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Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential

**Food Insecurity in Tennessee Higher Education
Convening Highlights
November 15, 2022**

Convening Agenda

1. ***What Do We Know*** About Food Insecurity in Higher Education?
 - a. **Group Discussion: Defining Food Insecurity**
2. ***What Have We Learned*** About Food Insecurity Across Tennessee Higher Education?
 - a. **Preliminary Survey Results**
3. ***Where Do We Go*** from Here?
 - a. **Group Discussion: Practice, Research, and Policy**

Background information

T.C.A. § 49-7-214 mandates THEC to submit a report to the Tennessee General Assembly on issues of food insecurity among students at public institutions of higher education in Tennessee.

Breakout Session #1: Defining Food Insecurity in Tennessee Higher Education

There is no universal definition of food insecurity specific to the higher education space. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), however, provides an operational definition for food (in)security generally and how to measure it. During the first breakout session, attendees discussed how food insecurity in higher education is (or should be) defined.

Reactions to the Literature Review

- Data points shared in the literature review are not surprising; however, they are alarming and should act as a call to action.
- Addressing the societal stigma associated with food insecurity is necessary to mitigating student experiences of food insecurity.
- Food insecurity resources should be sensitive towards different student subgroups, cultural preferences, and religious dietary restrictions.

Is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition suitable for use in the higher education context?

- The USDA's definition and measurements are valid for the general adult population but have not been validated within the higher education context. There are ongoing assessments of their validity and use in the higher education context.
- The USDA definition does not capture the importance of food quality or its relationship to larger student wellbeing.

What are some factors or causes of food insecurity that are unique to college students and how might we consider these when building our definition?

- Future definitions should fit the unique context of the student population and consider factors such as:
 - A change in a student's environment (e.g., on campus, off campus, at home, etc.).
 - Access to cooking facilities or cooking abilities.
 - Differences in student subgroups and populations.
 - Students with dependents.

Breakout Session #2: Practice, Research, and Policy

During the second breakout session, attendees chose from three tracks: Practice, Research, and Policy.

- **Track 1 (Practice):** Addressing the stigma of food insecurity
 - Students can sometimes feel undeserving of or 'guilty' for utilizing resources and see other students as in more need than they.
 - Messaging pertaining to food insecurity resources should encourage all students to utilize resources, regardless of need.
 - There is a need for additional education and awareness about the realities of food insecurity on campuses.
- **Track 2 (Research):** Collecting data on food insecurity
 - Incorporating student voices within research will provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of students facing food insecurity.
 - Additional research should evaluate chronic or continual usage of campus-based resources which could also indicate a deeper unmet need.
 - The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) may consider convening statewide taskforce of academic researchers and practitioners who are actively studying food insecurity that could share resources, recommendations, and best practices.
 - Absent existing quantitative measures of food insecurity among students, rates may be proxied through Pell or needs-based aid eligibility.
- **Track 3 (Policy):** Ensuring food security for all Tennessee postsecondary students
 - Potential areas for change include:

- State financial aid policies.
- Increasing completion grant-type funds.
- Food deserts and a lack of adequate cooking and meal preparation time on campuses.
- A statewide expansion of SNAP including a statewide notification system for SNAP eligibility.
- Current barriers to addressing food insecurity in Tennessee higher education include:
 - Information sharing.
 - Maintaining current information about resources for students.
 - Lack of dedicated staff and resources.

Additional Resources Shared

Anderson, A., Lazarus, J., & Anderson Steeves, E. (2022). Navigating hidden hunger: An exploratory analysis of the lived experience of food insecurity among college students. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(19), 12952. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912952>

“College students are a vulnerable population to food insecurity (FI), which has significant implications for academic and health outcomes. The aims of this study were to explore the meaning of FI and its impact on students’ lived experiences and food decisions, facilitators and barriers to food access as a student, and students’ proposed solutions to address FI. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with thirty students from a large, public land grant university in the Southeast United States.”

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2022). Mission critical: The role of community colleges in meeting students’ basic needs. www.cccse.org/NR22

“Since its inception, CCCSE has helped colleges use data to better understand and engage their students. CCCSE has long called attention to the many obligations community college students negotiate in addition to their studies, including work; caring for dependents; and managing the financial demands of tuition, other college costs, and living expenses.

The 2021 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) takes a deeper look at these challenges by exploring housing and food insecurity among community college students.”

Healthy Minds Study

“For 15 years, the [Healthy Minds Network] has administered the Healthy Minds Study, a population-level survey of post-secondary student mental health, collecting

over half a million responses from students at more than 450 colleges and universities. The network's research efforts have expanded into other facets of mental health in educational settings, including the role and health of faculty and staff."

[National College Health Assessment](#)

"The ACHA-National College Health Assessment (NCHA) is a nationally recognized research survey that can assist you in collecting precise data about your students' health habits, behaviors, and perceptions. "

[Trellis Company® Student Financial Wellness Survey](#)

"The Trellis Research annual, nationwide student financial wellness survey is focused on supporting participating institutions with greater insights into the connection between student financial stress and student success on their campuses"

Next Steps

THEC will continue to collect and to analyze data from a survey of campus administrators on food insecurity. In 2023, THEC will submit to the General Assembly pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-7-214. In addition, THEC will coordinate a second convening of stakeholders on food insecurity in Tennessee higher education.