

Oregon Hunger Task Force

Creating Policies for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Issue Brief: Hunger and Food Insecurity on College Campuses in Oregon

Summary

Student hunger is a significant problem in Oregon's universities and community colleges. Hunger and food insecurity¹ on campus hinders academic achievement, worsens health outcomes, and threatens economic mobility.

New research from Oregon and across America is shining a spotlight on food insecurity on campuses.

- **Hunger on campus is more prevalent than is widely acknowledged** and is likely to increase, given trends in higher education, if changes aren't made.
- **Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to address this issue** with local resources, research and student organizing. The current response is uneven.
- **Some changes are needed at both the state and federal level** to increase access to nutrition assistance (particularly SNAP) and also to address student poverty related to issues of unaffordable tuition, housing and childcare.

Background

Three in four undergraduates defy traditional stereotypes. Just 13% live on college campuses, and nearly half attend community colleges. One in four students is a parent, juggling childcare responsibilities with class assignments. About 75% work for pay while in school, including a significant number of full-time workers.²

Hunger on campus is not just a romanticized notion of students eating ramen noodles as a rite of passage. It is parents pursuing associates degrees skipping meals while working day jobs, going to school in the evenings, and doing the hard work of parenting. It is students formerly in the foster system who lack the stability of consistent housing. It is first-generation college students doing everything possible to mitigate student loan accumulation in an age of runaway costs of tuition, room and board.

¹ For the purposes of this document, we use the USDA/ERS definition of food insecurity:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>

² Goldrick Rab, et al., Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2016. "Expanding the National School Lunch Program to Higher Education." http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Expand-Lunch_Program.pdf

- A study at Western Oregon University found that 59% of student respondents were food insecure at some point in the previous year and students who experienced food insecurity had lower academic performance³.
- A study at Portland State University found that over 50% of student respondents were food insecure over the previous year. This was true in both years the survey was commissioned (2014 and 2016).⁴
- Recent studies at the University of Oregon and Oregon State University have also found food insecurity levels above 50% among student respondents.⁵
- In the largest study commissioned on community college hunger, **two-thirds of community college student respondents were food insecure**⁶. This suggests that while food insecurity is disproportionately high for all students, it is particularly high for community college students.
- The Wisconsin HOPE Lab found in 2018 that more than one in three (36%) of university student respondents nationwide on were food *and* housing-insecure⁷, and;
- Despite these staggering statistics, only 18 percent of all college students are eligible for federal food assistance (SNAP). **Only 3 percent actually receive benefits**⁸.
- Due to historical injustices causing current inequities;
 - Students who identify as African-American and American Indian experience food and housing insecurity at disproportionately high rates⁹.
 - High food insecurity among African-American and Latinx students correlates with college completion delays in both 2-year and 4-year colleges¹⁰.
 - Women are more likely to experience food insecurity at two-year colleges compared to women in the general population and heads of households are nearly twice as likely than all heads of households. This suggests that single mothers who are students are at particular risk of food insecurity¹¹.

Research about hunger among students points to significant cause for alarm, need for further research and the urgency for solutions at both community and systemic levels.

³ Patton-Lopez, Megan et al, Western Oregon University, 2014. "Prevalence and correlates of food insecurity among students attending a midsize rural university in Oregon." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24406268>

⁴ Cole, Jessica, Portland State University, Committee for Improving Student Food Security, updated 3/16/17. https://www.pdx.edu/student-access-center/sites/www.pdx.edu.student-access-center/files/PSU-Info_CISFS-SFI-Info_v03.16.2017.pdf

⁵ Tegethoff, Eric; Public News Service, July 24, 2017. Starving Students? An Unfortunate Trend on College Campuses <https://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/58649-1>

⁶ Goldrick Rab, et al., Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017. "Hungry and Homeless in College." <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf>

⁷ Goldrick Rab, et al., Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2018. "Still Hungry and Homeless in College." <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>

⁸ Allison, Tom; Young Invincibles, February 2018. "Rethinking SNAP Benefits for College Students." http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Rethinking_SNAP_benefits.pdf

⁹ Goldrick Rab, et al., Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017. "Hungry and Homeless in College. Appendix B1." <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Appendix-table-B1.pdf>

¹⁰ Blagg, Kristin, et al., Urban Institute, August 2017. "Assessing Food Insecurity on Campus: A National Look at Food Insecurity among America's College Students."

https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/92331/assessing_food_insecurity_on_campus_0.pdf

¹¹ *ibid.*

Many students pursuing degrees are doing so to achieve upward economic mobility. Oregonians with an associates degree experience hunger at nearly half the rate (4.9%) as Oregonians with only a high school diploma (8.6%)¹². For students who have a bachelor's degree, the hunger rate goes down to 2.5%. In other words, many students make the choice to pursue an associates or a bachelor's degree to increase earning potential and *escape* food insecurity. However, since taking classes often entails scaling back work hours to varying degrees, going to school can exacerbate or cause situations of food insecurity.

Meanwhile, eligibility rules for SNAP and other assistance programs are based on outdated assumptions of who is a college student, such as the notion that most college students attend four-year colleges with parental support. Federal SNAP rules like requiring students to work 20 hours a week or participate in work study programs do not provide the flexibility that many students need.

Despite these eligibility restrictions, many students in Oregon are eligible for SNAP but aren't participating. Of the 220,000 undergraduate students in Oregon, 47,000 are under 130% FPL and working 20+ hours a week. It's estimated that 72% of this population (34,000 students) would qualify for SNAP but are not enrolled. That's an estimated \$51,000,000 federal funds left on the table that could help students succeed in classes and boost local economies¹³.

Hunger on Campus: A Listening Session

The Oregon Hunger Task Force hosted a listening session on the University of Oregon campus on January 23, 2018.¹⁴ The goal of the listening session was to bring together leaders in addressing student food insecurity with an eye toward future recommendations. The listening session featured panelists representing student organizers, faculty, administrators, and staff at universities and community colleges, researchers on student food insecurity, and representatives from national anti-hunger organizations. The listening session attracted nearly 150 participants throughout the day, and the majority were representatives of schools (42% staff, 25% students) with strong attendance from nonprofits, community groups and government (33%). The day also featured breakout sessions to discuss solutions to campus food insecurity.

Recommendations

There is no one solution to address campus hunger. Solutions must range from making it simple to access food on campus to addressing deeper systemic issues like college affordability. Research and experience from Oregon and around the nation point to an emerging set of solutions:

¹² Edwards, Mark, Oregon State University, 2017. "Food Insecurity in Oregon and the U.S.: Uneven Recovery in the Midst of Overall Improvement (2014-2016)."

https://appliedecon.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/oregonhungerreport_28oct2017.pdf

¹³ Allison, Tom; Young Invincibles, February 2018. "Rethinking SNAP Benefits for College Students."

¹⁴ <https://www.oregonhungertaskforce.org/uolisteningsession>

Replicate Best Practices on Campuses

Effective solutions—often developed by students—are emerging to address food insecurity on university and community college campuses and should be replicated when possible. While each campus setting is different, institutions of higher education can:

- **Establish a Resource Center on Campus.** Campuses should establish resource centers based to provide one-stop resources for students who need support for basic needs like food, housing, and childcare. The Human Services Resources Center (OSU) is a model that other campuses should consider replicating (see “Spotlight” later in this document for more). Best practices include training staff and student leaders to assist with awareness of benefits and application assistance.
- **Create a shopping-style food pantry with student-friendly hours.** Many campuses have opened food pantries for students¹⁵.
- **Include information about resources and benefits available to all students as a part of orientation.**
- **Make transferring food benefits easier.** Campuses that use food “points” can establish systems to transfer unused or donated points to students for whom purchasing food is a hardship.
- **Create short-hour work study to help more students meet SNAP eligibility.** To meet SNAP eligibility, students must either work 20 hours or participate in a work study job. However, it doesn’t make sense for many part-time working students to forego a job they’ve been working to start a new work study job. Campuses could create work study jobs with short (one-hour) drop-in shifts that would help more students become eligible for food assistance.
- **Encourage instructors to include a statement of basic needs on syllabi.** These are short statements in each course inviting students with financial need to seek resources available¹⁶.
- **Maximize the SNAP Training & Employment Program (STEP).** The Department of Human Services (DHS) should continue to work with Community Colleges to maximize access for robust job training and career-building opportunities through the SNAP Training & Employment Program (STEP, aka “SNAP 50/50”).
- **Establish task forces on campuses to address food insecurity** that are led by students where they currently don’t exist.

Policy Recommendations

- **Oregon**
 - **Examine SNAP eligibility rules** to ensure more students can be eligible for SNAP. This includes maximizing work study participation and seeking

¹⁵ Cunningham, Sarah; Johnson, Dana; Oregon Food Bank, 2011. “So, You Want to Start a Campus Food Pantry? A How-To Manual.”

<http://www.tenriversfoodweb.org/uploads/8/1/6/1/81615248/so-you-want-to-start-a-campus-food-pantrypdf.pdf>

¹⁶Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Medium; August 4, 2017. “Basic Needs Security and the Syllabus.”

<https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9>

administrative guidance or waivers that could provide additional flexibility around eligibility.

- **Commission research** to examine the prevalence of food insecurity for students on campuses in Oregon.
 - **Survey campuses** on their toolbox of responses to food insecurity on campus. Consider developing an award designation for campuses that adopt a threshold of best practices.
 - **Prioritize SNAP outreach on campuses.** DHS should continue to prioritize SNAP outreach that trains student leaders and Student Life staff around eligibility and effective messaging. Best-practices include student-centered approaches such as training student “ambassadors” who are more likely to be able to have conversations with peers than outside groups.
 - **Develop a mobile platform** for participants to manage SNAP and other benefits, and ability to do online recertification.
 - **Heed the recommendations of the HB 4043 study group.** The legislature unanimously passed HB 4043¹⁷ in 2018, commissioning a study of how to ensure that public benefits are maximized for community college students. The recommendations of that study—due in 2019—should be prioritized.
 - **Housing** - Every student needs and deserves a safe, affordable place to call home while studying, yet housing near college campuses can often be unaffordable for many students. A student who is homeless or housing insecure is less likely to succeed in higher education. Oregon should use every tool at its disposal to ensure students have access to housing.
 - **Child Care** - Working parents deserve a safe, affordable place for their kids to be while parents are in class. Campuses should make efforts to provide drop-in child care options for working parents.
 - **Address college affordability.** Tuition and fees for Oregon’s college students have gone up faster than inflation¹⁸ and are a drag on the potential of each student and Oregon’s economy. Average tuition and fees at Oregon public universities rose by 38% between 2006-2016 *after* adjusting for inflation¹⁹.
- **Federal**
 - **Re-examine eligibility rules for SNAP and other means-tested programs to reflect the modern realities of college students.** SNAP rules are written with outdated notions of who is a college student. Three out of four college students in America are now “non-traditional students.” It’s time SNAP eligibility rules for students were re-written to reflect the juggling acts today’s students must do to get through college.
 - **Reject harsher work requirements that could hurt college students.** Proposals from Congress to subject SNAP participants to harsher work

¹⁷ <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2018R1/Measures/Overview/HB4043>

¹⁸ <http://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Pages/tuition-fee-data.aspx>

¹⁹ Moore, Kim, “Why is university tuition so costly?” Oregon Business, October 2017. <https://www.oregonbusiness.com/article/item/18048-why-is-university-tuition-so-costly>

requirements would penalize students working part time—many of whom parents with school-aged kids and older Oregonians by increasing paperwork and removing food assistance. These proposals would make pathways out of poverty more difficult and should be rejected.

- **Address college affordability.** High tuition costs creates hardship for students while on campus and often for decades thereafter. Both student hunger and crippling student debt are harming our future. We have an obligation to current and future generations to make higher education more affordable, or even free.

Spotlight: The Human Resources Service Center (HSRC) at Oregon State University

(<http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/hsrc>)

It was two students who hatched the idea of the Human Resources Service Center in 2008 During the height of the Great Recession. Today, the HSRC serves students who experience food insecurity and housing insecurity. It aims to provide a one-stop-shop for students for whom paying for food or rent is challenging.

The HSRC is managed by staff but retains its “for students, by students” identity, and is recognized as a national model for what college campuses can do to address food insecurity²⁰

. Efforts include:

- SNAP outreach and education
- Housing assistance
- Textbook lending program
- Cooking classes
- Encouraging instructors to include a basic needs statement on syllabi
- A campus food pantry
- A Twitter handle for events with free food (@eatfreeOSU)

HSRC’s Mission:

We humanize students marginalized by inequity, poverty, and oppression- and we center the voices of those we serve as we advocate for an inclusive campus and community where low-income students feel a sense of belonging and empowerment and have the basic needs to be academically successful.

²⁰ Goldrick Rab, et al., Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2018. Still Hungry and Homeless in College.