



University of Pittsburgh School of Education

Needs Assessment of Collegiate Food Insecurity in SW Pennsylvania

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Robert Morris University
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Meet the Team

- This project was conducted in collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Foodbank.
- We thank the Eden Hall Foundation for their generous support of this study.



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Definition

- **Food Insecurity:** Consistent access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money or other resources (USDA)
- **Uncertainty (insecurity) about whether you will be able to get enough nutritious food in the near future**
 - “Struggling to get enough to eat.”
 - “Hungry or at risk of hunger.”





Background

- **12% of adults** experience food insecurity, nationwide.
- Previous studies showed levels of food insecurity among college students to be **2 to 3 times** the rate for other adults.
- Current study was an effort to **understand** the **extent** and **impact** of hunger among college students in the SW PA region.
- Guide decision making about **resource allocation** and **delivery models**.



14 Participating Schools, N=6,222

- Carnegie Mellon University
- Chatham University
- Carlow University
- California University
- CCAC
- Duquesne University
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Penn State Beaver
- Penn State Fayette
- Penn State Greater Allegheny
- Penn State New Kensington
- Point Park University
- Seton Hill University
- University of Pittsburgh





Food Insecurity Screener

56% of students potentially experiencing food insecurity

Which describes the food you've eaten in the past year? (N=6,222)

| | % |
|---|----|
| 1) Enough of the kinds of food I want to eat. | 44 |
| 2) Enough, but not always the kinds of food I want. | 47 |
| 3) Sometimes not enough to eat. | 8 |
| 4) Often not enough to eat. | 1 |



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Severity of Food Insecurity

Based on 8 items (running out of food, skipping meals, unable to afford balanced meals, going a whole day without eating, etc.)

Severity of Food Insecurity on Campus in SW PA ($N=6,222$)

High Food Security (Score = 0)

55%

At Risk of Food Insecurity (Score = 1 – 2)

16%

Moderate Food Insecurity (Score = 3 – 5)

14%

High Food Insecurity (Score = 6 – 8)

15%



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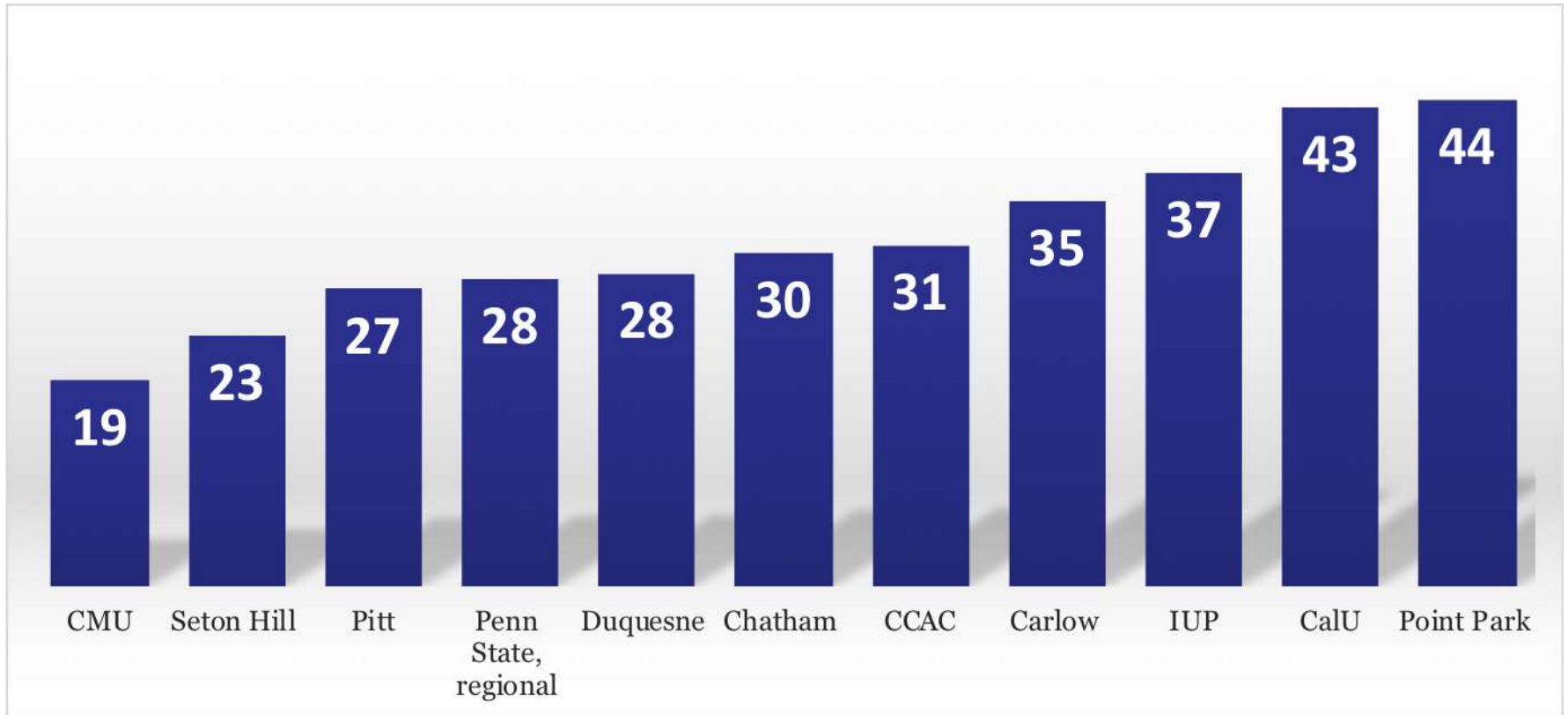
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15%



Food Insecurity by Campus





Food Insecurity by Student Characteristics

Highest rates of food insecurity in this study were among:

74% Homeless students

45% Black/African Americans

42% 1st generation

40% Hispanics/Latinos

39% Parents

28% Whites



Conclusions

- Rates of food insecurity were consistently high across schools studied. The ***least*** food insecure campuses in the study exhibited a food insecurity rate of around 20%.
- More than 1/5 of respondents in every race category were experiencing food insecurity.
 - Rates approaching $\frac{1}{2}$ for students of color are especially concerning.



Conclusions: Consequences

- A majority of students experiencing food insecurity indicated that limited food supply had impacted their mental and/or physical health.
- Nearly 60% also indicated that hunger was interfering with their academic performance



Conclusions: Quality v. Quantity

Most food insecurity among participants in this study was related to limited **quality** of affordable food.

Problems accessing a sufficient **quantity** of food were **less frequently** cited than problems accessing sufficiently high-quality food.

“I'd prefer to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables but it's a lot more expensive so I end up buying whatever is cheapest and will give me the biggest bang for my buck regardless of the nutritional value.”



Food Pantry Attitudes

70% of students experiencing food insecurity reported they would use a food pantry if one were available.







Those who would **not** typically cited one of two reasons:

1. Reserving food pantry services for others who are perceived to be more in need.
2. Stigma.

“I feel like there are other people who need the food more, and I feel like I don't have a right to use a pantry.”



Recommendations for Food Pantries

| | |
|---|--|
|  | Problem solve to reduce barriers to stocking perishable food. |
|  | Communicate mission of pantries – to serve all in the campus community who have difficulty accessing enough nutritious food. |
|  | Publicize the prevalence of collegiate hunger |
|  | Integrate food pantry services into existing food stores |
|  | Pay what you can farmer's markets |
|  | Technology for redistributing unused meal plan meals |



Thank you!

Questions or Further Information:

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Why wouldn't you use a food pantry?

“It’s not below me, but it’s more of a pride issue. I work hard for my own and would feel ashamed that I couldn’t afford my food. So I’d rather go without. I know it’s dumb, but it’s a pride thing.”



Why wouldn't you use a food pantry?

“Stigma;
I'm a white male in a PhD
program, I'm not allowed
to have this problem.”



Why wouldn't you use a food pantry?

“I do not want to be noticed as someone who must visit a food pantry in order to get proper/enough nutrition. My family works very hard to support ourselves and I don't like to think of our efforts as lacking.”



Why wouldn't you use a food pantry?

“I feel like I don't deserve it and should work for my food.”



What's the difference between what you do eat and what you want to eat?

“I eat a lot of cheap carbs or canned or frozen foods because I can't afford meat or fresh foods/veggies.”



What's the difference between what you do eat and what you want to eat?

“What I eat: a lot of ramen, lunchables, to go meals, fast food, What I would like to eat: more healthier foods such as fruits and veggies.”



What's the difference between what you do eat and what you want to eat?

“I eat cheap unhealthy meals that are quick versus healthy food. For example boxed sides that have high carbs VS fresh vegetables etc.”



What's the difference between what you do eat and what you want to eat?

“I eat a lot of frozen meals because they are cheaper. I would like to eat more fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables, but almost always settle for the cheapest option.”



Thank you!

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