Student Voices at the Table: Proposed Solutions to College Food Insecurity, from College Students Who are Currently Experiencing It

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“I definitely think the role of education is super important. Even just in the welcome package that you would include freshman year... I sort of had to find out everything on my own, there wasn’t a welcome packet that says here are places you can go for help. I had to search these out and then tell other people about it. How can we start integrating that into the culture of being a freshman?”

(Female Graduate Student)

BACKGROUND

• College students are a vulnerable population to food insecurity (FI)¹
• Student voices can evoke sustainable changes in the design of policy, education, and nutrition interventions²

OBJECTIVE

1. To explore proposed solutions to address FI informed by students and assess areas of improvement for current food resources on campus

METHODS

• Semi-structured qualitative interviews with 30 students with FI
• Data were inductively coded and analyzed in NVivo software
• Grounded theory methodology and conventional content analysis³

RESULTS

• Six interrelated themes emerged from the data related to the research objective
  o Themes (n=6) related to proposed solutions to FI and areas of improvement to increase efficacy of food resources (Fig. 1)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

• Identifies how student food access can be improved through addressing financial and social barriers
• Findings are formative for the implementation of students’ proposed FI interventions
• Students voices must inform intervention strategies

Figure 1: Emergent themes and select quotes of students related to proposed solutions to FI and areas of improvement to increase efficacy of food resources

Food scholarship or grocery stipend
“If financial aid were to give students money for groceries of some sort, since a part of education is also to make sure we have food to eat, I think it would be nice...If there was like a guaranteed stipend that college students are going to receive X amount of money for groceries.”

(Gender queer graduate student)

Education on nutrition, budgeting, and cooking
“I would want more things online for budgeting and meal planning. Because it took a long time for me to figure out how to meal plan appropriately. And I feel like a lot of students, even if they are in hardship, find it really hard to figure that out.

(Female undergraduate student)

Financial assistance for housing and other basic needs
“Financial resources were huge for me, so that would be what I would feel is most helpful. Because I was homeless, at one point...So more knowledge about like social services and housing for students in distress would be huge because I might not be here having this conversation right now if I didn’t have a friend to take me in and let me finish my undergrad.”

(Female graduate student)

Increasing access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
“I think that maybe some seminars on how to connect students with social services that they need like SNAP...things like that would be really useful. Maybe having some event or something with some sort of takeaway card or seminar to be like here are things that you can do to improve your situation and here’s how to access them.”

(Male undergraduate student)

Destigmatizing and increasing awareness of FI
“It helped me having this kind of interview and these questions on this specific topic about food insecurity of the students on the campus, because from my standpoint, I thought that this was just my problem at first. But when I saw this kind of topic happen, I feel like its not only me that has this problem happen, its also like other students too, its kind of good to know many of us have this kind of situation.”

(Female undergraduate student)

Centralizing and educating about resources
“We need a service online to help students find scholarships and grants and things like that. If there was a service that could narrow the many resources down to the things you’re eligible for and this is what you need to do to apply for it, that kind of thing would help save time and money.”

(Male undergraduate student)


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