Feeding Minds: Addressing Food Insecurity at USC

Student Health Services and Leadership and Service Center
Learning Outcomes

1. Increase awareness of food insecurity among college students
2. Boost confidence in how to identify and respond to student food insecurity
3. Identify both on and off campus resources available to students for food insecurity relief
Name: Sam
Age: 19 years
Year: Sophomore
Major: Engineering
Residence: Off-Campus Apartment with Roommates
Home: Baltimore, MD
Definition of Food Insecurity

- **Food insecurity** is the lack of reliable access to sufficient quantities of affordable nutritious food.
  - **Hunger** refers to a personal, physical sensation of discomfort
  - **Food Deserts** are areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up a full and healthy diet.
  - **Food Swamps** are areas with a high-density of establishments selling high-calorie fast food and junk food, relative to healthier food options.
- **Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
Food Insecurity Nationally
Food Insecurity in South Carolina
Food Insecurity in South Carolina

In South Carolina, 687,880 people are struggling with hunger - and of them 207,840 are children.

1 in 7 people

struggles with hunger.

1 in 5 children

struggles with hunger.
What causes food insecurity?
Causes of Food Insecurity Among College Students

- Increase in tuition prices and cost of living
- Higher percentage of college students borrowing for tuition and living expenses
- Unexpected expenses

“Many students consider food to be their most flexible expenditure when determining where to cut expenses”

Increasing access to higher education to a larger, more diverse student population has been a contributing factor to higher prevalence of food insecurity.
• First generation student from an immigrant family
• Comes from a family that struggles financially to support Sam and her three other siblings
• Receives financial aid and scholarships which cover the cost of her tuition and enrollment fees, rent, utilities and books but not much is left after these expenses
• When prioritizing her monetary resources she elected to not purchase a school meal plan
• Excels academically; however the quality of the work she submits has begun to decline
• Very engaged on campus and attends many open events for students
• Has been late for classes and her job on campus repeatedly
• Seems fatigued and unable to concentrate in the classroom and at work
Red Flags of Food Insecurity

- Undernourished
- Anxiety, Depression or other Mental Health concerns
- Putting off the purchasing of books or paying certain bills
- Late to commitments (classes, appointments, work, etc.)
- Hoarding of free/low-cost resources behaviors
Effects of Food Insecurity on a Student

- Mental Health and Well-Being: 55% of students with very low food security also report symptoms of depression.
- Early Academic Indicators: 25% of basic needs insecure students consequently drop a class.
- Academic Performance: 15x higher chance that food insecure students will fail a class.
- Retention and Graduation: <20% of basic needs insecure students will graduate in five years.

Food Insecurity Among College Students

Nationally

- According to Feeding America’s 2014 Hunger in America report, roughly 10% of its 46.5 million adult clients are college students.
- 36% of university students worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more. (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2018)
- 25% of university students skipped meals or cut the size of their meals because of a lack of money. (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2018)

At the University of South Carolina

- 16% of students went hungry at some point in the previous 30 days because there wasn’t enough money for food. (HMS, 2016)
- 27% of students indicated it was somewhat or very difficult to pay for food over the course of a semester. (HMS, 2016)
Did you know?

36.06% of students reported* they cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food.

*Statistics sourced from ‘2017 USC Needs Assessment’ survey.
Social Stigmas of Food Insecurity

- Social Class Identity
  - Social Class Origin
  - Felt Social Class
  - Attributed Social Class

- Negative Assumptions
  - People experiencing food insecurity are lazy
  - Food insecurity is a choice
  - Food insecurity is a rite of passage
Effects of Social Stigma

- Shame- a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety.
- Guilt- feelings of deserving blame especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy.
- Anger- a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism (attached to injustice or unmet expectation).

Stigma can therefore be a barrier to individuals seeking out resources to relieve food insecurity.
How to Begin a Dialogue

Things to consider:

• Relationship to individual
  – Power differentials

• Formality of the setting

• Build rapport
Asking the Right Questions

Topics to cover:

• Quantity of food available
  – Do you ever feel like you need to stop eating while you are still hungry, so that your food lasts until your next paycheck?

• Sufficiency of food to attain nutritional adequacy
  – Are you able to purchase foods that keep you fueled throughout the day?

• Quality of food available
  – Do you ever want to buy higher quality food items, but can’t because of price or availability?

• Diversity of food available
  – Do you buy the same types of food every time you go grocery shopping because you are concerned about exceeding your budget?
Formal Food Insecurity Screening
Adapted from the US Household Food Security Survey

I’m going to read you two statements that people have made about their food situation. For each statement, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true or never true for your household in the last 12 months.

1. “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.” Was that often true, sometimes true or never true for your household in the last 12 months?
2. “The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes or never true for your household in the last 12 months?

A response of “often true” or “sometimes true” to either question = positive screen for FI.

“An affirmative response to either question 1 or 2 had a sensitivity of 97% and specificity of 83% (Hager, et al.)”
• You’re able to schedule a time for Sam to stop by your office to catch up on her semester.

• Sam reveals to you that she has been feeling overwhelmed with balancing her classwork, job and student organization commitments along with the commute to and from campus as a second-year student.

• She also mentions that she really appreciates the larger open campus programs that usually provide food.

• Next you ask Sam what kind of food they typically serve at those events out of curiosity, she answers that it’s most often pizza.
• Then you follow up to ask if she’s able to purchase foods that keep her fueled throughout the day because you’ve noticed she’s seen a bit fatigued.

• Sam then opens up that she actually struggles with having enough money left towards the end of the month after rent and utilities to pay for food. When she does have money she often purchases things like rice and beans that will last longer and are easy to prepare.

• It is at this point that you let Sam know that there are resources available to her and many other students for food access.
On-Campus Resources Available

Gamecock Pantry

• The Gamecock Pantry provides access to food and toiletries in a free and confidential way to members of the Carolina community while creating awareness about food insecurity at Carolina.

• Any current student with a valid CarolinaCard can access Gamecock Pantry. Once registered, students can receive up to 15 food items per week, which will be available for pick-up during operating hours. Students may be eligible for additional aid if they have dependent family members in their care such as children.

• Gamecock Pantry is housed in McBryde Quadrangle A

On-Campus Resources Available

Student Health Services

• Registered Dietitians are on staff to provide the following:

  – *Healthy Eating Group Appointments*: Students learn how to choose balanced meals and snacks on and off campus. By the end of the appointment, they will have increased basic nutrition knowledge, know tips for eating on a budget, and understand cues for eating. At the end of the appointment, students can elect whether they would like to move on to individualized health coaching or if they need medical nutrition therapy.

  – *Cooking Classes*: Free, hands-on cooking classes last an hour to an hour and a half to teach skills needed to plan and prepare meals and snacks. Attendees prepare the recipes and sit down to eat as a class and discuss the nutritional components. Classes are open to any skill level.
On-Campus Resources Available

Student Health Services

• Counseling and Psychiatry
  – Students have access to up to 10 individual counseling appointments during the academic year.

Student Success Center

• A comprehensive one-stop-shop for academic support services on campus. All programs and initiatives are free to undergraduate students at USC.
• Financial Literacy workshops and consultations are available to students to maximize their understanding and skills needed to handle fiscal matters that directly affect them.
Off-Campus Resources Available

Food assistance:
• Harvest Hope Food Bank
• Oliver Gospel (Men)
• Transitions *(for residents and non-residents)*
• Salvation Army
• Operation Veterans Support

Shelters:
• Oliver Gospel *(men)*
• Toby’s Place *(women)*
• Transitions
• St. Lawrence Place *(families)*
• Hannah House *(women and children)*
• Homeless No More

Transportation:
• Soda Cap Connector
• DART *(people with physical disabilities)*
• Yellow Shirts (Main St. district)

Ongoing Assistance
Benefits Bank Enrollment (SNAP)
Available at the Richland County Library
• You notice that Sam seems to be more engaged in the classroom and handing in assignments of high quality.

• When you check in with her again you learn that she has taken advantage of the Gamecock Pantry and the Cooking Classes offered on-campus. Additionally she has a Financial Literacy Consultation planned with the Student Success Center to discuss how she can manage her financial aid, scholarships and money from her part time job to budget for living expenses.
Scenario Activity
Key Reminders

- Food insecurity is not a right of passage for college students
- Remember to challenge your assumptions of a food insecure individual
- Take a part in keeping up to date about the resources available for food insecurity relief
- You can make a lasting impact by connecting someone to the appropriate resources
Questions?