

# Combating Student Food Insecurity at the University of Wyoming

## Current Actions and Recommended Options

November 13, 2019

**Offered to:** University of Wyoming (UW) Administration, UW Board of Trustees, ASUW-convened food security taskforce, and any other stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff, interested in ensuring UW students have enough healthy, high quality food to eat.

**Contributors:** Dr. Rachael Budowle (*Assistant Professor, Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources*); Isabela Farmer (*Kinesiology & Health undergraduate, Wellness Ambassador*); Christine Porter (*Associate Professor, Wyoming Excellence Chair in Community & Public Health, Kinesiology & Health*); Ariel Preble (*Physiology undergraduate, Wellness Ambassador*)

**Investigation Support:** students in Fall 2019 HLED 4020/5020 Food, Health & Justice class; students in the ENR Sustainability minor 2017 - present, Sustainability Club RSO, ASUW

**Purpose:** This report summarizes UW's initial, student-led actions to combat student food insecurity in collaboration with faculty and staff to date. It additionally identifies options for our institution to catch up with or surpass our peers in ensuring every UW student has enough healthy, high quality food to eat.

### The Problem

Over a third (37.4%) of our undergraduate students are unsure if they have enough to eat or do not have enough to eat. Half of these students (18.7%) worry about shortages, with the other half (18.7%) actually skipping or reducing meals for lack of food. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: UW undergraduate food insecurity rates, in comparison with other institutions <sup>1</sup>

2017, among 47 institutions		UW results		2-year colleges		4-year public		4-year private	
Food security status <sup>3,4</sup>									
High or marginal food security		62.6%	452	50.7%	2251	62.4%	6823	49.1%	838
Low food security		18.7%	135	21.9%	973	18.8%	2053	21.7%	370
Very low food security		18.7%	135	27.4%	1218	18.9%	2063	29.3%	500
Total Responses		100.0%	722	100.0%	4442	100.0%	10939	100.0%	1708

Food-insecure students are more likely to suffer from:

- Anxiety and depression,<sup>2</sup>
- Poorer physical health,<sup>3</sup>
- Lower GPAs,<sup>4</sup>
- Higher drop-out rates,<sup>5</sup>
- Housing insecurity and homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

Our student food insecurity rates match those at other 4-year public institutions, as shown in Table 1 and in other surveys of this issue.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, colleges and universities are tackling this problem with responses such as campus at-cost grocery stores, meal swipe sharing, and sending alerts to interested students whenever good food is available after catered events or near closing time at dining facilities. Currently, UW lags behind peer institutions in implementing these kinds of high-impact food security solutions.

## Actions and Plans to Date at UW

Since 2017, UW students supported by faculty and staff have investigated student food insecurity and taken the lead in beginning to tackle this problem.

- **ASUW Resolution #2670:** The Associated Students of the University of Wyoming recently passed a resolution seeking action to reduce student food insecurity at UW.<sup>8</sup>
- **ASUW Student Food Security Taskforce:** Following the resolution, work has begun to form a multi-stakeholder taskforce, which will convene later this semester.
- **UW Food Security Summit:** The taskforce members and other stakeholders will hold a summit on this issue in Spring 2020.
- **Food Sharing Cabinets:** Increasingly, students, faculty, and staff in academic units are implementing cabinets in their buildings to share food with each other. Over the past two years, four independently managed cabinets have opened:
  1. “Kendall House Food Share Cabinet” Haub School, Kendall House
  2. “The Cowboy Cabinet” Kinesiology & Health, Corbett Hall
  3. “The SAL-ivation Station” Student Art League and Visual Arts, Visual Arts Building
  4. Honors College Cabinet, Guthrie House

Several more cabinets are currently in development, and Sustainability Club students are seeking ASUW funding to support and scale-up those cabinets. Haub School and Kinesiology & Health students and faculty collaborated with generous donor support to produce a **Food Share Cabinet Toolkit**, released in October 2019, to assist with starting and managing food sharing cabinets in other UW units. The taskforce additionally aims to connect the people who manage the cabinets, so they can share ideas and support one another. To our knowledge, we are the only university in the US using a distributed cabinet model. While cabinets are an excellent bottom-up strategy for addressing student food insecurity, and we should continue to expand and support them, higher-impact solutions are additionally necessary.

- **Scoping options for UW:** Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Services, and the Academic and Student Affairs subcommittee of the Board of Trustees have all requested and received updates on student food (in)security at UW. This report aims to help inform these discussions with strategies that other institutions are using to nourish their students.

## Solution Options

### *Swipe Out Hunger: meal sharing through dining*

**How It Works:** Students with dining meal plans can contribute meal swipes to a central pool. The meal swipes are then shared with students who need them.

**How It Helps:** At schools that have implemented a form of this program, 73% of participants feel less anxious about where their next meal is coming from and 63% feel their institution is more supportive of them.<sup>9</sup> Colorado State University (CSU) found that students on the waitlist for their meal sharing program, but who were not yet receiving benefits, had significantly lower GPAs than those students who were receiving benefits.<sup>10</sup>

## Summary of Options for Combating Food Insecurity at the University of Wyoming

**Who's Doing It:** Most institutions using this strategy use a nationally available program, Swipe Out Hunger. Swipe Out Hunger began in 2010 when a group of students at UCLA recognized the issue of food insecurity on their campus and collaborated with dining to invent this program.<sup>11</sup> Execution comes in many forms. For example, Cornell University only allows students to donate one meal per semester, then all the donated meals are divided among students determined to need them the most.<sup>12</sup> At Vanderbilt, students can donate five meals a semester which are then pooled and distributed.<sup>13</sup> UC Davis holds a drive at the end of each semester where members of the community can donate money that is distributed to the school's meal sharing, food pantry, and food bank programs.<sup>14</sup> At the University of Vermont, a drive is hosted to donate extra meals at the end of the fall semester. They were able to raise 629 meals, which was enough to fund 14 meals for each of 45 students.<sup>15</sup> CSU has developed meal sharing as part of their larger Rams Against Hunger program, gathering donated meals from students who have extra and adding some from dining to provide up to 75 meals per semester to students who otherwise might not have enough to eat.

**Next Steps for UW:** UW Dining plans to pilot meal sharing in 2020, likely setting aside meals to share in advance as opposed to using a student-sharing program, initially. In response to questions from Amy Bey, we are assembling data on operational details from universities already sharing meals, such as how programs are funded, how (and how many) meals can be shared, and how they are distributed. The Swipe Out Hunger Guide is also a reference.<sup>16</sup>

### Good Food Recovery and Sharing

**How It Works:** Though several options are available, a primary strategy is an alert system, where students who register and sign a waiver receive a text or email notice whenever an event ends or a dining facility has extra food. Then students usually have about 30 minutes to arrive with their own clean containers to take food on a first-come, first-served basis. Several apps are available off the shelf for this and some institutions create their own. Other options include creating alternative dining rooms where excess meals from dining outlets are shared with students who are food insecure. (The Bill Emerson Food Donation Act protects organizations from criminal and civil liability when food is donated.<sup>17</sup> UW already shares some food with the Laramie Soup Kitchen under a 2014 agreement.<sup>18</sup>)

**How It Helps:** Recovery provides good food to students and reduces waste. The Sustainability Club RSO conducted a campus-wide waste audit in 2018, which found that 60% of waste from dining locations across campus is currently compostable (i.e., includes large amounts of food waste).

**Who's Doing It:** Many universities and colleges have adopted alert systems, including CSU. Some have other sharing options, for example, dining facilities at George Fox University in Oregon share extra food with campus "hospitality tables" where students who do not have access to dining services for financial reasons can get food.<sup>19</sup> The Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at UW has piloted an email alert system for students to join the last 30 minutes of events and enjoy excess food onsite.

**Next Steps:** Adapt policies and apps in use from other institutions, pilot, enroll campus partners who serve food (e.g., UW Dining and Catering, other caterers, Athletics, Greek Life organizations), and launch.

## Summary of Options for Combating Food Insecurity at the University of Wyoming

### Campus Grocery Store

**How It Works:** UW would open a centralized on-campus grocery store, blended grocery/pantry option, or food co-op.

**How It Helps:** Such stores help bridge transportation, time, and cost barriers for student grocery shopping, which are exacerbated by food and financial insecurity. This format could make subsidized food available to students and, possibly, staff who also struggle with food security.

**Who's Doing It:** Some are free and healthy-option grocery stores, like a pantry but in a shopping format, such as University of California Irvine's Basic Needs Hub.<sup>20</sup> Funded by a \$3 student fee, it includes fruits and vegetables such as apples, onions, and broccoli and other foods ranging from meat to granola bars. MIT's TechMart partnered with an existing campus food option to create a place where students could buy fresh produce, protein options, spices and sauces sold at cost. The store also sells boxes for students in a hurry or who do not have the tools to cook.<sup>21</sup> The University of South Florida also has an on-campus grocery store, a branch of a supermarket chain but staffed by students and built near student housing.<sup>22</sup> University of Maryland has a student-owned and run food co-op in their student union.<sup>23</sup> Cornell University's Anabel's Grocery offers a subsidized, healthy-option store to students.<sup>24</sup>

**Next Steps:** Survey students about their desires and priorities, map practical options for UW, and begin planning.

### Central Food Cabinet or Pantry

**How It Works:** Much like a campus grocery, a pantry would entail forming and stocking a central campus location where students can pick up both perishable and non-perishable food and household items.

**How It Helps:** Our anecdotal experience (including having once hosted a one-off pantry targeted at UW students) is that UW students do not feel comfortable visiting the Laramie food pantry hosted by Interfaith, but that they would use a central campus pantry. While there is little research into campus pantries, the existing research suggests that most food insecure students do not use them; instead, they are a last resort for students and likely provide an option that enables students to stave off emergencies and hunger crises.<sup>25</sup>

**Who's Doing It:** Many campuses have started central campus pantries. For example, Laramie County Community College (LCCC) partners with Western States Bank in Cheyenne, Wyoming, which donated \$25,000 to help start the pantry. Ann Nelson, Wyoming market president for the bank said they hoped the gift might encourage others to make similar or larger gifts. Since the generous gift, many employees, students, and community members have donated to the pantry through money or items. In 2018, the food pantry was accessed 656 times by LCCC students.<sup>26</sup> CSU also has a food pantry available to all students.<sup>27</sup> They partner with Food Bank for Larimer County to provide a mobile pantry once a month. Students simply bring a bag to fill with goods and show their ID. Central Oregon Community College offers food bags containing three meals to students, which they receive every two weeks.<sup>28</sup> South Seattle College provides a pantry any student can access once a week by showing their student ID.<sup>29</sup> Utah State University, South Dakota State University, University of Montana, Montana State University and University of Idaho also all have pantries, some of which receive corporate sponsorships. These options support students who may be experiencing a temporary state of food insecurity to access food without the stigma of having to demonstrate need, income level, etc.

## Summary of Options for Combating Food Insecurity at the University of Wyoming

**Next Steps for UW:** We recommend that students be consulted about their priorities and preferences for accessing pantry or grocery items on campus. UW students might prefer a grocery store option or a blended solution of grocery with some pantry features. The College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFA) provides information for starting and running a food pantry on college campuses.<sup>30</sup>

### Growing Food on Campus

**How It Works:** Central campus greenhouses, campus orchards and permaculture, and student housing community gardens can provide fresh, local food for students.

**How It Helps:** Student-run greenhouses have been shown to improve mental and physical wellbeing as well as provide a greater sense of community for students.<sup>31</sup> Campus food growing projects also provide extensive experiential education opportunities. Such operations could provide food for students to harvest as they walk through campus and/or to supply a campus grocery, pantry, and food share cabinets.

**Who's Doing It:** Harvard University graduate students lead a project of implementing green roofs across campus.<sup>32</sup> The first garden produced approximately 400 pounds of radishes that were then prepared for meals by the dining hall operator. University of Arkansas greenhouses provide food for students and became sustainable after startup cost investments.<sup>33</sup> CUNY (City University of New York) campuses also grow produce to feed its students across several campuses. An urban farm at Kingsborough Community College produced 3,000 pounds of food in 2018 that was then distributed to over 1,000 students.<sup>34</sup>

**Next Steps:** Explore options with UW's student farm, ACRES. With sufficient support from our institution, they may be interested and willing to grow their organization, expand operations to campus, and share their produce with campus. Currently to raise funds (and for the business experience), they sell at Laramie Farmers' Market and through Community Supported Agriculture shares.<sup>35</sup> Explore options with Plant Sciences and UW Operations; potentially existing resources could be redirected to growing food plants rather than other kinds of landscaping plants. Explore community gardening options with Residence Life.

### Other Options Requiring Further Investigation

**"School Lunch" Program:** UW could adopt approaches from the National School Lunch Program and offer heavily subsidized meal plans to our most financially insecure and vulnerable students.

**Campus Food Hub:** UW could leapfrog to national leadership on this issue by offering a combination of solutions in one location and/or organization, such as a grocery, pantry, food growing options, cooking classes, and a community kitchen.

### Immediate Needs

- UW Administration, UW Board of Trustees, Faculty Senate, and Staff Senate support for student-led efforts, including engagement in ASUW Task Force;
- Information hub to compile existing reports and resources (e.g., Food Share Toolkit) and guide students to access shared food at UW;
- Identify funding and long-term support network to extend and scale-up food share cabinets;



## Summary of Options for Combating Food Insecurity at the University of Wyoming

- Further investigation and prioritization of several of the above high-impact solution options to 37% student food insecurity at UW.

### Conclusion

Ensuring that all UW students have enough healthy, high quality food to eat would help UW meet its education, retention, and graduation rate goals. Adopting programs such as these would not only assist the nearly 5000 undergraduates actively coping with food insecurity, it would support our graduate students and, possibly, enable more of our undergraduates to work fewer hours at low-paying jobs and focus on their studies. The world needs more universities enabling students to thrive, rather than worrying about where their next meal will come from.

---

<sup>1</sup> Office of Student Life, “Study on Collegiate Financial Wellness, University of Wyoming: Food Security on Campus. 2017, p. 2, *Ohio State University College of Education and Human Ecology*. Nearly 3,000 UW undergraduates were invited to participate; 780 responded. Our 26% response rate was much higher than the 10.5% average among the 47 institutions participating.

<sup>2</sup> Student Hunger on Campus: Food Insecurity Among College Students and Implications for Academic Institutions. 2018. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0890117117719620>

<sup>3</sup> Student Hunger on Campus: Food Insecurity Among College Students and Implications for Academic Institutions. 2018. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0890117117719620>

<sup>4</sup> Maya E. Maroto, “Food Insecurity among Community College Students: Prevalence and Association with GPA, Energy, and Concentration,” *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(6), 515–526.

<sup>5</sup> Hunger on Campus Oct 2016. [http://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger\\_On\\_Campus.pdf](http://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger_On_Campus.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Meghan R. Silva et al, “The Relationship Between Food Security, Housing Stability, and School Performance among College Students in an Urban University,” *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 1521025115621918, December 14, 2015, doi:10.1177/1521025115621918.

<sup>7</sup> Wisconsin Hope Lab. Still Hungry and Homeless in College. April 2018. <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Senate Resolution. 24 September 2019. <http://www.uwyo.edu/asuw/senate-resources/legislation/sr-2670-final1.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Swipe Out Hunger. 2019 <https://www.swipehunger.org/2019impactreport/>

<sup>10</sup> Students Against Hunger: An Approach to Food Insecurity at a Large Public Land Grant University. 2016-2017. [https://mountainscholar.org/bitstream/handle/10217/180886/JOUE\\_JOSA\\_v26-2016-17.pdf?sequence=1#page=100](https://mountainscholar.org/bitstream/handle/10217/180886/JOUE_JOSA_v26-2016-17.pdf?sequence=1#page=100)

<sup>11</sup> Swipe Out Hunger. 2019. <https://www.swipehunger.org/aboutus/#our-roots>

<sup>12</sup> Swipe Out Hunger. Cornell Dining helps in the fight on Food Insecurity. <https://living.cornell.edu/dine/howeare/swipe-out-hunger.cfm>

<sup>13</sup> Vanderbilt hustler. Meal swipe donation program will allow students to donate unused meals. 28 March 2019. <https://vanderbilthustler.com/22992/featured/meal-swipe-donation-program-will-allow-students-to-donate-unused-meals-to-general/>

<sup>14</sup> UC Davis. Swipe Out Hunger. 8 July 2019. <https://housing.ucdavis.edu/dining/swipe-out-hunger/>

<sup>15</sup> UVM Food Feed. Launch of Temporary Food Assistance Program on Campus. 19 March 2019. <https://learn.uvm.edu/foodsystemsblog/2019/03/19/swipe-out-hunger/>

<sup>16</sup> Swipe Out Hunger. A Guide To Creating Your Campus Sustainable Meal Sharing and Recovery Program. [https://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/files/Swipe%20Out%20Hunger%20Guide\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/files/Swipe%20Out%20Hunger%20Guide_Final.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Feeding America. Protecting Our Food Partners. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/partners/become-a-product-partner/food-partners>

<sup>18</sup> University of Wyoming. Cowboy Food Sharing: Supply the Soup Kitchen and Reduce Waste. 2016. [http://repository.uwyo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=honors\\_theses\\_15-16](http://repository.uwyo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=honors_theses_15-16)

<sup>19</sup> New York Times. Tuition or Dinner? Nearly Half of College Student Surveyed in a New Report Are Going Hungry. 2 May 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/nyregion/hunger-college-food-insecurity.html>

<sup>20</sup> New York Times. California Today: A Space for Students Who Need Something to Eat. 27 March 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/us/california-today-uc-irvine-food-pantry.html>

- <sup>21</sup> MIT. Techmart at cost Grocery Store Pilot Open in Walker Memorial. 2018. [www.news.mit.edu/2018/mit-techmart-at-cost-grocery-store-pilot-opens-in-walker-memorial-0926](http://www.news.mit.edu/2018/mit-techmart-at-cost-grocery-store-pilot-opens-in-walker-memorial-0926)
- <sup>22</sup> Education Dive. U of South Florida brings grocer Publix to campus. 7 Dec 2018. [www.educationdive.com/news/u-of-south-florida-brings-grocer-publix-to-campus/543847/](http://www.educationdive.com/news/u-of-south-florida-brings-grocer-publix-to-campus/543847/)
- <sup>23</sup> The Maryland Food Collective. [www.mdfoodcoop.org](http://www.mdfoodcoop.org)
- <sup>24</sup> Anabel's Grocery. Anabel's Grocery provides fresh, nutritious, and affordable food for all Cornell students. <http://anabelsgrocery.org/>
- <sup>25</sup> Taylor & Francis Online. Partnering to Build a Pantry: A University Campus Responds to Student Food Insecurity. 05 Feb 2016. [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10875549.2015.1094775?casa\\_token=hBWFpemedK0AAAAA%3A2wvGuXQMLUHvNEiL5c3b\\_jUYGJ0m3XQdJfKAXDeSXDjJqc\\_ZrZYGR9k1RKl5qitc9a0xnOJz00KTgQ ; https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/10/9/1163](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10875549.2015.1094775?casa_token=hBWFpemedK0AAAAA%3A2wvGuXQMLUHvNEiL5c3b_jUYGJ0m3XQdJfKAXDeSXDjJqc_ZrZYGR9k1RKl5qitc9a0xnOJz00KTgQ;https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/10/9/1163)
- <sup>26</sup> Laramie County Community College. Western States Bank Food Pantry now open at LCCC. 10 Sept 2018. [http://lccc.wy.edu/news/2018-9-10\\_food\\_pantry.aspx](http://lccc.wy.edu/news/2018-9-10_food_pantry.aspx)
- <sup>27</sup> Colorado State University. Rams Against Hunger. 2019. <https://lsc.colostate.edu/slice/slice-engagement/rams-against-hunger/#1505497146883-d51ee575-230e>
- <sup>28</sup> Central Oregon Community College. ASCOCC provides a Food Bank year round to all COCC students. <https://www.cocc.edu/departments/student-life/ascocc/services/community-cabinet.aspx>
- <sup>29</sup> South Seattle College. Food Pantry. <https://southseattle.edu/student-life/food-pantry>
- <sup>30</sup> CUFBA College & University Food Bank Alliance. Truth in Numbers. <https://cufba.org/resources/>
- <sup>31</sup> SGP. Mental Health and Well-Being 2019. <http://sgp.msu.edu/research/index.php>
- <sup>32</sup> Harvard University. Sustainability. What's growing on your roof? <https://green.harvard.edu/tools-resources/case-study/whats-growing-your-roof>
- <sup>33</sup> University of Arkansas. Division of Agriculture. Starting a Greenhouse Business (Part 1) Some Basic Questions. <https://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/FSA-6051.pdf>
- <sup>34</sup> New York Times. Tuition or Dinner? Nearly Half of College Student Surveyed in a New Report Are Going Hungry. 2 May 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/nyregion/hunger-college-food-insecurity.html>
- <sup>35</sup> CSA and Composting Programs. <http://www.uwyo.edu/uwacres/csa-composting/index.html>.