students in particular have become increasingly burdened financially. The financial responsibility required for higher education attendance is rising every year and students that are not from a high-income background are feeling the difficulty of this transition. A report for the Institute for Higher Education Policy indicated that only 6 out of 50 flagship institutions meet an affordability benchmark for students not from a high-income background and even moreover, students that have experienced economical disadvantages may be responsible for covering over \$80,000 beyond what they can offer over the four years. (Mugglestone, Dancy and Voight, 2019).

Administrators and student affairs practitioners have recognized the impact of rising tuition costs on retention and recruitment to the campus. However, the impact has lead to human necessities being sacrificed to pay for college, books, technology, etc. to get through to their degree. According to Don Willis, students may be more prone to food and housing insecurity as a result of the rising cost to attend higher education institutions and the constructed social net gaps that situate individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds in another environment to be placed at a disadvantage (2019).

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a theoretical framework, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs address the most foundational elements necessary achieve self-actualization. In student development, these foundations are necessary to promote student success in areas of cognitive development. For a student to even begin to address the ill-structured problems of King & Kitchener or understand justice versus caring in their ethical development, their environment should meet the basic principles of Maslow's Hierarchy. At the base of the pyramid is the Physiological Needs - food, water, and sleep. By living on campus, students have the opportunity to utilize the resources around them to achieve these needs. However, the food insecurity that college students face are disrupting the base of Maslow's pyramid.

As student affairs practitioners, it is crucial to reevaluate how we operationalize the dining facilities to accommodate and adequately address the needs of our students. It is a goal of student affairs to develop the students in our care through multiple capacities and to challenge them using a variety of frameworks. However, we are failing the students on our campuses if we are not addressing the foundational needs as described in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Before we can challenge in through various student development theories being implemented, these cannot be ignored.






# IMPACTS ON INTERSECTIONALITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The impact of food insecurity on a student goes beyond not meeting the foundational level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs but actively affects student success and challenges specific identities as a result of systemic oppression structured in society that have disadvantaged these identities. A study done at University of Missouri-Kansas City found that 1 in 3 students experienced food insecurity and these students were disproportionately students of color, of lower socio-economic status, and students with unstable housing security during their time at college (Willis, 2019). It is the responsibility of student affairs professionals and educators to understand what systems are disadvantaging our students on our campus to appropriately develop sustainable practices.

Furthermore, food insecurity directly impacts the success of our students academically, socially, and developmentally. In a study by Maya Marato, it was found that food insecure students were more likely to report a lower GPA defined as a 2.5 or below (2014). Another study finds through self-reported data that physical health problems and depression symptoms among the at-risk and food-insecure students are higher than those who are food secure; such health consequences have implications for university administrators because they represent another likely mechanism by which food insecurity might undermine important academic outcomes including GPA, retention, and on-time graduation (Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldiera, 2017).

In the next half of this presentation, we have outlined several initiatives that work to alleviate food insecurity on the college campus and efficient ways to adapt current practices.



**INCREASING FOOD SECURITY:  
INITIATIVES FOR THE COLLEGE  
CAMPUS**

# Presentation Overview

- EDUCATION AND AWARENESS INITIATIVES
- NEW SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMMING
- ON-CAMPUS DINING
- COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
- BUDGET REVIEW

# INITIATIVE PLANS

To begin to address the concern of food insecurity on the college campus, there are several components that need to be considered. First and foremost is what accessible resources currently exist? Most campuses have implemented a food pantry but is this sufficient enough with about 44% of students attending a four-year college experience food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al, 2019)? It is crucial for us to reevaluate and assess the current practices on campus to ensure we are appropriately serving our students beyond the classroom. There are four categories that we have chosen to identify initiatives in that can assist increasing conversation around food insecurity and developing a culture on the college campus where students can contribute to supporting their peers.

**EDUCATION AND AWARENESS** | Practices in student affairs have tied in academic interests and education for decades now. We felt it was important in addressing the need for increased levels of food security on campus to implement an avenue to educate students and faculty/staff alike on what food insecurity is and what part they can play in assisting the community. We believe that through this education we can start to develop an increased awareness about the impact of food insecurity on college students and increase conversations about what peers can be doing to help one another. Additionally, we tie faculty into this topic as it is necessary to the college environment that faculty are involved in these conversations. They often are the individuals that see students week to week, day to day, and may be more prone to notice the outcomes of food insecurity on student performance. Food insecurity is not an issue to address on just one level of the college environment, but on all levels, and that is what we hope to accomplish with this category of initiatives.



**NEW SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMMING** | Through this track, we wish to reevaluate the current systems on the college campus through assessment of usage, effectiveness, and collecting student feedback. Additionally, the initiatives in this category are meant to build upon some of the current systems on the college campus that students have access to. The implementation of a major large scale technology change or program on a campus can cost significantly more than the budgeted amount for the plan to address food insecurity initially. Through adapting the current programs on a campus, we can improve the resources students already have available to them.

**ON-CAMPUS DINING** | While we were discussing what initiatives we could pursue, we felt that we would be doing a disservice to the campus by not making on-campus dining part of the discussion. On campuses that have implemented a first-year live on requirement, these students are also required to have a meal plan. How does this requirement affect students both in their first-year, and beyond when they may move off campus and no longer have that option or accessibility to food? In this category, we work to address concerns with on-campus dining both for residents and nonresidents of the campus.

**COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS** | A major part of spreading awareness and improving the experience of students we identified was the collaborative partnerships that could be built on and around campus. Some significant partners we considered were community groups in the larger locational community, the athletics department, and working with local secondary education to promote a decrease in the communal food insecurity in the surrounding area of the campus. Recognizing that the location of the campus will heavily impact this part of our plan, it is important to be aware of the limits of community partnerships as they may hold a specialized focus that wouldn't extend to college students or we could experience a lack of resources in the greater community; however, the latter presents an opportunity for students to get engaged in developing and leading such organizations for the community they live in.

# EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

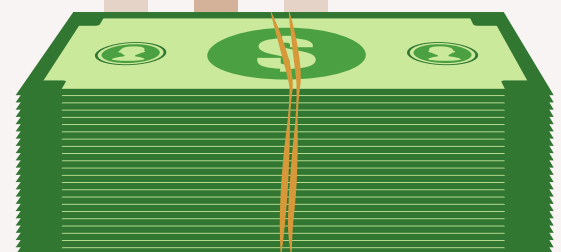
- **Student Health Ambassadors** | By utilizing student volunteers on campus already educating about health concerns college students face, student health ambassadors can be utilized to spread awareness about food insecurity. In particular, a subgroup of ambassadors that specifically work on programming initiatives and facilitation of education sessions about food insecurity can work to increase the community involvement on the topic. With more individuals available to discuss the issue on campus, more organizations have an increased opportunity to educate their members through the various services student health ambassadors currently offer.
- **Mandatory Faculty Training** | In a similar way that faculty members are trained on topics regarding Title IX and bias incidents, a mandatory health session that targets educating faculty members more on the topic of food insecurity can better equip the employees at a university to assist their students. By acknowledging it is a hardship students face, the faculty presence and support in a student's everyday life may organically create an opportunity for faculty to direct a student to on-campus resources or talk about opportunities in the community surrounding an institution. As student success and progression through graduation is impacted by food insecurity, it should be a concern of faculty to have these conversations to assure they can provide the best support to their students.
- **Student Leader Training** | In relation to faculty-specific training, promoting student leader education can enhance an organization's understanding and involvement in tackling issues of food insecurity on campus. There are chances throughout the year that some schools take advantage of to pull the top organization Presidents on campus together to discuss leadership best practices, what is happening in their general target population, and to provide professional development opportunities. Incorporating specialized training about food insecurity in these sessions can lead to an increase in awareness the general student body participating in these student groups have about the topic. Additionally, this can lead to more programming efforts to increase the support of on-campus efforts, such as a food pantry.



# NEW SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMMING

**Meal Plan Reimagined** | Many students finish out the academic year with leftover balances on their meal plans. They may swipe for friends or buy food from campus markets for their residence hall floor. However, adjusting the dining and financial system for students to allow for the transfer of balances between students and to an allocated pool of dining dollars for food insecure students provides two new avenues for addressing students' food insecurity. First, allowing students to transfer balances from their meal plan to another student would allow students to "sell" their remaining balance at a discounted rate. This would provide an incentive for students with an excess and the purchase of extra money for a meal plan more affordable for low income students. Second, allowing students to donate unused meal plan balances to an allocated pool would create an extra chance for food insecure students to obtain more money for on-campus dining. The fund would exist in campus dining or with the Office of the Dean of Students, but students would be able to apply for an amount to be transferred to their meal plan.

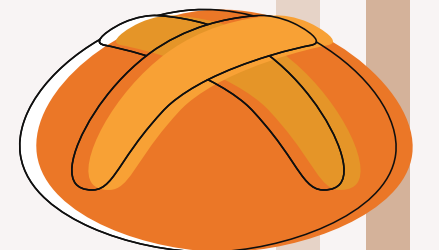
**Campus Dining Assessment** | As we discuss the potential for adjusting campus dining and better serving our food insecure students, it would be vital to the process to conduct an assessment within our dining facilities to get student input and feedback about the accessibility of the food. We believe that a thorough multi-year assessment can assist in implementing new changes to the campus dining to increase support for students experiencing food insecurity on the campus.





# ON-CAMPUS DINING

- **Campus Dining Facilities** | Dining halls often have leftover food at the end of the day that is still viable for consumption, but is difficult to donate to an entity such as a food pantry due to its perishable nature. We propose that leftover food from dining halls that would otherwise be thrown away and be consolidated to a single dining hall that is open late night. During this time period anyone is able to dine on the leftovers for free which accommodates for students who might be working late off or on campus. This initiative also assists with food waste on college campuses. The average college student wastes 142 pounds per year and collectively college campuses throw out roughly 22 million pounds per year (Recycling Reports as cited in Poon, 2015). By reducing the amount of leftovers disposed, we can reduce the food waste across the campus to limit how much we are contributing to this number.
- **Campus Food Pantry** | We also propose the increased utilization of student volunteers and organizations to help organize and distribute food via an enhanced campus food pantry (or multiple pantries). As the food pantry is already in effect, we would maintain the current director to continue to serve as the lead for program. By increasing the number of food pantry locations, it will be easier for students to access the food pantry. Part of the staffing needed to run the pantry can be provided through Service Learning Courses or First Year Seminar courses to require a certain amount of hours or shifts at the pantries as well for a somewhat consistent flow of extra help in the Fall and Spring.



# COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- **Athletic Partnership** | We propose a partnership with the Athletics department can benefit the outreach component of addressing food insecurity. By implementing a program that allows attendees to *bring a can for the chance to be entered in a raffle*, we can utilize the influx of attendees during major campus games (playoffs, rivalries, etc.) to give back to our on-campus community. These collected items can be people's entry into a raffle. Many college campuses give away prizes during major sports games and the act of collecting items would incentivize returning fans by increasing the opportunity to participate in these challenges. Additionally, this opportunity could be offered multiple times a year. If you take a Division I institution, for example, there are many different games that will bring out large crowds of fans across different sports. At NC State University, there was a 98.7% fill rate for their football games in 2018 in a stadium that holds 57,583; at University of Nebraska, there was a 104.2% fill rate in a stadium holding 85,458 (Daughters, 2019). These are just two select universities ranking in the Top 25 for the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), but this initiative implemented on campuses with high turnout to their sports games can be beneficial for the increased supply in their on-campus food pantries. Another opportunity for engagement with athletics crowds is to offer a *discounted price rate for in-person ticket purchases* (at the venue) if a food item is brought that meets the same standard of being a nonperishable food item. This would be another chance for non-student attendees to support the student population and contribute beyond the athletics department.
- **Community Group Partnership** | There are many local areas to a university that students might not be aware of that can assist in the concern with food insecurity. For this initiative, we propose that the university can help form partnerships and agreements where students can trade volunteer work for goods and services provided by local businesses. The university can assist with transportation as well (if the system is large enough) to ensure proper support for the students participating. Additionally, university administrators and organizations can work to partner with non-profit organizations that serve a similar mission as the local businesses. Through this, two avenues are afforded to students who might need the assistance beyond the university campus.





# BUDGET PROPOSAL

## Total Allotment for initiatives: \$3000

- Student Educators: No Cost
  - The Student Educators could be paid if the university feels they have the resources to do so, but otherwise would be student volunteers. Their contributions serve as marketable experience for students going into various disciplines including public health, sociology, social work, non-profit management, and more.
- Operating Cost (Dining Halls): No Cost
  - The adaptation of later hours would be offset by adjusting a dining hall's current hours on campus rather than adding new ones with this model.
- Marketing/Informational Materials: ~\$1000
  - Creation of new educational marketing materials for distribution and presentation can require a larger amount of funding upon its creation, however this cost would not remain the same annually once many materials have been created. If rebranding is necessary or more need to be printed, that would be accounted for that budget year.

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