

THE ETHICS OF FOOD INSECURITY ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

EMILY TEAGUE

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS/CONCEPTS

- Food Insecurity: the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner. (College & University Food Bank Alliance)
- Social Minimum: the bundle of resources that a person needs in order to lead a minimally decent life in their society. (Stuart White, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- Capabilities: substantial opportunities to choose and act. (Martha Nussbaum)

STATISTICS ON THE ISSUE

- 30% of college students are food insecure
- 43% of food insecure students have a meal plan
- 56% of food insecure students are working
- 75% of food insecure students receive financial aid

(College & University Food Bank Alliance)

CENTRAL CLAIM

- Colleges and Universities have a moral obligation to address the needs of their food insecure students.
 - We'll consider Martha Nussbaum's capability theory of justice to provide reasons for this claim, then consider next best step to address food insecurity on UF's campus and more generally

CAPABILITY THEORY OF JUSTICE

- Nussbaum provides a list of ten capabilities that form her conception of the minimum requirements of justice, meaning that these opportunities are essential pieces in promoting the flourishing and meeting the needs of the people in a given society
- These are the capabilities: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination, and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species, (9) play, and (10) control over one's own environment

AFFECTS OF FOOD INSECURITY ON COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Food insecurity prevents students from engaging with most, if not all, the capabilities that Nussbaum mentions in her theory.
- People experiencing hunger and food insecurity are more likely to face physical and mental/emotional health concerns and for students this can cause a lot of barriers to their academic success.
 - This can lead to physical health issues like: heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and kidney disease, among other issues. (United Healthcare) Some emerging studies have also led to food insecurity leading to disordered eating that can be seen through like: binge-eating, purging, food restriction, and dietary restraints. (Duke Health)
 - This can lead to mental/emotional health concerns like: fear, anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness or lack of control.
- As mentioned previously, 56% of food insecure students are working jobs while taking classes. This is typically out of necessity to make ends meet, afford school, and afford as much of their basic needs as possible. Work schedules can conflict with classes, homework, and other campus commitments.

HOW TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE: AT UF

- Add meal plan options at free or reduced prices based upon student need
 - This should not be based on a student's financial aid or scholarship earnings, which typically go directly to tuition costs and not living costs
 - This could also reduce food waste by giving out food to students in need, opposed to throwing out food that isn't taken from Simply to Go or cannot be used from other stations in Henderson at the end of the night
- Keep dining halls open during breaks, even with limited hours and staffing
- Introduce "swipe sharing": Let students donate unused meals to students in need (Grace Tatter, Harvard Graduate School of Education)
 - Students at UF could also donate unused Derrick Dollars to students in need
- Start a food pantry on campus
 - Sources on starting and maintaining a food pantry are available from College & University Food Bank Alliance, Feeding America, and The Hope Center.
- Educate students about local resources and how to access government resources like SNAP, if applicable
 - Previously UF has offered an 'Adulting 101' course, these topics could be addressed in that kind of format

HOW TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE: MORE BROADLY

- Advocate for reform to SNAP benefits, making them more inclusive for those in need
- The following suggestions about policy reform come from Grace Tatter:
 - Increasing the maximum dollar amount of Pell grants to cover the true cost of attending college, including food.
 - Expand the federal programs for school lunches to students at the collegiate level.
 - Revisit guidelines for students seeking federal food aid, and lower work requirements.

(Harvard Graduate School of Education)

FURTHER READING

- N.d. “Not Enough to Go Around: The Effects of Food Insecurity on Health”, *United Healthcare*.
<https://newsroom.uhc.com/community/effects-of-food-insecurity-on-health.html>.
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<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/11/food-insecurity-college-campuses>.
- Uri, Rachel. N.d. “Food Insecurity and Disordered Eating”, *Duke Health*.
<https://eatingdisorders.dukehealth.org/education/resources/food-insecurity-and-disordered-eating>.
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