

Food Insecurity on the OKC Campus at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

Food insecurity is the condition of having restricted or uncertain ability to acquire a sufficient amount or quality of food in socially acceptable ways to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [1]. Food insecurity affects college students at higher rates than the US general population [2], and is associated with adverse academic performance [3] and health outcomes [3,4].

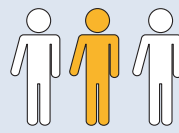
An electronic survey was distributed to students, staff, and faculty across the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) to assess prevalence of food insecurity and to identify favorable campus food assistance programs as well as utilization barriers for those experiencing food insecurity. A total of 1171 respondents on the OKC campus completed the survey between August-September 2019. Major findings are summarized below.

About the Study

Prevalence

1 in 3 Staff

experienced food insecurity within the past 12 months



1 in 5 Students

experienced food insecurity within the past 12 months



11.5% Low Food Security

(reduced quality, variety, and desirability of diet)

12.2% Very Low Food Security

(eating patterns disrupted and food intake reduced)

23.7% Food Insecure

within the past 12 months



Preferred Food Assistance Programs

TO USE:

Out of 278 respondents experiencing food insecurity, the top programs they wanted to use were...

#1 - Farmers' Market or Stand (57.6%)

- fresh food from local farmers for purchase

#2 - Monthly Boxes of Fresh Food (57.2%)

- free fruits and vegetables available for pick-up once a month

#3 - Low-cost Student-Run Grocery Store (54.0%)

- discounted food available for purchase

TO SEE ON Campus:

Out of 278 respondents experiencing food insecurity, the top program they wanted to see was a...

#1 - Food Pantry (75.5%)

- select free fresh and shelf-stable foods as often as once a week

TO VOLUNTEER FOR:

Out of 1171 respondents on the OKC campus, the top programs they wanted to volunteer for were...

#1 - Food Pantry (21.5%)

- select free fresh and shelf-stable foods as often as once a week

#2 - Community Garden (20.5%)

- raised beds to grow your own food

Utilization Barriers

Out of 278 respondents experiencing food insecurity, the top reported barriers to using a food pantry on campus were...

#1 - Feeling Like Other People Need the Food More (61.2%)

#2 - Embarrassment (51.8%)

Recommendations

For Food Assistance Programs on Campus:

- Target population should include **students and staff** of the university.
- Programs providing **fresh foods** like fruits and vegetables may be more desirable.
- **Next steps: explore feasibility, required resources, and costs** associated with the preferred programs to determine the best option to establish on campus.
- **After** the decision has been made on which program to establish: **conduct research** throughout the establishment process to assess effectiveness of the program at reducing food insecurity on campus [5].



Reducing Stigma & Barriers for Food Assistance:

- **Promote awareness of food insecurity on campus**
Potential avenues for promotion:
 - Events, such as orientation for new students
 - Webinars or email campaigns
 - Informational brochures and flyers
 - Course curriculum including food insecurity topics
 - Statements on course syllabi [6], or in staff training manuals providing info on available resources
- **Correct misconceptions** surrounding food assistance to minimize the feeling of being undeserving [7].
- **Choose language carefully** for messaging about the program (certain terms like "food pantry" may be more linked to stigma than others).
- **Base campus food assistance programs on the trust system** (require no proof of financial qualifications).
- **Provide volunteering opportunities** for participants; potentially offer food at reduced rates instead of free.



References:

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