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Studying hard while hungry and broke: Striving for academic well-being while navigating food insecurity

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Abstract

Food insecurity on college campuses disproportionately impacts underrepresented students and can contribute to detrimental outcomes. Furthermore, new research with a broader scope includes universitywide populations such as faculty and staff who may also face food insecurity. The reasons behind higher-education food insecurity are complex and based in historic academic structures that create gender and race disparities. Focusing on increasing the numbers of women and minorities entering the graduate school pipeline has resulted in a more equitable distribution of master and doctoral level degrees. However, lower wages, higher workloads, and perceptions of inferior academic performance continue in the current day. These factors contribute to only 26% of women achieving full professorship and only one-third receiving external federal research funding. This reflection provides autoethnographical accounts of three female faculty members who experienced hunger during their undergraduate and graduate careers, and intermittently struggle with purchasing nutritious foods as working professionals. They also discuss their interactions with and observations of

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their students who also face challenges in securing meals on a regular basis. Three undergraduate female students who are actively involved in campus food projects share their insights from a personal and peer perspective. Grassroot initiatives including an onsite food pantry, a village garden, external funding, and ongoing research attempt to fill gaps. In addition to short-term fixes, it is important to continue conversations with university administration and community leaders to create policies and programs to address campus food insecurity.

Keywords
Food Insecurity, Underrepresented Students, Underrepresented Faculty, Higher Education, Grassroot Projects

Introduction

Food insecurity on college campuses and the unfortunate academic consequences for students who face hunger are well documented. Food insecurity and food deserts at our university are frequently discussed as topics of concern among our students. These discussions have expanded to include faculty and staff, who are reluctant to share their own financial burdens, including food insecurity, in the higher-education setting. In this article, a group of university faculty, staff, and students address universitywide hunger with various grassroot initiatives: a campus food pantry, a community resource guide on free or discounted food sources, a community garden, and guidelines for students to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Although these initiative help bridge the gap, challenges continue to exist in securing nutritious foods to meet current needs. Faculty, staff, and students focus on external grants to expand food-related resources and to conduct campus food-insecurity research. Three female faculty members and three female undergraduate students share their personal experiences with food insecurity while working on possible solutions with minimal funding.

Food-insecurity research on college campuses highlights the disproportionate burden that some students face; however, studies that include university staff and faculty are less common (Riddle et al., 2020). A group of female faculty started an informal conversation about the challenges of working in academia when the issue of food insecurity arose. We soon realized that we not only experience food insecurity as current faculty members but also did previously as underrepresented graduate and undergraduate students. Now we work at a campus nestled in a thriving community that is health-driven and oriented to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) that has a high cost of living. Students as well as faculty and staff struggle with unexpected hidden food insecurities despite a prosperous environment. This reflective essay describes the journey of three female faculty members and the experiences of three female undergraduate students to explore the impacts of food insecurity on a college campus. In addition, we discuss university initiatives that are addressing food insecurity across campus populations and the need for future research investigating the broader scope of hunger in academia.

Intergenerational Voices: All Interconnected

Kristin Osiecki (Kristin) reflects from a first-generation college student and as an assistant professor of public health who researches health inequities in disadvantaged and underrepresented populations with an invisible disability. Angie Mejia (Angie) reflects on her position as a Latina assistant professor trained in the social sciences. Like her colleagues, she shares her frustration over the lack of support and resources for her students in an institutional context where student-centeredness is mainly performative. Jessie Barnett (Jessie) reflects on her experience as a senior lecturer in public health—a field advocating for social and economic justice—while navigating the realities of life in education. Within these experiences of shared vulnerability in the economic and professional senses, we write as social justice–minded faculty and engage in a criticism of food insecurity on college campuses. Kaitlyn Pickens (Kaitlyn) reflects on her experiences as a first-generation, premedical student who works to increase food access on campus and is passionate about social justice. Kara Nyhus (Kara) is a premedical, health-science student on campus, and she reflects on her own experience searching for safe and healthy foods as a student while also

managing a severe fear of food-borne illness. Tessie Burley (Tessie) reflects on her experience as a vegan health-sciences student who faces bulimia/binge eating disorder and is especially passionate about the health and wellbeing of others, despite struggling with her own.

Food Insecurity: It's Complicated

Studies of underrepresented undergraduate students' success often examine factors such as insufficient academic preparation, difficulties navigating the overall college experience, and ongoing financial issues (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). Data support that meeting basic student needs is central to academic development and overall success; however, housing issues and food insecurity disproportionately impact underrepresented students at higher rates than their counterparts (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018). The year shown at the start of each entry represent the time in which the event took place based on notes and recollections.

> 1985: I sat in my 100-level chemistry class with three hundred students packed into the old, giant lecture hall. The professor begins, "Take a look at the person on your left and then the one on your right. One of these people will not be there by the end of the semester." I soon learned that this is a weed-out class designed to eliminate the weaker, nondeserving freshmen students. I have a hard time keeping up because of my lack of study skills acquired at my underperforming high school. I study relentlessly for hours and barely pass, even on the curve. Stress fuels high levels of anxiety that turn into panic attacks at the beginning of each exam, a ritual that continues throughout my undergraduate career. So I attend alcohol-fueled campus parties that are not just fun but a cheap way to cope with my extreme anxiety. (Kristin)

Student food programs are often a low priority on college campuses, even though they are essential to student performance and successful degree completion (Henry, 2017). Studies show that undergraduates experiencing housing and food insecurity have a higher risk of dropping out or having low academic achievement overall (Payne-Sturges et al., 2018). In addition, food-insecure students tend to forgo the required textbooks to afford food, and they struggle to complete schoolwork and attend class (Kovacs, 2016).

> 1986: I moved into an off-campus apartment. The envelopes on the kitchen table are staring back at me, "MUST MAIL TODAY!" Rent is non-negotiable, so I seal the envelope and rush it to the on-site drop box. I postdate the electricity, cable, and phone checks and shove the envelopes into my backpack. This situation is the beginning of getting behind, and always stressed until the end of the semester, hoping I can rebuild my bank account with my summer job. That leaves me short for the start of the fall semester, but I will worry about that later. The thing is, I never catch up. I am always hungry and extremely underweight, contributing to my recurring sore throats, influenza, urinary tract infections, and exhaustion. (Kristin)

> 2022: I really love this part and align with it because I and so many other students do this (never catch up financially) at the University of Minnesota at Rochester (UMR) as well. (Tessie)

> 2022: This is so fitting to the reality of the (current) student experience and is a really valuable perspective to have included. (Kara)

> 2005: The financial aid office tells me that I no longer have access to work-study funds or was it that I am no longer eligible for it since my husband "makes too much money." This situation means I have to take three buses to get to the church's food pantry. I am so tired of having to hustle here. The problem with that food pantry program is that you are supposed to be ministered to and listen to the word of God before you get a box of canned food and rice. Maybe if I pretend that I do not understand, they can give me a waiver for listening to God. "No speakie English" works with bill collectors, which I have many of. Maybe it can work here? (Angie)

Studies show that food-insecure populations on campus include those with international status, Pell grant recipients, and financial aid students (El Zein et al., 2018). At the same time, utilization of a campus food pantry by these populations tends to be low because of social stigma, insufficient information, or inconvenient hours of operation (El Zein et al., 2018; Gaines et al., 2014, Henry, 2017). In the U.S., government public health policy examines social determinants of health (SDOH) such as social, physical, economic, and environmental factors that directly and indirectly affect food insecurity. Furthermore, long-term governmental practices, including institutional racism, segregation, and discrimination, perpetuate health inequities between populations and create higher rates of negative health outcomes in underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. Underrepresented students often hail from and live in disadvantaged communities that are designated as food deserts with little or no access to affordable, nutritious foods (Dhillon et al., 2019). Transitioning into higher education exasperates these conditions expecting students to adjust to a myriad of stressors, including managing limited finances and making food choices (Dhillon et al., 2019).

> 1989: I walk over a mile to class from my worn-out apartment on the outskirts of town. I rush into the campus building, glad for the sudden wave of warmth. The classroom's hissing radiator covers the sound of my gurgling stomach, three more hours until lunch. I then walk a mile to my campus job and dig two quarters out of my pocket for the vending machine, which is stocked with my usual lunch: Diet Mountain Dew and a Butterfinger candy bar. I savor each bite as I prepare for my job as a lab inspector. For the next four hours, I crisscross the campus, completing my inspections. This experience inspires me to change my major from biochemistry to community health education. I am unsure if this is a stroke of luck or divine intervention. I go from being on academic probation to the dean's list because I am passionate about my courses, which are taught by caring professors. When I get home, I eat a box of macaroni and cheese and try to manage my 18-credit hour course load to graduate on time. Four more days of this routine until the weekend, then I continue the never-ending pattern of completing schoolwork while battling hunger. (Kristin)

Studies show that underrepresented undergraduate students face increased SDOH and educational obstacles that relate directly to college retention rates and student success (Schraedley et al., 2021). These external neighborhood stressors involving education attainment, and social justice, are complex issues that individual students have little control over. For example, low-performing public schools can limit underrepresented students' ability to navigate higher education due to a lack of college preparatory resources. Students also face social and neighborhood stressors that contribute to high dropout rates (Schraedley et al., 2021). Such conditions are perpetuated with higher-education policies that inadvertently create disparate situations for underrepresented students on campus. Addressing basic student needs such as housing and food security is nonprioritized by the administration because these financial issues are placed on the individual student, which compounds the detrimental effects to student success (Schraedley et al., 2021). The rising costs to attend college, which outpaces the buying power of family income, creates more financial hardships for families. Low-income families, with an average income of US$21,000 per year, who secure financial aid are still required to pay on average US$12,300 a year for their child to attend a 4-year public university (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018).

> 2010: I have been accepted to a Ph.D. program at a private, elite university in upstate New York. I was initially excited about my four-year stipend as a teaching assistant covering all our living expenses. However, I forgot that my stipend does not get disbursed until a month after the first semester of attendance. I have to figure out what part of our budget as a family we must stretch to afford a move across the country. I hate it when we do this to our food part of the budget since we are no longer eligible for food stamps. (Angie)

> 2013: As my Ph.D. program comes to an end, I accept a full-time postdoctoral research position at an elite university in Houston, Texas. Although academically qualified, I quickly discovered a polite but tense competitive work environment. Although no degrees are created equal, I navigate uneasy feelings of fitting in with my Ivy League peers. I am socially ostracized, spending time exploring my new surroundings alone. My moldy apartment with outdated appliances has fecal matter in the tub due to giant flying cockroaches. Soon, income-driven student loan payments start. Emergency spending for an unexpected car accident and health issue breaks my fragile budget. I embrace my ramen-noodle and mac-and-cheese diet. (Kristin)

In addition to financial pressures, underrepresented students in higher education endure nuanced challenges as they move upward in the educational process. For example, graduate and doctoral students often must learn academic norms based on the historical context of white, male, and class-privileged colleagues (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Universities create policies to address "big problems" surrounding diversity and equity within these traditional boundaries, which creates an antagonistic environment for women who challenge the power structure (Jackson, 2019). Working toward a doctorate degree with little or no social networks creates even more tension when family and friends cannot identify with the pressures of the academic world (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). This tension intensifies as underrepresented doctoral students successfully complete their degrees and face an inherent stigma of being "less than" as they compete for tenure-track positions. Although this seems like a "university culture issue," female graduate students, especially those who accept a tenure-track position, often struggle with food and nutrition insecurity based on complex elitist academic systems. Accepting a tenure-track position creates a new and challenging work environment with a disparate culture for new hires. Adaptation is highly stressful while addressing the competitive research agendas of tenured peers, being assigned to courses no one else wants to teach (in leftover time slots based on seniority), and burdensome service loads with expected higher time commitments (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Tenure-track female faculty are pressured under such practices to assure their worth by the number of hours they spend teaching, researching, and providing service to the university while continuously producing intellectual products and competing against their peers (Davies & Bansel, 2005).

Unfortunately, female faculty experience greater stressors that indirectly contribute to food and housing insecurity. Regardless of federal and state affirmative-action policies, female faculty continue to be underrepresented and underpaid compared to male faculty (Monroe et al., 2014). Over the past 50 years, academia has relied on the pipeline model, an approach of increasing the number of females in graduate school, to support women earning tenured professorial positions (Monroe et al., 2014). This model has proven to be ineffective, with 24% of full professors, 38% of associate professors, and 46% of assistant professors' positions held by women (Monroe et al. 2014). These numbers show an alarming trend of the higher percentage of women starting in tenure-track positions, with approximately half achieving tenured full professor status. Furthermore, discriminatory practices have still been prevalent over the past decade, including demonizing motherhood, sexual harassment, demeaning remarks, and unwelcoming work environments (Monroe et al., 2014).

Things Will Be Different: Present-Day Academia

The transition into academia can be surprisingly difficult, with expensive rent, lack of diversity, and acclimating into the university structure. Research shows that gender inequities persist in higher academia in which women are continued to be viewed as less competent than their male peers (Cardel et al., 2020). Female academic researchers receive less than a third of federal grants, are perceived as producing lower-quality publications, and have significantly lower salaries than men (Cardel et al., 2020). Furthermore, while poverty is a driving factor of food insecurity, women also experience higher hunger levels due to economic conditions, ethnicity, and family structure (Ma et al., 2021).

> 2017: I am searching for an apartment as new faculty in an extremely tight rental market with inflated monthly costs that crushes my housing budget. I forgo a campus parking pass and cable television. My life-long academic dream dripping with student loan debt now includes a bus pass, individual servings of macaroni and cheese with diet Pepsi, and seeking out free entertainment for minimal work-life balance. I wonder if I should have applied for jobs in the government or private sectors that pay double my salary. Every week, I question this decision while looking at job postings but hesitate because of my underrepresented students. (Kristin)

> 2019: I have accepted a position as a tenure-track assistant professor at a university in the Midwest. Forty percent of the UMR student population identifies as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); 65% of the student body identifies as underrepresented (first-generation college students, Pell grant recipients). My enthusiasm and anxiety about being a faculty here co-exist in some weird relationship: I am enthusiastic about serving BIPOC undergraduates while anxious about moving to a place full of White people. I will eventually learn that a growing population of BIPOC students does not mean that they will be supported or welcomed. (Angie)

Studies show that underrepresented minority faculty face challenges regarding discrimination and inherent bias while struggling with heavy teaching and service loads while being devalued by peers as an assumed diversity hire (Ransdell et al., 2021). University initiatives to recruit underrepresented faculty focus on the hiring process. Once obtained, the new faculty member faces scrutiny, lack of support, and constant battles to prove themselves.

> (Still) 2019: What the fuck did I get myself into? I found an apartment, but when time comes around to look at our cost of living, it appears we will pay more for taxes. The brown girl's dream of moving up the U.S. socioeconomic hierarchy and eating organic food morning, day, and night while watching cooking shows is all a bunch of *mentiras*—lies. (Angie)

> 2019: As a newer faculty member, I am fortunate to team teach with Jessie, another underrepresented public-health faculty member who is equally passionate. Also, [both being] from a major city, we discuss the challenges of integrating into a conservative socio-political environment where low/middle class and predominantly minority communities are considered "rough" or "bad." We become quick friends and share experiences. (Kristin)

Studies show higher levels of academic-based stress among faculty with the systematic practice of increased workloads, deadlines, and responsibilities associated with understaffing (Davies & Bansel, 2005). Administrators often rely on a personal-responsibility model for self-care during times of crisis, in which the stress created by the demands of the institution is placed upon the individual (Davies & Bansel, 2005). Food-related issues are now wrapped under the umbrella of self-care as a problem associated with the pandemic (accessing food while sick and quarantining, for example).

> 2020: I am chronically living what I call the Sunk Cost Theory Life. I've invested so much in being here that it must get better, right? It must. I've sunk in so much. It just must. If we keep sharing student voices and advocating for ourselves, it must, right? So, I advocate and work hard and wait. I connect with students who face a housing and food insecurity daily and wonder if they can see that I'm house-poor too. I feel like I live in a place not built for me, and I am a faculty member. This city is made for others, nonlocals, medical tourists, and an impression of health and wealth that isn't the reality of working people or students. The prices of food and essentials in our place produce thoughts like, "Someday, I won't have to splurge to get this." "If I struggle to eat on campus and in town, how do our students do it?" and "It's all connected." (Jessie)

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Having started our academic careers as underrepresented undergraduate students, we as faculty can relate to informal discussions of stomach churning, feeling lightheaded in class, and fatigue due to a lack of nutrition. We also know how scary it is to decide between buying food or paying rent, relying on a minimum wage job for a food budget, and constantly feeling behind your peers.

Food Insecurity on Campus: Leading the Change

Undergraduate students experience high levels of food insecurity, rely on cheaper food, and need more information on menu planning within a budget (Hiller et al., 2021). They also struggle due to their level in school, cooking frequency and skills, gender, and lack of a meal plan (Soldavini et al., 2019).

> 2017: There are no food offerings [at UMR] for students often found at other universities, such as food courts, cafeterias, or quick marts. Vending machines, refrigerators, and microwaves are available in common spaces. The only grocery stores within walking distance of campus are an organic/natural food co-op with higher-than-average costs, a full-service gas station with prepared foods, and a few international markets that carry little or no fresh produce. Overall, expensive food courts and restaurants cater to Mayo Clinic employees and medical tourists except for a few fast-food offerings. (Kristin)

> 2018: "And here is what a typical student kitchen looks like. Since we do not have a student meal plan, students have control over what they eat, which allows for dietary restrictions to be met. (UMR ambassador tour guide)" Perfect. If I choose to go to school here, I will be able to make sure that my food is prepared safely. As I scrutinized over the decision of which college to attend, UMR's lack of a meal plan was a determining factor for me. I would not have to go to a dining hall and painfully obsess over whether the milk used in my macaroni and cheese dish was beginning to spoil or whether the spinach in my salad was properly washed. I would be willing to eat meat because I would be able to double check the internal temperature myself. I need to be able to cook my own food. "Not having a meal plan seems concerning to some prospective students, but our students here love the experience of getting to cook their own meals. (UMR ambassador tour guide)" (Kara)

> 2018: "Are you sure you'll be ok at a college without a meal plan?" My mom had concerns about my interest in UMR, and rightfully so. "Yes, I really want to work at Mayo Clinic and go to a small school!" I reassured her, but I had an ulterior motive for choosing this campus to be my home for the next three and a half years. My high school junior self had been struggling with bulimia and binge eating disorder for six years. I had a name for my eating disorder, Ed. Not very creative but thinking of my struggles as a different being helped me. Ed was, and still is, a devastating expert when it came to restricting me from food for long hours and binging to the point of extreme discomfort. Ed and I knew that UMR was the right school for me, for numerous reasons, one of which was the lack of a student meal plan and cafeteria. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely fell in love with Mayo Clinic, the wonderful faculty, and the small student body, but these alone were not our deciding factors. At other universities, we saw meal plans, cafeterias, and abundant food pantries around every corner. What was supposed to be an exciting experience introduced so much anxiety. If we felt so compelled to eat just on the tour, imagine how miserable our student life would be. When we looked at UMR, we saw comfort. Comfort in knowing that this university would never pressure us to eat because instead of accessible food around every corner, there were study spots and expensive restaurants. As a student there, we'd continue with ease to participate in our extremely self-destructive food behaviors. No cafeterias, no meal plans, no affordable grocery stores within walking distance, and no

> time to cook meals. It was our perfect storm. A storm that protected me, because, in a time when virtually everything in my life was changing, UMR would let me keep one thing, Ed. (Tessie)
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> 2019: A rule in our syllabus allows students to eat during class. Early-morning courses are filled with certified nursing assistants (or other low-paying hospital jobs) coming off the night shift or afternoon courses have students preparing for the night shift ahead. We observe the meals around the room and can see obvious disparities. Those who arrive early run to the fridge and microwave a portion-controlled leftover meal in a variety of vessels: reused butter container, a cleaned-out spaghetti jar, or a fancy lunch box. A handful of students burst through the door and apologized for being late with lunch from the food court and a large latte from the coffee shop. (Kristin and Jessie)
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> 2019: I moved into my on-campus apartment, excited about starting a new chapter in my life, only to find that feeding myself while balancing my course load would become a nightmare. I was stranded downtown, not having a car of my own and having no idea how public transportation worked. As the semester amped up, I was studying in every free minute I had, so there was no time to worry about when I could trek to the grocery store. My only hope was that my parents would be kind enough to visit me and bring me to the grocery store. (Kaitlyn)

Food insecurity and lack of nutrition are not only about health issues associated with being hungry. Food-insecure students report higher rates of physical health issues and are at risk for depression (Payne-Sturges et al., 2018). Grade-point averages are lower when students report food insecurity versus those who are not food insecure (Maroto et al., 2015). Initiatives intended to address student food insecurity range from grassroots movements to federal policy and vary in effectiveness, accessibility, and institutional support.

> 2019: We did it! Ed and I made it to our perfect school. So far classes are going well, I really like my professors and have two nice roommates. When I do eat, it's always peanut butter and jelly sandwiches towards the end of the day. Those are all the meals that I have time to make, and they never disappoint. They're so convenient too because I'm vegetarian. However, after a few weeks of PB&J's, I realized that I had technically been a vegan this entire time. "Well, let's see how long I can keep this up," I thought to myself. While veganism is commonly assumed to be very difficult to maintain, Ed and I had no trouble at all. All was well until I began to struggle to keep up with my classes, isolated myself, and always felt an overwhelming level of fatigue. (Tessie)
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> 2019-2022: You see, it's not that I don't like the opportunity to cook my own meals. I love that I get to make the decision of what I cook. And when I cook. Or … to cook. Look at the time … it's too late to cook now, but I have leftovers from yesterday—I'll just eat those. I have class well into the afternoon and work evenings. By the time I return to my apartment, I'm too exhausted to cook, and there are assignments due before midnight. I finished the leftovers yesterday, but I'll just have some yogurt. I have a lot to do anyway, so this works out better. Homework takes priority over meal preparation, and as the semester progresses, I can't rationalize taking a few hours out of the day to get groceries, wash the produce, and put the food away. I'm out of yogurt … but I have Cocoa Wheats in the cupboard. And break is only two weeks away. Between that and my rice, I have enough for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When I go home for break, my parents can take me to the grocery store, and I'll be able to restock then. Plus, I'll have a little more time once all of my exams are done and I'm on break. I've had rice for eight days in a row. … I can't do another day of rice. If I just go to bed now, I won't have to worry about cooking anything until lunch since I'm not a big breakfast person. I blame it on laziness. I'm just

> being lazy right? It was a long day. … Maybe I can cook tomorrow. I'll just have some ice cream and go to bed. I deserve that after the long day I've had. I had to be at work by 8:00 a.m., and I worked until noon. Class started at 12:30 p.m., so I didn't have time to get lunch today. I'll make something now. I wonder what is in the kitchen pantry. … Not all of the ingredients I need are mine. I'll just wait until my roommate gets back, and I'll ask them if I can use their noodles. It's 10:00 p.m. and my roommate hasn't come back yet. My stomach growls, but I'm not actually that hungry. "I'll order you something." I deny. I don't want to waste that much money on pasta. I have a protein meal shake. That will hold me over until morning. When the opportunity arises to actually cook a meal, students greatly appreciate the opportunity to create something that fits the comfort, safety, and dietary standards they want from their food. Yet, not having a meal plan means that students are not held accountable for spending their dining hall money to eat. Going to the grocery store is an expensive and major hassle, and the task is deemed as less important than doing well in one's classes. After accounting for student commitments and expectations, many of us are too mentally and physically exhausted to rationalize cooking. Pass the ramen, please. (Kara)

> 2022: Now Ed and I are juniors. I'm twenty-one, and he's been loyally at my side for eleven years. I have been thinking for a while about what I should contribute to this paper. After reading what the other authors had written, I realized I needed to "expose" my Ed. Why did I choose this school? Why have I struggled here? Why am I so passionate about this research? There are many answers to these questions, with one common thread: I am sick. In no way am I saying that this school is the sole reason I am still struggling, but the environment here is a factor in my life that enables my harmful behaviors. This university makes the dangerous assumption that prospective and current students have healthy, stable relationships with food. Many do not. Rarely does a day pass where I don't hear someone say, "Gosh, I haven't eaten anything yet today," at 4 p.m. This should not be normal, and I hope this paper helps change that. (Tessie)

Food insecurity contributes to negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety (Bruening et al., 2016) and everyday stressors were then magnified at the beginning of the pandemic. As the pandemic wears on with less expectations of "getting back to normal," the ongoing events create a divergent dialog surrounding food insecurity on campus. If anything, hunger is taking a back seat to the COVID-19 realities of illness, long-term symptoms, caregiving, and navigating the changing rules with masks, distancing, and appropriate gatherings.

On-Campus Food Pantry and Resource Guide

The UMR food pantry offers donated nonperishable items from the Area Channel One Foodbank and near-expiring produce donated from the Co-op Grocery Store. Funds from a local donor have recently allowed for offerings of basic culturally inclusive foods like rice, curry, and spices, and fresh perishable staple items like milk, eggs, and butter.

> 2019: I learned from my students that they go to the SSB restaurant since buying a cup of soup (at US$3.99) allows them to fill up on the free breadsticks from the self-serve area. They tell me that they pile up on breadsticks so they can have them for dinner. Three days later, I decided to meet with senior administrators, and they told me they "are working on it," "it" being the food-insecurity issue. I retorted back with, "show me." They say they have another meeting to attend, and they ask me to find a time on their calendars for "another chat." (Angie)

> 2021: Working as the food security intern for the campus food pantry, I was eager to address food access on campus. My top priority was keeping the pantry stocked, and I quickly learned that this was not a simple task. Each week, I filled my entire car with boxes from Channel One, then unpacked all the items and

stocked the shelves. Within 24 hours, almost all the new food would be gone, and this would occur every time I dropped off new items from our community partners. I ordered as many items as I could to keep the pantry full. Still, during the winter and spring, when the community garden was unable to provide produce, the items in the pantry were often high in sugar or highly processed. We provided food to the students, but was the food providing the nutrients they needed to succeed in higher education? (Kaitlyn)

2022: More than just an empty fridge: This photograph [see Figure 1] shows the fridge in the student food pantry. This picture was the last in a sequence from 12 days in a row that the fridge was empty. This fridge rarely saw typical staples like eggs, milk, and fresh produce. The fridge is always something that students check during their food pantry visit, but typically end up disappointed and wanting more. (Tessie)

Figure 1. Empty Fridge in the Student Food Pantry

The campus food pantry exists due to dedicated faculty and staff who volunteer their time outside the realm of expected service. Students are involved with the food pantry for a variety of different reasons, including as volunteer hours or to earn course credit. Any expansion plans are reliant on this volunteer group to expend additional time writing grants or finding donors. At this time, the administration has not deemed this a priority for funding or student success outcomes. To help supplement the limited food from the pantry, a campus food guide lists restaurant discounts, grocery delivery, free shuttles to big-box retailers, food offered at churches, and other food pantries throughout the city. To reduce food waste, a campuswide opt-in mailing list was created to notify subscribers when leftover food from campus events was available. The resource guide is helpful but also requires additional time and effort for students to take advantage of these resources.

The Village Community Garden and Learning Center

Angie is the principal academic investigator on a campus-community participatory learning initiative, in collaboration with the Village Community Garden and Learning Center (VCGLC), to understand the role of organized garden projects in decreasing food insecurity and facilitating resilience in diverse groups in the community. Using a mixed-method approach, Angie and her team are examining the experiences of two communities in our metropolitan area: current and new growers with VCGLC plots, and university students who supplement their vegetable and fruit intake with produce provided by the food pantry The community garden serves as a community learning laboratory for several university initiatives that include increasing access to free fresh fruits and vegetables via a community garden site. Due to an existing grant that supports access to a garden coordinator/educator, students can grow fresh vegetables and fruits to supplement their food allowance. In addition to space and education to grow food, growers not affiliated with the campus donate surplus fruits and vegetables to the local community college and our campus student food pantries. As a community garden receiving support mostly via the labor, time,

and resources from individuals, university staff, faculty, and students, the Village cannot completely supplement a student's needs for nutritious food. Nevertheless, it has been a creative response to the unique situation of our students (Mejia et al., 2020).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Undergraduate students are now eligible for SNAP benefits through COVID-19–related expanded federal food entitlements (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2021). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO) has reported that financial aid is insufficient to support all college costs (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). In the past, students have had limited access to SNAP because they did not meet the criteria (U.S. GAO, 2018). Furthermore, 65% of colleges surveyed for the report stated that students are not informed of their possible eligibility under the SNAP program (U.S. GAO, 2018). As such, UMR staff advocates for using SNAP's recently created assessment tool and application guide to assist students wishing to apply for benefits.

Currently, female faculty, staff, and students are addressing campuswide food-insecurity issues with inclusionary measures, removing stigmas, and conducting research to identify the needs of students. Campus food-insecurity issues are well studied, especially regarding negative student outcomes related to hunger and access to nutritious foods. Achievement gaps and success measures are directly related to basic housing and food needs that are not commonly addressed at the higher-education policy level. Underrepresented students face additional stressors with integrating into campus culture, and also may experience the lack of essential resources that support their well-being. The recruitment of underrepresented students to meet university diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic goals need to be expanded to examine campus resources that support their basic needs and evaluate the effectiveness of campus nutrition programs. Also, research investigating SDOH factors that affect food insecurity both on and off campus can highlight chronic hunger problems.

Literature on campuswide food insecurity affecting faculty and staff is limited. Future research is needed to explore this issue, especially considering the inequitable and exclusionary practices of women and minorities in academia. Food insecurity goes beyond individual female faculty to potentially affect their family households and exacerbate other stressors women face as primary caregivers, which is even more challenging since the pandemic.

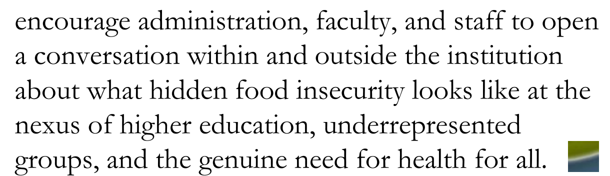
Autoethnographies provide an in-depth perspective of personal experiences, which also makes female faculty and students vulnerable to institutional scrutiny, especially when exposing potential injustices based on race and gender. Possible limitations exist for faculty members to share their experiences based on the stigma of letting colleagues know of their food-insecurity issues and university climates, making it difficult to scrutinize historical biases in academia. Moving forward, our food-insecurity research design incorporates peer-led focus groups and interviews that support anonymity. Validated survey surveys that investigate campuswide food insecurity that can be shared across campuses can provide a bigger picture of hidden hunger in our institutions.

Conclusion

The food pantry and community garden continue to seek outside funds through donations or funding proposals submitted by female faculty, to meet the ongoing needs of students, faculty, and staff. The food pantry has expanded to include a gently used clothing closet that contains attire for job interviews. The community garden continues to grow and support our diverse ethnic populations both on and off campus with enriching experiences for students and community members. It serves as a cultural support initiative for those who have immigrated and settled in our community with the ability to grow their own food.

The pandemic has created unforeseen circumstances that can cause more significant disparities in food access. For example, numerous institutions either closed their doors or released faculty or staff because of budgetary constraints. Financial struggles forced many universities to institute a pay cut for personnel during the pandemic. For some institutions, the original salaries have been restored. Others received an across-the-board minimum raise, which puts underrepresented faculty behind

the pace of a competitive salary beyond the disparate conditions between genders. In the heart of a prosperous and growing community, basic access to affordable, nutritious, and readily available foods for campus populations is not readily seen. We encourage administration, faculty, and staff to open a conversation within and outside the institution about what hidden food insecurity looks like at the nexus of higher education, underrepresented groups, and the genuine need for health for all.



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