

COMBATING STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING



Spring 2020 Student Food Insecurity Survey Results

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Offered to: University of Wyoming (UW) Administration, UW Board of Trustees, UW Food Security Taskforce, and any other stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, the UW Board of Trustees, staff, and any others interested in ensuring UW students have enough healthy, high quality food to eat.

Purpose: This report summarizes UW student responses to a Student Food Insecurity Survey administered online from April 1-27, 2020¹. Survey responses provide insight into student food insecurity and recommendations for strategies UW should pursue to end student food insecurity.



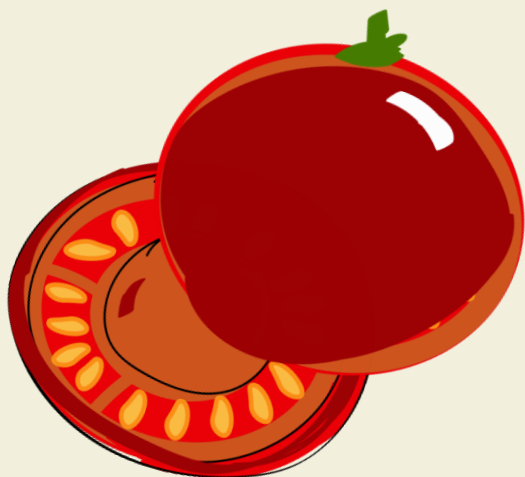
BACKGROUND

In fall 2019, the Associated Students of the University of Wyoming (ASUW) and Sustainability Coalition leaders assembled a Taskforce of students, faculty, staff, and administrators to plan and guide UW's work to reduce student food insecurity. A 2017 survey indicated over a third (37.4%)² of UW's undergraduate students experience food insecurity, meaning they are unsure if they have enough to eat or do not have enough to eat. Students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, poorer physical health, lower GPAs, higher dropout rates, and housing insecurity and homelessness.

As an initial step to ensure no UW student goes to class hungry, the UW Food Security Taskforce conducted a survey in spring 2020 which initially included graduate students and aimed to better understand:

- Which groups of students experience food insecurity at greater rates than others;
- Potential underlying factors contributing to student food insecurity;
- Student perspectives on the strategies UW should pursue to end student food insecurity.

The survey included questions from the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment III³; U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form⁴; the #RealCollege Survey from the HOPE Center⁵; the 2019 Food and Health Survey from the International Food Information Council Foundation⁶; and the UW Food Security Taskforce.



“ I personally haven’t reached out, because I feel shameful and embarrassed. ”

- Survey Respondent Comment

Questions focused on students' age, gender, race/ethnicity, school status, student status, year in school, standardized USDA short form regarding food security, military status, household status, family status, education level, parental and marital status, and access to food and impacting factors (such as expenses, employment, and knowledge of resources).

In spring 2020, 11,545 students were enrolled at UW. Approximately 51.5% of the student population identified as male, and 48.5% female⁷. The total student population consisted of 83.2% undergraduates and 16.8% graduate/professional students⁷. The total student population is comprised of 94.7% domestic students and 5.3% international students⁷.

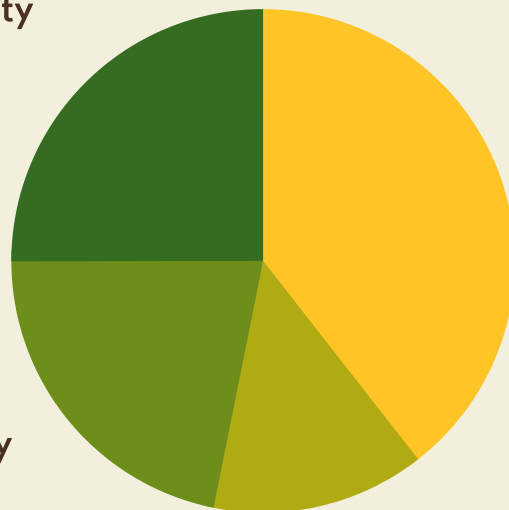
STUDENT RESPONSES

Of the 1328 students that responded to the survey (11% response rate), 1287 responded to the Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form. Response rates for online surveys are viable at 10%⁸. The majority of respondents were female (67.2%), full-time students (90.5%), undergraduate (88%), White (85%), domestic (86.5%), and non-military connected students (90.4%).

Spring 2020 survey results indicate, according to the USDA's six-item assessment questions, 46.7% of survey respondents reported food insecurity. In comparison to the 2017 survey, which also shows data from 47 other institutions, more UW students are experiencing food insecurity when compared to other 4-year public schools. For example, 32% of CSU students reported experiencing low or very low food security.

Very Low Food Security
25%

Low Food Security
21.8%

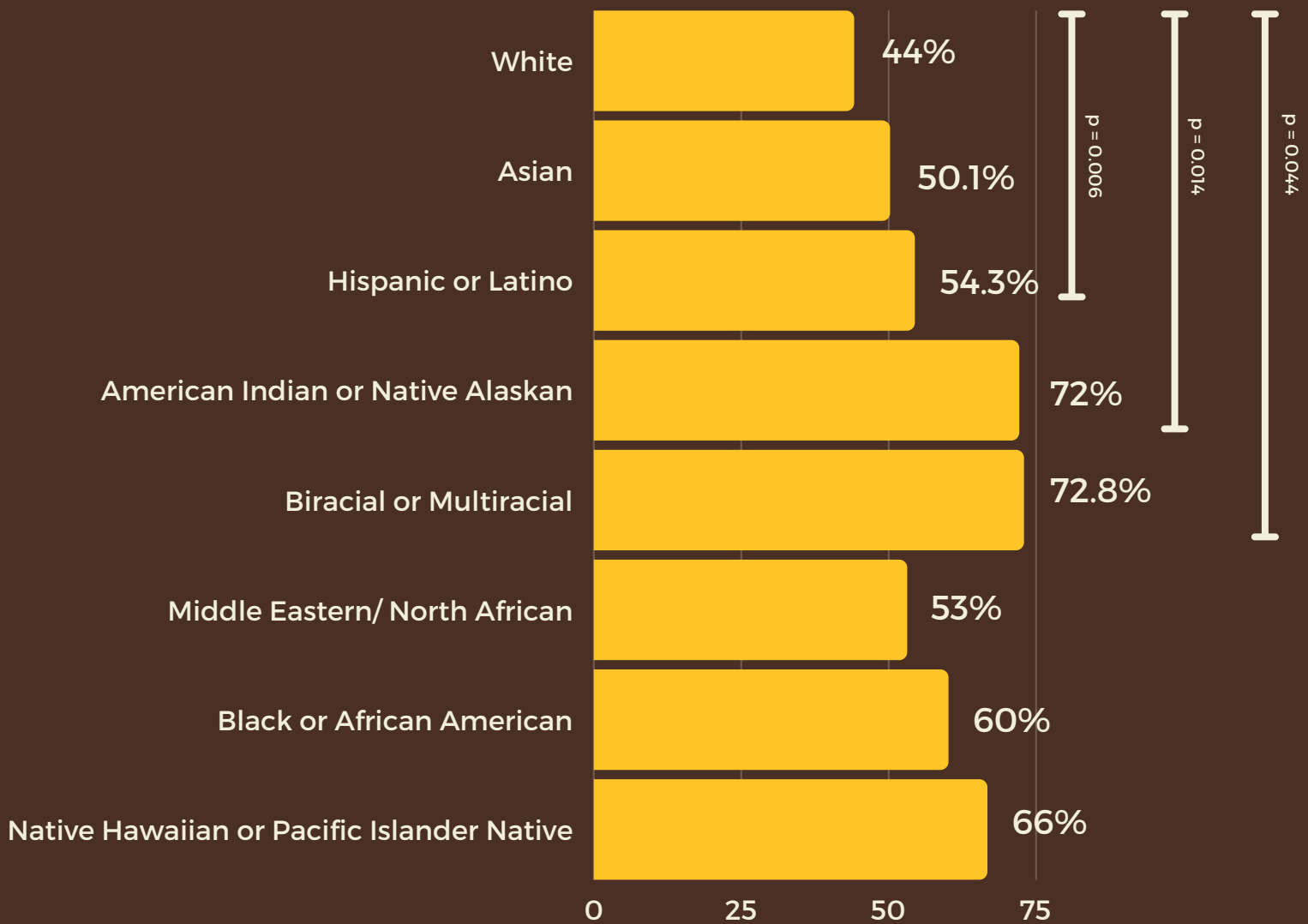


Marginal Food Security
13.7%

Figure 1: Food Security Percentages, According to the USDA's Six-Item Assessment Questions. Of the 1287 UW students who responded to the survey in spring 2020, 46.7% were food insecure.

High Food Security
39.4%

FOOD INSECURITY BASED ON RACE



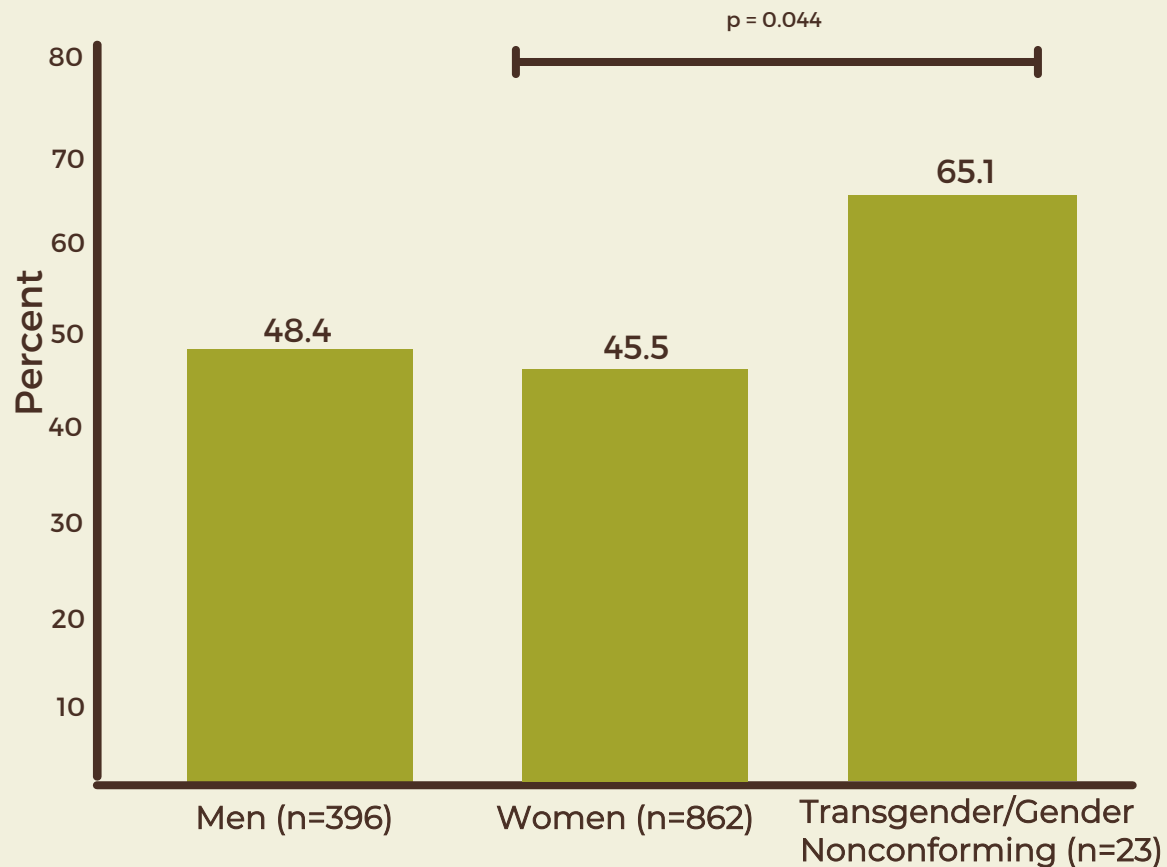
“ Students cannot give their best effort in their schooling if they do not have adequate access to food. This should be of the utmost priority to the administration. ”

- Survey Respondent Comment

Figure 2: Percentage of Student Food Insecurity Based on Race. Survey results indicate students of all racial identities meet low food security score criteria. However, White students reported significantly lower food insecurity when compared to Hispanic/Latino students, American Indian/Native Alaskan students, and Biracial or Multiracial students. Overall, we did not collect enough responses from Middle Eastern/North African, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Native to determine a significant difference in food security.

FOOD INSECURITY BASED ON GENDER

Figure 3: Food Insecurity Scores Based on Respondents' Gender. There were less male participants when compared to overall UW demographics. Students who identified as transgender or gender nonconforming reported higher food insecurity.

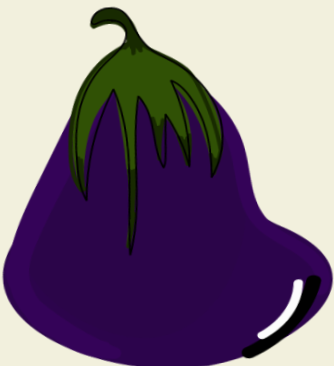


“

Keep doing what you are doing to keep students fed; it is a serious issue. As a student who has had to work full-time since I began college (over 9 years), I can tell you how important it is to give to each other and to have less costly options available to all who need it.

- Survey Respondent Comment

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FOOD INSECURITY BASED ON STUDENT STATUS

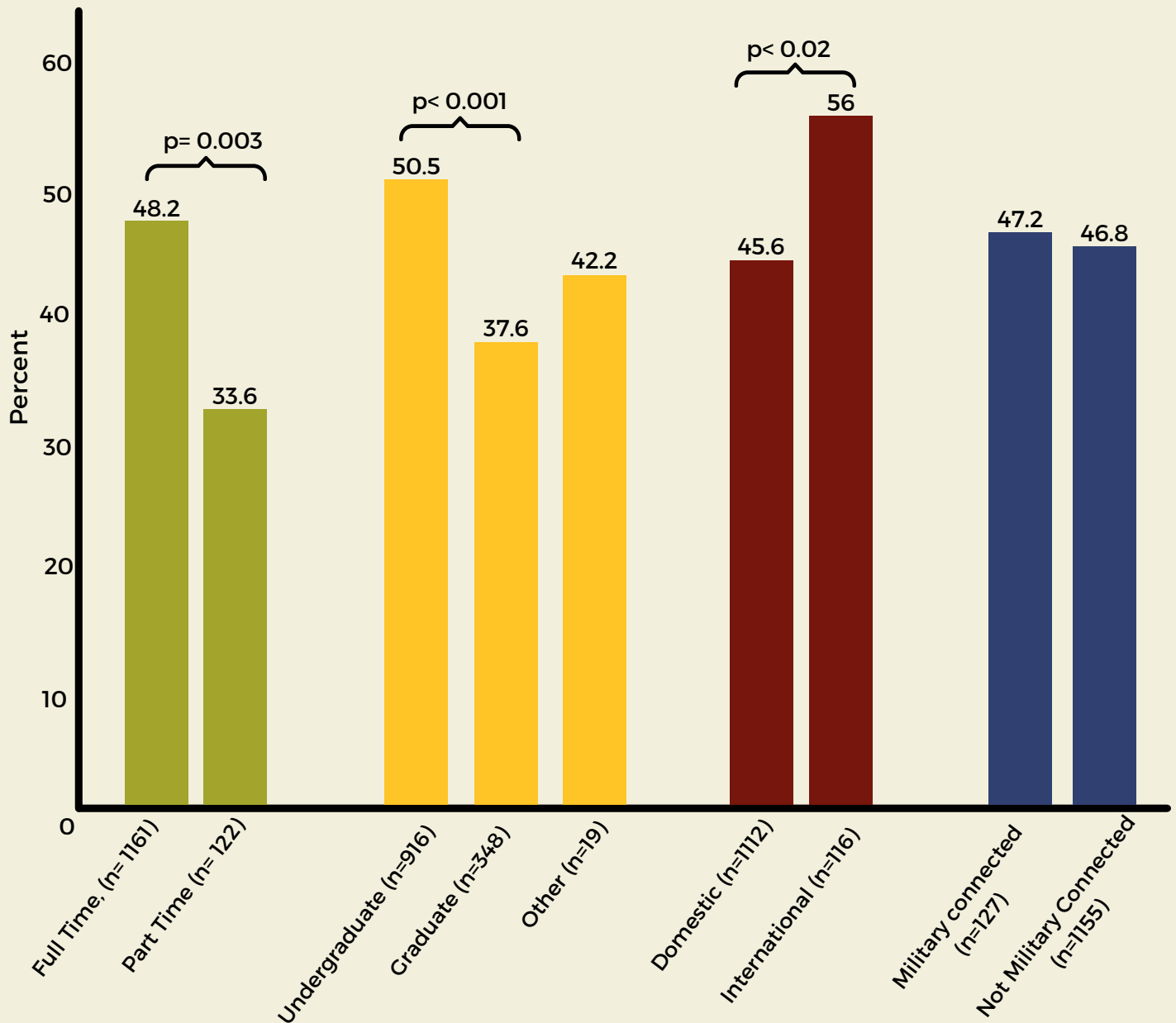


Figure 4: Food Security Scores Based On Respondent Demographics. Significant differences among students reporting food insecurity were identified between full-time and part-time students, undergraduate and graduate students, and international and domestic students.

“ **There are days that I actually search for meetings that bring pizza just so I can eat something.** ”

- Survey Respondent Comment

FOOD ACCESS RESOURCES RANKED BY UW STUDENTS

Figure 5: Respondent Ranking of Food Access Resources. Students were asked to rank resources they would most like to see implemented at UW. Each potential (or existing) food access resource included a short description. ALL resources received support/interest, with a campus grocery receiving the highest level of support. A campus grocery store was defined as a centralized on-campus grocery store that provides healthy foods with prices that are at-cost or subsidized for students. Very few respondents (N = 8) indicated they did not support any of these resources.

Note: Weighted scores are out of 6000



#1 : Campus Grocery Store

Weighted score: 5646



#2 : Good Food Recovery and Sharing

Weighted score: 5136



#3 : Swipe Out Hunger

Weighted score: 5042



#4 : Central Grocery/Pantry Blend

Weighted score: 4814



#5 : Growing Food on Campus

Weighted score: 4311



#6 : More Student Food Share Cabinets

Weighted score: 3003



#7 : I would not like to see any of the above choices

Weighted score: 1140

“

I strongly support the above solutions and think they would be utilized well at UW. I think implementing these solutions will help students who are food insecure and reduce stigma by bringing the issue into the eyes of the general student population. I think many UW students would support these initiatives to help their fellow students.

”

- Survey Respondent Comment

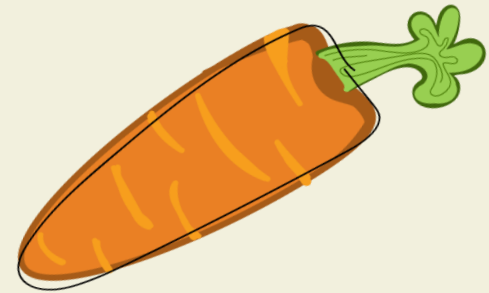
The UW Food Security Taskforce is working to ensure every UW student has enough food to eat and never has to go to class hungry. Consistent through all their efforts are the values of respect, dignity, and autonomy. Experiencing food insecurity is often accompanied by feelings of personal shame or societal stigma [cite]. Student respondents indicated they feel personal stigma or shame surrounding food access “sometimes” (22.7%) or “often” (4.8%). Students also reported their feelings of societal stigma or shame surrounding food access was “quite a lot” (28.5%) or “a great deal” (7.3%).

“ I am older and need help financially, and I cut corners everywhere in my life to afford tuition and living. Food is the first to be cut. ”

- Survey Respondent Comment

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

We received over 375 unique comments about student food security, generally, and additional UW food access resources that respondents would like to see. Responses included themes of support for one or more of the six unique strategies; systemic considerations about student food insecurity; calls for reduced cost, subsidized, and/or free food at UW; requests for information and educational resources; recommendations for food variety to meet health, cultural, dietary, and other needs; and overall concern, gratitude, and support for student food security efforts. Only 15 total comments expressed critique or dismissal of the survey or UW food security efforts; 11 of those were provided by respondents not experiencing food insecurity themselves. Please find exemplative respondent quotes throughout this report.



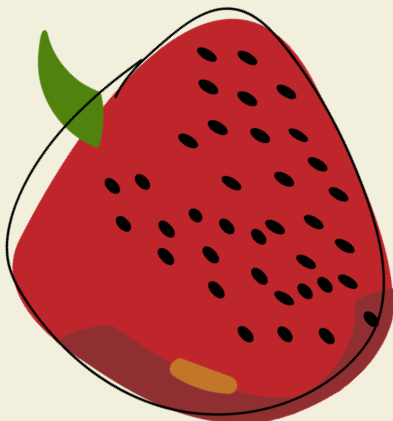
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

As indicated by responses to the survey, far too many students at the University of Wyoming must make the choice between feeding their minds, by investing in higher education, or nourishing their bodies, by purchasing food. 46.7% of student respondents met criteria for low or very low food security with a disproportionate impact on American Indian, Biracial, Native Hawaiian, transgender or gender nonconforming, and international students. The novel coronavirus pandemic has only further exacerbated this problem, and emergency and sustained support for students has become all the more necessary. Respondents supported all of the listed food access resources, with the #1 resource recommended as an at-cost, subsidized (and/or free) food campus grocery store.

The UW Food Security Taskforce will continue to address student food insecurity through a variety of strategic efforts including:

- Engagement with students, staff, and faculty from a broad range of disciplines, departments, colleges, and administrative roles across campus; Support and guidance for existing resources such as the UW Food Share Pantry, Food Share Cabinets, and Meal Swipe Sharing through UW Dining Services;
- Implementation of additional resources such as Growing & Sharing Food with ACRES Student Farm, Campus Grocery Store, and Good Food Recovery & Sharing;
- Management of an information hub and media for food security resources; Pursuit of funding and long-term support networks to extend and scale-up current efforts;
- Support for strategic efforts to address food insecurity among staff and community members;
- Connections with Wyoming community colleges to develop a statewide network.

The work of the UW Food Security Taskforce to address student food access, in particular the top desired resources identified through this survey, will have a significant impact across multiple university programs and units. This work will reach almost every UW student—the 46.7% who are food insecure, others who work too many hours to avoid food insecurity thereby sacrificing time and energy otherwise spent on their studies, and the student leaders and volunteers who will learn and develop professional capacities by guiding and implementing strategies to improve food access. With a coordinated and comprehensive approach to food access resources on campus, UW is poised to become a national leader in strategic action on student food security. Most importantly, if our state and institution invest in nourishing UW students now, they will be able to graduate at higher rates and with better educational experiences and, in turn, be better prepared to serve our state and nation for the rest of their careers.



“ This is going to be a critical issue of major significance in the upcoming months and years. Anything the University can do to increase food security is money and resources exceptionally well spent. Morally, ethically, and for return on investment. Thank you. ”

- Survey Respondent Comment

ENDNOTES

1. Survey responses coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Food security questions were focused on students' experiences over the past 6 months but may have resulted in slightly inflated numbers compared to 2017.
2. The Ohio State University - Center for the Study of Student Life. (2017). "Study on Collegiate Financial Wellness." <https://cssl.osu.edu/research-projects/study-on-collegiate-financial-wellness/>.
3. American College Health Association National College Health Assessment. (ACHA NCHA) (2019). Publications and Reports. Retrieved April 7, 2020, from https://www.acha.org/NCHA/ACHANCHA_Data/Publications_and_Reports/NCHA/Data/Publications_and_Reports.aspx?hkey=d5fb767c-d15d-4efc-8c41-3546d92032c5
4. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Services (USDA ERS). (2019). Survey Tools. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/survey-tools.aspx#adult>
5. Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Kinsley, P. (2019). Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education. 33.
6. International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC). (2019). Food Insight. Retrieved February 20, 2020, from <https://foodinsight.org/>

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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