Position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior: Food and Nutrition Insecurity Among College Students

Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD1; Melissa N. Laska, PhD, RD2

INTRODUCTION

It is the position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) that college students, particularly those from underserved communities and with lower incomes, are a population at risk for food and nutrition insecurity. Nutrition educators and other health professionals have a professional obligation to collaborate with other stakeholders to improve policies, systems, environment, and research to alleviate food insecurity and promote nutrition security among college students.

FOOD AND NUTRITION INSECURITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

College students, particularly those from underserved communities with lower incomes, are at risk for food and nutrition insecurity. Food insecurity is inconsistent access to foods, whereas nutrition insecurity is the inconsistent access and availability of foods for the maintenance of healthy bodies and support of disease prevention and management. Financial, social, food, and other resources for the current college student population have not met the needs of these students. Research has consistently found food insecurity prevalence estimates of 30% to 50% among college students, 3–5 times the national average, though these estimates and the rigor of the supporting research have varied widely. Although much of this position paper focuses on the US context, the literature supports similar experiences and outcomes from students in other Westernized and non-Westernized countries.9

Not surprisingly, the highest rates of food insecurity among college students are among those already experiencing a wide range of challenges from systemic and structural barriers (eg, students of color, parents, first-generation, veterans, international, and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual people students).5–7 The consistency of high prevalence rates of food insecurity across studies has understandably caused alarm and mobilization to address college food and nutrition insecurity at the local, state, tribal, and national levels.10,11 Research has indicated that other groups of emerging adults, such as those serving in the military, also report higher-than-expected levels of food insecurity.12 Given the complex multilevel determinants that impact food and nutrition insecurity, a social ecological perspective helps characterize influences across influence levels. Determinants of food and nutrition insecurity during college include macrolevel factors like college affordability7 and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) accessibility for college students,13 mesolevel factors such as familial history with food insecurity, and individual factors like financial independence, financial literacy, and budgeting skills and behaviors.14 Ultimately, colleges and universities serve many emerging adults at a scale not comparable to any other platform, and higher education could provide an opportunity to help address key social determinants of health. Adequate support must be implemented to address basic needs such as food and nutrition security.

Food and nutrition security is a result of complex socioeconomic factors. Students are located on or near college campuses, surrounded by particularly unhealthy environments, with fast food and convenience foods very prevalent on campuses.15–19 Students have time and resource scarcity and must choose between food and other expenses (eg, tuition, textbooks, and housing near campus). Many college students are at a critical age in the life course (eg, making decisions about food procurement and preparation, often for the first time, usually with limited skills).13,14 College students generally have very poor eating patterns and diet quality, associated with an increased risk of overweight/obesity, disordered eating, and other health problems into adulthood.24,25 Incoming college students are particularly vulnerable to developing unhealthy behaviors that will follow them into adulthood.24,25 There is not equitable, healthy food access in the college environment for all students. College campuses have been described as food deserts, perpetuating the
disparity in the consistent food access for emerging adults pursuing higher education,19,26 with limited access to healthy foods.

Focusing on college student food and nutrition security should not diminish the work done to address food and nutrition security in other populations.27,28 However, there is an opportunity among nutrition educators and other health professionals to address food insecurity among a particularly vulnerable population structurally and systemically. Without additional support, students experiencing food insecurity may fall through the cracks, furthering the disparities that they face.

FOOD AND NUTRITION INSECURITY IS RELATED TO POOR HEALTH AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Among all populations, food insecurity is related to poor health outcomes, such as the increased risk for chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes.29 Populations with food insecurity have been shown to have poor dietary quality30 and are at risk for micronutrient deficiencies such as low iron intake.31 For college students experiencing food insecurity, disparities are magnified. Research has consistently indicated that food insecurity among students is associated with lifestyle habits, including unhealthy dietary habits and patterns,32,33 and less sleep.34 A dose-response relationship between food insecurity and disordered eating behaviors has been observed among college students.35 Mental health is particularly of concern for students experiencing food insecurity.36–38 Studies report 3 times greater odds of mental health issues in students who report food insecurity than their food secure counterparts.35,37 One study identified differences in brain connectivity and cognitive function as measured by brain scans among students who had food insecurity vs food security, even after adjusting for adverse childhood experiences,39 which may be related to mental health, executive functioning, decision making, and risky health behaviors. Mental health issues have dire consequences for students experiencing food insecurity, as food insecurity has been linked to suicide ideation among emerging adults.40 Student experiences of trauma in the past, such as adverse childhood experiences, may impact their mental health and academic success during college and could provide important insights on intervention approaches. Adverse childhood experiences are related to food insecurity,41 suggesting the need for trauma-informed care42 when addressing food insecurity in college students.

Academic outcomes are also affected by food and nutrition insecurity. Students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to report missing classes, have lower grade point averages (GPAs), and consider dropping out of college.43–46 Research indicates that some of the effect of food insecurity on academic outcomes is explained by poor mental health.47,48 Raskind et al47 reported that mental health accounted for 73% of the effect of food insecurity on GPA, based on results from mediation analyses among their longitudinal sample of students across Georgia.

Food and nutrition security impacts educational attainment, particularly for students from underserved communities and/or first-generation college students. Recent research using longitudinal, nationally representative data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics illustrated that students with experiences of food insecurity during their college years were 43% less likely to graduate compared with their peers; these effects were evident after accounting for differences in race/ethnicity, household position, parental education, poverty, age, and gender.49 Furthermore, the effect of food insecurity on college dropout rates was far worse for first-generation college students than for others. Findings indicated only 47% of first-generation college students who experienced food insecurity graduated from college, compared with 59% of first-generation students who were food secure, 65% of non-first-generation students who were food insecure, and 76% of non-first-generation students who were food secure.49 Ultimately, the academic impact of food insecurity has immediate implications for college students experiencing food insecurity (eg, associations with lower GPAs may result in being less competitive for scholarships) and may have sufficient long-term implications for career success and advancement, likely perpetuating disparities for those even with a college degree. However, these long-term implications have yet to be evaluated.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS TO THE CURRENT BODY OF LITERATURE ON FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Improvements in the quality of food and nutrition security research are needed. Although a limited number of peer-reviewed studies have employed large samples across numerous institutions,35,50 the bulk of the literature relies on relatively small sample sizes and cross-sectional survey data.6,7,33,51,52 A large multi-institutional project administered by the Hope Center at Temple University has collected repeated cross-sectional survey data of food insecurity among 4-year institutions and community colleges across the US, with >40,000 responses each year,52 with response rates generally at 5% to 10%. Most food and nutrition security research among college students has yielded similarly low response rates or has relied on convenience sampling in which response rates cannot be estimated; these factors likely result in selection bias in the estimates of food insecurity. Very few studies have examined the impact of food and nutrition insecurity among college students using prospective designs,49,53 and except for studies published in 2022 from Panel Study of Income Dynamics,49,54 these are limited to relatively short time frames (<2 years). There is no research examining how experiences of food and nutrition insecurity...
before, during, and after university life are related to long-term health, academic, and/or career attainment.

Food and nutrition insecurity is apparent across higher education institution types. More than 250 studies have examined food and nutrition insecurity prevalence within colleges, and most focused on 4-year public institutions. The few studies that measured food insecurity in other postsecondary institutions found similar rates. One study among private colleges indicated a food insecurity rate of close to 36%. Findings from the Hope Center indicated a slightly higher prevalence of food insecurity at community colleges than at 4-year colleges (39% vs 29%, respectively), using the 10-item US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Adult Food Security Survey Module. In contrast, results from a large college health surveillance system of Minnesota institutions (response rate, 36%) yielded no significant differences in the percent of students screening positive for food insecurity from 2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private institutions (26%, 27%, and 22%, respectively) using the 2-item Hunger Vital Signs screener. A study from Historically Black Colleges and Universities estimated the prevalence of food insecurity using this 2-item measure to be 73%, whereas another study that included Historically Black Colleges and Universities estimated a prevalence of 29% using the 6-item USDA short form.

**MEASUREMENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Various measures are used to assess food insecurity, and no validated measure exists for college students. Currently, the most well-accepted measures include variations of the US household food security survey module developed by USDA and focus on the household level. Household questions may not apply to college students, as many often live in unique co-living arrangements and may still be connected with parents, family, and/or universities for resources. The time frame of assessments may also be an issue. Many assessments ask about the past year or month, but students’ experiences tend to follow the academic calendar and may notably change during breaks or between semesters. Given the dynamic nature of students’ lives, transitory living situations, fluctuating work, and also semester fluctuations in financial aid and other supports may impact experiences of food insecurity for students. Studies that use fewer questions to assess food insecurity have found a higher prevalence in those samples. Reports indicated college students do not respond to the gold standard measures such as the 10-item Adult Food Security Survey Module as expected and have difficulty differentiating between money for food and other resources, such as time. Time scarcity may confound experiences of food insecurity for college students. College students often navigate many new responsibilities, including employment, coursework, internships, extended transportation to and from campus, meal preparation, physical activity, social activities, and ongoing responsibilities, such as family obligations and child care. In general, this population reports high levels of stress. Time management is likely to play a unique role in the experiences of college students with food insecurity. Given the challenges in accurately assessing food insecurity among college students and the long-time perceptions of overall privilege among those who can pursue higher education, some advocates have asserted that scarce resources to address food insecurity should be directed at other groups and communities in greater need. Regardless of the precise prevalence and potential misclassification of college student food insecurity, food insecurity is an important problem to address among college students, as the struggle is consistently associated with negative health and academic outcomes. Higher education is a key social determinant of health, so college graduation can lead to many long-term health gains. In recent decades, there have been widespread national efforts to improve access to higher education among emerging adults from underserved communities, and although access has improved, graduation rates remain low. Ultimately, to effectively reduce health and economic disparities in the US, we must increase diversity in college admission and successfully support students in reaching graduation.

**CAMPUS FOOD PANTRIES AND EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION: THE POPULAR APPROACH TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AND NUTRITION INEQUITIES AMONG STUDENTS WITH LOWER INCOMES**

The most common mechanisms being used to address food insecurity among students are campus-based programs that provide food directly to students in need, such as campus food pantries. More than 800 college and university campuses across the US are members of the College and University Food Bank Alliance, a national community of practice founded in 2012 and subsequently acquired by the nonprofit organization Swipe Out Hunger to share best practices across campuses engaged in these efforts. Of member campuses, most either currently host or plan to open a food pantry, and these vary widely in size, infrastructure, sourcing, reach, and financing.

Results from a 2017 survey (n = 262, response rate: 49%) highlighted challenges and opportunities for campus food pantry operations. Most survey respondents reported limited institutional support for their pantry, with annual budgets < $5,000 and significant reliance on donations, in-kind support, and volunteer effort. Though many colleges provide limited in-kind support, like campus space (~100–300 ft²), these allocations are often small, creating challenges for sustainability over time. Natural turnover of student leadership is often also a problem. About half of College and University Food Bank Alliance survey respondents reported their pantries were open every weekday for ≥ 30 h/wk, and half (51%) could not pay...
individuals to staff the pantry. On a positive note, few pantries require proof of the need to receive food or other provisions, like personal hygiene products; this practice may allow for easier student access and reduce the effects of stigma. Today, many campus pantries also provide students with assistance enrolling in the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through the presence of county SNAP agency staff, representatives from supporting nonprofit organizations and/or trained campus staff at the pantry.65,66

Unfortunately, campus food pantry programs lack evaluation systems to date,67 likely a consequence of constrained support, staffing, and infrastructure. Recent cross-sectional surveys among pantry users have provided limited evaluation findings; for example, results from a survey in the University of California system found food pantry users tended to use the pantries frequently, averaging 3–4 times/mo, with a notable subset of students visiting twice per week or more.68 Two student surveys at other universities found significant barriers to pantry use included social stigma, embarrassment, lack of information on pantry policies, the desire to not take resources away from students in greater need, inconvenient hours of operation, and lack of time.69,70 To date, even after more than a decade of college food insecurity research, there is little to no data on-campus pantries’ effectiveness in reducing food insecurity.57

OTHER CAMPUS PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

Other campus-based initiatives to address food insecurity have included supplying food directly to students (eg, farm-based programming and/or campus produce stands,67,68 food recovery efforts21), providing money or vouchers to students that can be used for food (eg, food scholarships,72 meal donation programs),54 and building nutrition education or food skills for students experiencing food insecurity.73,74 Although many campus-based food insecurity programs benefit from collaborations with local or regional community organizations, they also face challenges similar to those of campus pantries, including insufficient institutional support, lack of funding, and other barriers to long-term sustainability and efficient upscaling to meet campus needs. Of these programs, arguably the most well-known national program is Swipe Out Hunger,75 a California-based organization founded in 2010 with chapters on campuses across the US. Swipe Out Hunger’s flagship program is the Swipe Drive, marking a collaboration with food service providers, such as Aramark, to allow students on participating campuses to donate “extra” meals on their meal plans to students in need. However, an underrecognized challenge of the program is the food service providers’ strict limits on donations; for example, on the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus, serving > 50,000 students, donations historically could not exceed 1,000 meals per semester (personal communication). If campus reports of food insecurity prevalence are accurate,58 these programs lack the scalability to adequately address students’ food and nutrition needs across their college careers.

In addition, there has been a proliferation of campus task forces and committees to address food insecurity at colleges nationwide in recent years.76,77 The formation of a task force marks an early action phase that can serve as a critical formative step in engaging key stakeholders, assessing opportunities and challenges, coordinating action, and raising awareness across campus and university systems. A whole-campus approach is valuable because food insecurity is a multi-dimensional problem that manifests simultaneously with challenges in meeting other basic needs, such as housing. An example of such an approach is from the University of California system, which has created basic needs centers to address multiple needs of students on campus.78

Multisector stakeholders should be involved in planning, assessment, and collaboration, including (but not limited to) representation from student services, financial aid, higher administration, food service, student government, faculty, alums, and more. Aligning with best practices for cross-sector partnerships and networks,76,79,80 members should meet regularly, share leadership, and collaboratively set goals. Ideally, when possible, these members should gather data for objective needs assessment and disseminate information across campus. In some cases, campuses have used external resources to gather needs assessment data; examples of these resources include the Hope Center’s #RealCollege survey initiative,52 the Minnesota Statewide Surveillance of College Student Health, and the National College Health Assessment.81 Ultimately, surveillance data, particularly those with valid assessment tools for food insecurity, can be used to raise awareness about the challenges faced by students, inform action steps, and engage additional stakeholders so that coordinated programming can begin to be developed that meets several students many needs, only one of which may be food insecurity.82

POLICY SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS COLLEGE FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

With growing recognition of the problem, there has also been growing interest in upstream solutions and policies to address food insecurity among college students. A 2020 policy review identified that in the 116th Congress, 17 federal bills (12 unique) addressing food insecurity were introduced.10 A parallel state-level review11 identified additional state-level policies addressing college food insecurity, including those enacted in 7 states and introduced in 6 additional states. The highlights of these and subsequent policy initiatives are briefly summarized below.

Much of the legislation addressing food insecurity among college students has addressed the limitations of SNAP, the largest food assistance program in the US. Unfortunately, major student restrictions to SNAP were implemented within extensive racialized policy reforms that
occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when political leaders promoted the assumption that by and large, college students are from families of means and are generally supported by their parents.83 Thus, most students aged 18–49 years without a disability enrolled in college half-time or more are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits. Some students with low incomes may be eligible if they meet one of a series of exemption criteria, including receiving public assistance under a Title IV-A program, participating in a state or federally-financed work-study program, working at least 20 h/wk, or being a single parent or guardian of a young child.

Recent efforts to expand this limited SNAP access for students with low incomes have taken several forms. These include:

1. Pandemic-related expansion of SNAP eligibility. Although many states’ waiver requests to expand student SNAP eligibility were denied by USDA in 2020,84 temporary changes were eventually passed in the Consolidated Appropriations Act in December 2020. Eligibility expansions extended to students whose expected family contribution on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid was zero dollars and those eligible but not necessarily able to participate in federal or state work-study programs.86 These changes expired with the expiration of the federal state of emergency.77

2. Federal proposals to permanently expand SNAP eligibility. The Student Food Security Act of 2021,68 introduced in the House and the Senate, aims to make the temporary student expansions to SNAP (described above) permanent. In addition, the EATS Act of 2021, also introduced in the House and the Senate,89 aims to extend eligibility further so that it would no longer be conditional on employment or work-study participation.

3. Support for SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs. State E&T programs allow students with lower incomes to enroll in approved training and career programs to receive SNAP benefits for food and other necessities like transportation and child care. Students in E&T programs are exempt from SNAP work requirements. In 2019, Hawaii enacted a law to expand appropriated funds for E&T programs, and Illinois expanded E&T eligibility to all career and technical programs approved by the Illinois Community College Board.11

4. Restaurant Meal Program on college campuses. A 2017 law enacted in California mandated that colleges with eligible food service facilities must apply to participate in the Restaurant Meal Program, a program that allows some SNAP recipients (ie, those who are aged ≥ 60 years, disabled, and/or home-less) to use their benefits in participating restaurants.11

Research indicates barriers to SNAP access remain for college students.55,68,83 However, participation in the CalFresh program by college students with food insecurity during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic was associated with higher GPAs,90 indicating the importance of SNAP on food security and academic outcomes. Removing student exclusions from SNAP increases opportunities to provide SNAP-Ed programming on college campuses and is a key opportunity for nutrition educators and other health professionals to explore. There are currently pilot programs in California to bring SNAP-Ed interventions to college campuses and SNAP outreach (Center of Healthy Communities, Chico State; https://www.csuchico.edu/chn/index.shtml).

Beyond expanding SNAP, a 2018 Government Accountability Office report13 found that over half of the students currently eligible for SNAP under one of the standard exemptions (such as participating in a work-study program) were not enrolled. The Government Accountability Office report largely attributed this to insufficient communication about the program and recommended that (1) SNAP eligibility be better communicated to students and (2) best practices for technical assistance strategies to enroll students be shared across state agencies. In response, USDA’s Food and Nutrition Services improved the clarity of student eligibility information provided on their website.91 Beyond awareness, students likely need more help navigating government systems. Food insecurity can be overwhelming, especially for emerging adults on their own for the first time, and applying for SNAP is generally challenging.92 The challenges and self-efficacy for applying for federal food assistance are not likely limited to SNAP but also are faced by emerging adults in accessing cash, housing, medical assistance programs, and earned tax credits.94 Challenges specific to college students with low incomes may include a lack of knowledge and experience navigating these types of programs, challenges in accessing the correct documents needed for application, challenges corresponding by mail amidst fluctuations in housing (and perhaps a lack of a permanent address), complicated family and living situations and income volatility.

It is also important to highlight the key systemic factors critical in keeping SNAP participation rates low among eligible college students. Student SNAP exclusions have historically lacked clarity, been complex, and changed over time. These factors make it challenging for even county-level SNAP staff to understand and appropriately implement these rules. Thus, the current SNAP system can grossly fail students, as SNAP staff—who do not necessarily have the time to learn or stay updated on student-specific regulations—unknowingly deny students the benefits they should be eligible for.65

States and individual campuses have also taken small steps to raise awareness about current SNAP eligibility criteria. For example, through the Hunger-Free Campus Act, which has been enacted in 5 states and introduced in numerous others as of January 2022,11,64 campuses can apply for a hunger-free campus designation by meeting a series of criteria, typically including (1) appointing a campus staff person to share SNAP program information on campus, (2) participating in an annual student food insecurity awareness event, (3) hosting a campus food pantry or other regular food distribution, (4)
participating in a meal donation program, and (5) establishing a task force that meets regularly. The College SNAP Project also hosts a national crowd-sourced website to link selected state-level student eligibility criteria and enrollment information for SNAP. Individual campuses have sought strategies for screening students for SNAP eligibility (eg, in conjunction with campus pantry operations) and assisting students in their applications.

Although these approaches mark small steps toward progress, more action is needed to directly notify students of likely SNAP eligibility, for example, using data provided by students to their institution or state or federal government. Several federal bills in this vein have been introduced but have not been enacted. In recent years, the state Offices of Higher Education in both Massachusetts and Minnesota collaborated with state SNAP agencies to contact all students with a $0 estimated family contribution on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid, directly notifying them of their likely SNAP eligibility and providing information on how to enroll in SNAP. In addition, these Offices of Higher Education letters to students then served as approved documentation for their SNAP application, thus lessening the burden on students to submit required documents. Because work-study eligibility and participation are determined at the institutional level, initiatives to directly notify work-study students of likely SNAP eligibility must be administered by each college; although not required, Minnesota recently revised its Hunger-Free Campus Act to require designated campuses to conduct these notifications.

1. High-quality research on food insecurity assessment measures and screening tools in this population is needed. There currently are no validated tools, and indications are that some populations of college students over-report and/or perceive food insecurity differently than the general population. Having a validated tool for food insecurity assessment development and testing among students is necessary for understanding the true scope of the issue. Nutrition educators, particularly those who work directly with students, can support the development testing of new measures with college student populations.

2. National surveillance of food insecurity for college students is needed. Given the differential reports and specific needs of college students, a national surveillance system of college food insecurity is needed, using validated measures of food insecurity for college students. In the Spring of 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics announced it would administer a national assessment of food insecurity among college students using the HFSSM every 4 years. Leveraging these efforts and tying them to other health and academic outcomes is critical. Nutrition educators can promote participation in national surveillance.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR NUTRITION EDUCATORS AND OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO ADDRESS FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

The evidence around food insecurity among college students has remained relatively stagnant, with most of the research cross-sectionally reporting the prevalence and correlates of food insecurity. The following actions are needed to make measurable differences in food and nutrition security for college students. Strong research is not currently available to assess the efficacy of several of the recommended policies and solutions detailed below, but the urgency of the problem requires timely action. These recommendations are made on the basis of the best possible evidence currently available, and strong evaluation and research approaches are needed as nutrition educators, advocates, policymakers, and others pursue these approaches.

3. More rigorous research on food insecurity in this population is needed, particularly using designs that allow for better causal inference on how food and nutrition insecurity interventions impact health and other outcomes over time. Understanding how food and nutrition security affects health, academic, career, and economic outcomes may support policy intervention efforts. Nutrition educators can play an important role in designing and implementing studies to assess how to best reduce food and nutrition insecurity risks and adverse outcomes.

4. Studies are needed on the intersectionality of food and nutrition security and other factors that can interact with and/or impact food and nutrition access.

5. Additional research and interventions are needed for specific subpopulations that are consistently underserved—especially those with disabilities, emerging adults coming out of foster care, first-generation college students, and underserved communities, such as Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, individuals identifying as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual people, and veterans. Foreign-born individuals/ international students make up approximately 5% (> 1 million) of the US college/university population and are understudied. We need to better understand these students’ unique needs and lift their voices in their experiences with college food and nutrition insecurity.

6. Improved collaboration across disciplines is needed. Food insecurity is not exclusively a nutrition issue but is deeply intertwined with housing, academic affordability, and other basic needs for students. We also need creative and coordinated solutions across sectors to address the root causes of food insecurity. For example, higher education accrediting bodies
(ie, Higher Learning Commission) could explore enacting food and nutrition insecurity prevention policies. Nutrition educators can partner interprofessionally to conduct these studies and to disseminate and translate findings.

7. More policy, systems, and environmental-level changes are needed to evaluate this change. Emergency and charitable food systems such as food pantries, automated food delivery systems, and meal donations will not address the root causes of food and nutrition security. Investments are needed to scale food assistance programs for those who need them and ensure access to quality food. Furthermore, an evaluation of any effort to improve food and nutrition security is needed. Most interventions are implemented and never evaluated. With limited resources, evaluation and effectiveness assessments are necessary. Nutrition educators can advocate for the inclusion of valid evaluation efforts alongside the programs they are implementing and ensure that the next generation of nutrition educators are adequately trained in evaluation methods and other necessary skills to continue this work.

8. Any intervention to improve food and nutrition security should include trauma-informed care when harm is not perpetuated. Trauma-informed care considers the whole individual (or community) and any historical trauma they may have experienced and works to minimize re-harm while building trust and maximizing resilience through 5 principles: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment.

9. Efforts to improve awareness of existing resources available to students who experience food and nutrition insecurity are needed. State Offices of Higher Education and/or individual institutions can be a connecting resource for students in need. For example, sending notifications to students who would likely qualify for SNAP and referring them for SNAP screening and enrollment support is a low-cost approach to connecting students to external resources to improve food insecurity. In addition, SNAP rules on student eligibility should be simplified so they can be readily understood and easily applied by county agency officials.

10. Pandemic SNAP expansions for college students should continue.

11. Given that many college students are emerging adults, more emphasis on the unique needs of emerging adult health is needed. Improved strategies are required to address the root causes of food insecurity among emerging adults who are not in college and/or attending college part-time.

Given the evidence-base of the harmful effects of food and nutrition insecurity and the special needs of college students, nutrition educators, and other health professionals are well-positioned to lead these efforts. Nutrition professionals often have access to college, university, and academic settings, either as educators or food service providers, and this makes them well-positioned to engage with students. Many nutrition educators are well-versed in the evaluation of programs and policies to address dietary intake, food security, and other diet-related outcomes, making them an ideal group to conduct evaluations with improved measures to enhance the evidence-base for program and policy efforts to address food and nutrition insecurity in colleges students. Nutrition educators and health professionals can convene interprofessional groups to employ policy, systems, environmental approaches, and trauma-informed programming to address the root causes of college food and nutrition insecurity. The training and expertise of nutrition professionals position them as key advocates and leaders for college student food and nutrition security. We need to expand our training of future nutrition educators on policy, systems, and environmental change to address the root causes of food and nutrition security.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior position was adopted by the SNEB Board on July 11, 2022. Before the usual JNEB review, SNEB members evaluated the position paper. The authors thank the following SNEB Division representatives for reviewing this paper: Alexander L. MacMillan Uribe, PhD, RDN, Digital Technology in Nutrition Education and Behavior Change; Adrienne Markworth, MA, Division of Sustainable Food Systems; Karen Plawecki, PhD, RD, Food and Nutrition Extension Division; Zubaida Qamar, PhD, RDN, Higher Education Division; Nick Rose, MS, Nutrition Educators in the Food Sector; Rachel L. Vollmer, PhD, RD, Nutrition Education for Children; Kritika Gupta, PhD, CHES, Student Division. The authors thank the following SNEB members for reviewing this paper: Karla P. Shelnutt, PhD, RD; Diego Rose, PhD, MPH, RD; Cheryl L.H. Armstrong, PhD, MBA, RDN, LD; Laurel Moffat, MPH. The authors thank the working group of SNEB members for facilitating the entire review process for this paper: Susan Johnson, PhD; Carolyn Gonthier, PhD, RDN; Barbara Lohse, PhD, RD, CDN; Kathryn Kolasa PhD, RDN, LDN; Kathryn Keim, PhD, RD, LDN. The authors thank Karen Chapman-Novakofski, PhD, RD, LDN, former Editor in Chief of the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, for her guidance and leadership through this process. The authors thank these and the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions.

REFERENCES


Dhillon J, Diaz Rios LK, Aldaz KJ, et al. We don’t have a lot of healthy options: food environment perceptions of first-year, minority college students attending a food desert campus. *Nutrients*. 2019;11:816.


Hattangadi N, Vogel E, Carroll L, Côté P. “Everybody I Know Is Always


e1.


Bruening and Laska


99. Lok M. Devil’s Depot partners with DoorDash and Starship to deliver


ORCIDs

Meg Bruening: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8301-8040
Melissa N. Laska: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3836-0269