

Feeding Western: Campus Food Assessment

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Executive Summary

Indicators both nationally, regionally, and internally suggest food insecurity exists on Western Washington University's campus. Nationally, 48% of students experience food insecurity.¹ Regionally, in 2016 the Bellingham Food Bank reported 165K client visits, up 13% from 2015.² On campus, Western's Financial Aid office reports \$15,000 going towards Viking Free Food Credits and unofficial assistance with food assistance paperwork. However, Western does not know the extent to which hunger exists on its campus. We propose that Western perform a food assessment, to research potential food issues pertaining to students. We propose an emphasis on increasing access to healthy food and culturally appropriate food, and to raise awareness to student food insecurity. Funding would require one paid staff managing the initial data collection research. The staff member could utilize cost-saving and educational opportunities such as a grad student, nutrition or other related class, or undergraduate to accomplish the research. We are then asking that Western designate a department to researching and addressing food insecurity, if issues are found on campus. Subsequent projects from the initial food assessment could include a food pantry, partnering with the Bellingham Food Bank, or simply aggregating student resources in an effort to mitigate food insecurity on campus.

Statement of Need

"I have worked in survey research here on campus for the past 9 years and I don't know of any data on food insecurity with students." ~Beth Hartsoch, WWU Institutional Research

Issues with food insecurity, food access, and food health are evidenced nationally, regionally, and on Western's campus. Affecting food access, the USDA reports almost 10%, or approximately 30 million people in the US, live in low-income areas more than 1 mile from a grocery store.³ People living in lower-income neighborhoods, communities

¹ Dubick, J. Matthews, B. Cady, C. (2016). Students Against Hunger: Hunger on Campus. Retrieved from: http://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger_On_Campus.pdf

² Bellingham Food Bank. (2016). 2016 By the Numbers. Retrieved from: <https://www.bellinghamfoodbank.org/sharing-our-work/2016bythenumbers/>

³ Ver Ploeg, M., Breneman, V., Dutko, P., Williams, R., Snyder, S., Dicken, C., & Kaufman, P. (2012). Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food. *Economic Research Report*, 143, 1-39.

of color, or rural communities are less likely to have healthy nutritional access.⁴ With a lack of nutritious foods, communities come to depend on low quality and highly processed foods. From a public health perspective the crisis of food-related epidemics such as diabetes and obesity has caused examination, and sometimes scrutiny, of the current food system.⁵ An ironic contradiction between hunger and obesity exists in populations struggling with undernourishment. Worldwide several of the same countries experiencing hunger are at the same time experiencing a growth rate of obesity.⁶ In the US, approximately two thirds of adults are overweight, while at the same time over one billion people are overweight worldwide.⁷ Today the burden of obesity is displaced primarily on individual responsibility, as opposed to manufacturers, advertisers, and government.⁸ How do we plan for healthier communities?

According to the UN, everyone has the right to adequate food.⁹ How do we apply solutions of food insecurity and access to university settings? No evidence of a food assessment or similar research for Western was found, though many tools and programs exist for internal research. It is assumed that Western is already collecting some of the metrics useful food assessment, however the data is not aggregated and food insecurity does not appear to be one of the current metrics collected.

What is a food assessment?

Food assessments are a first step in planning for community food security, or when community members have access to safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritionally adequate food and diets on a regular basis.¹⁰ Food assessments are traditionally performed for cities, counties, and other municipalities with the intention to collect and disseminate the findings to community decision-makers and leaders for improved appropriate strategies.¹¹ Food assessments frequently encompass food sovereignty and justice issues, including issues of hunger, food insecurity, access and geographical location, telling the story of food in the community.¹²

⁴ Bell, J., Mora, G., Hagan, E., Rubin, V., & Karpyn, A. (2013). Access to healthy food and why it matters: A review of the research. *Philadelphia, PA: The Food Trust.*

⁵ Abelson, P., & Kennedy, D. (2004). The obesity epidemic. *Science*, 304(5676), 1413-1413.

⁶ FAO.(2015) The State of Food Insecurity

⁷ World Health Organization. (2002). *The world health report 2002: reducing risks, promoting healthy life.* World Health Organization.

⁸ Abelson, P., & Kennedy, D. (2004). The obesity epidemic. *Science*, 304(5676), 1413-1413.

⁹ De Schutter, O. (2014). UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. *Report on agroecology and the right to food.*

¹⁰ Pothukuchi, K. (2004). Community food assessment a first step in planning for community food security. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23(4), 356-377.

¹¹ Pothukuchi, K. (2004). Community food assessment a first step in planning for community food security. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23(4), 356-377.

¹² Bell-Sheeter, A., A-dea Romero, V., Segrest, V., & Foxworth, R. (2014). First Nations Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool 2nd Edition.

<http://www.firstnations.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/FSAT/mobile/index.html>

Defining Food Insecurity

Indicators both internally, regionally, and nationally suggest food insecurity exists on Western's campus. The USDA defines food insecurity as, "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways." Food security and insecurity are measured along a continuum in four ranges, including 1.) High food security, where households have no problem accessing enough food, 2.) Marginal food security, where households have trouble time-to-time accessing food, 3.) Low food security, where households have lower quality, but the intake level of food is normal, and 4.) Very low food security, where at times household eating patterns are disrupted due to lack of resources for adequate levels of food. The term food insecurity refers to the "low food security" and "very low food security" range on this continuum.

1. **High food security**—Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food.
2. **Marginal food security**—Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.
3. **Low food security**—Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.
4. **Very low food security**—At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

Source: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#insecurity>

Students Nationally

Indicators nationally suggest food insecurity exists on Western's campus. National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness states approximately half of students (48%) report food insecurity within past 30 days. One fifth of students qualify as having very low levels of food security. According to the research, food insecurity also disproportionately affects students of color and can be an indicator of housing insecurity.¹³ According to a 2013 Feeding America report, 31% of households choose between paying for food and education.¹⁴ Measuring food insecurity has taken place on college campuses across the country. Humboldt University founds 53% of students

¹³ Dubick, J., Matthews, B., Cady, C. (2016). Students Against Hunger: Hunger on Campus. Retrieved from: http://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger_On_Campus.pdf

¹⁴ Feeding America. (2013) Hunger In America in 2014 Executive Summary. Retrieved from: <http://help.feedingamerica.org/HungerInAmerica/hunger-in-america-2014-summary.pdf>

experience food insecurity.¹⁵ Students without consistent access to quality food during the school day had lower GPA by about half a point compared to students who were well fed.¹⁶

Hunger Regionally

In viewing information locally, food insecurity could be assumed on Western's campus. In 2016 the Bellingham Food Bank reports 165K client visits, a 13% increase from the prior year.¹⁷ Feeding America estimates in 2014 that 15-19% of Whatcom County residents experienced food insecurity.¹⁸ Reflecting nationwide statistics, Whatcom County performed a Community Food Assessment in 2011 reporting 15% of residents saying the amount of food they had was "often or sometimes not enough."¹⁹

Food Insecurity At Western

Food insecurity exists on campuses across the country. Yet students on campuses nationwide can either not qualify for food assistance or are unable to use food benefits at the closest available stores, since available stores may not accept Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, especially on college campuses. Preliminary data on Western's campus shows most students know someone who is unable to afford the necessary foods for a complete diet, according to our sample survey of approximately 50 students. The Financial Aid office reports spending \$15,000 towards Viking Free Food Credits and unofficial assistance with paperwork for student seeking SNAP benefits. In our search however, it does not appear that Western has staff dedicated to researching or monitoring food insecurity amongst students. The Office of Survey Research has not been aware of research on food insecurity at Western in at least the past nine years. The Associated Students Social Issues Research Center (SIRC), who is responsible for bringing social issue to light, mentioned during our interview that the idea of an on-campus food bank has been discussed within the group.

Western takes pride in students' well-being. A food assessment is an opportunity to place students' best interest in mind. If food insecurity is found on Western's campus as

¹⁵ Maguire, J., O'Neill, M., Aberson, C. (2016). California State University Food and Housing Security Survey: Emerging Patterns from the Humboldt State University Data. Retrieved from: <http://hsuohsnap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ExecutiveSummary.docx1-14-16.pdf>

¹⁶ Dreier, P., Bomba, M., Romero, R. (2016) Occidental College, Urban & Environmental Policy Institute. Food Insecurity Among University of California Employees. Retrieved from: <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3145000/Food-Insecurity-Among-University-of-California.pdf>

¹⁷ Bellingham Food Bank. (2016). 2016 By the Numbers. Retrieved from: <https://www.bellinghamfoodbank.org/sharing-our-work/2016bythenumbers/>

¹⁸ Feeding America. (2016). Map the Meal Gap 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2014/map-the-meal-gap-2014-exec-sum.pdf>

¹⁹ Burrows, C., Betz, D. (2011). Whatcom County Community Food from 2008-2009. Washington State University Whatcom County Extension. Retrieved from: http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/cfa/docs/CFA2011/CommunityFoodAssessment_all_v7.pdf

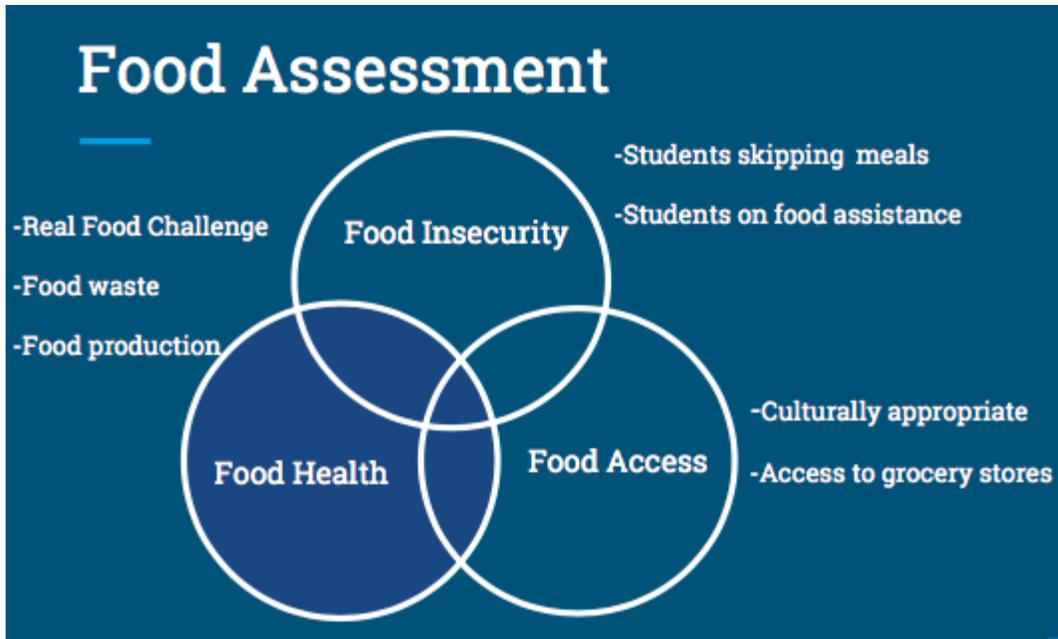
indicators suggest, the hope will be to establish a program at Western tasked with researching, monitoring, and mitigating food insecurity amongst Western students.

Project Description

We see a food assessment on Western's campus as imperative to the well being of the student body. We recommend three phases for the Feeding Western Project. Phase 1, perform a food assessment to research food related issues on Western's campus. Phase 2, aggregate and identify needs. Phase 3, if food insecurity is found, implement appropriate project(s) to address the issues. We propose a campus food assessment as a first step in a set subsequent phases, if found necessary. The food assessment is important in identifying a baseline in order to discover the extent to which food insecurity is an issue at Western Washington University.

Phase 1: Food Assessment

Phase 1 will entail institutional research regarding food insecurity, food access, and food health. Food insecurity is a primary focus of the food assessment, though the additional metrics of food access and food health are valuable in strengthening a more holistic examination of food on Western's campus, giving context to the issue at large. Areas to measure in for the topic of food insecurity could include number of number of students skipping meals on a regular basis due to lack of resources or number of students on food assistance. In terms of food insecurity, though the Financial Aid Department allocates programs and funding such as Viking Free Food Credits to students, data to back those numbers is unfounded, as far as we can tell. How large is the issue of food insecurity at Western? Could it be larger than current funds allocate? The food access theme could include questions on how culturally appropriate food is to student groups and how accessible food is to students. Are there barriers to fresh food? Are students able to regularly make trips to a full service grocery store? The topic of food health could include metrics on the Real Food Challenge, a nationwide program aimed at measuring local, organic, and fair trade food. Though a direct connection between "healthy" foods and Real foods is not necessarily inherent, the data on Real Food already being measured would give the university an idea of fresh, locally purchased, and relatively unprocessed food. Food health could also quantify food produced on campus at the Outback Farm and Arntzen garden and waste produced, two metrics already being collected. Overarching questions could also include: Are students aware of available resources for food insecurity on campus? Is there more that could be done to support students in need of food assistance?



The three areas of focus for the food assessment, *Food Insecurity*, *Food Access*, and *Food Health* (darker, to signify most of the data is actively collected).

Food Assessment Draft Outline

Food Insecurity

- Jobs, income, parent demographic (brief)
- Food plans on/off campus
- Number of students that skip meals
- Number of students on food assistance

Food access

- Cultural appropriateness of food on campus
- Food locations and access of grocery stores on and close to campus

Food health

- Real Food
- Food production
- Food waste

Phase 2: Aggregate and Identify Need

After the food assessment is performed, the data will need to be analyzed, aggregated, and needs identified. We recommend aggregating information and resources for students, faculty, and decision makers in a useable format such as an online website with info graphics regarding results of the food assessment, if appropriate. According to the level of food insecurity on campus evidenced by the analysis, campus needs can be identified.

Phase 3: Implementation

If student food insecurity is discovered, subsequent programs should be initiated following the results of the initial research. Using data from the food assessment in Phase 1, the possible project implementations could include: an on-campus food pantry, mobile food bank unit in partnership with the Bellingham Food Bank, cooking classes for students in the dorms or other facilities, access to food grown on campus, aggregating resources for students such as a website, help with food assistance paperwork, and/or transportation to food sources such as a carpool to the food bank, farmers market, or grocery store. In supporting the programming, opportunities for student exist such as outreach to fellow students, service learning, and educational opportunities for supporting the programing. Humboldt's OhSNAP! program offers students opportunities to volunteer, intern, research, or do class project with the organization.

Budget

The food assessment in Phase 1 could incur minimal costs and staff time as well as provide educational opportunities for students. In performing the food assessment, a grad student, nutrition or other related class, or an undergrad could gain valuable research collection skills as well as understanding complex social issues. University personnel are currently collecting several of the intended data sets. For example, dining services and the Outback Farm are collecting metrics on Real Food purchases, food waste food, and production, which satisfy our food health theme. Educational and service learning opportunities exist for the food assessment as well as future monitoring or project implementation, if the need arises. The Office of Survey Research roughly estimates drafting, vetting, and publishing questions regarding food insecurity on an existing Western survey would take about 10 staff hours.

Conclusion

As indicators suggest, food insecurity exists on Western's campus as we have seen nationally, regionally, and internally. Performing a food assessment gives Western an opportunity for impact for students in need. Food insecurity is more than likely affecting our most vulnerable student population, disproportionately affecting our students of color, and possibly indicating homelessness. Food assessment research has the potential to bring to light some of the issues surrounding food. We propose an emphasis on increasing access to healthy food and culturally appropriate food, and to raise awareness to student food insecurity. The initial funding for such a project is relatively minimal. Some of the metrics are already being collected, merely needing to be aggregated. Engaging staff, faculty, students, and related classes also provides additional service learning opportunities. In the future, we hope Western will continue to be a leader in addressing student issues such as food insecurity, and take a more complete look at student well being on campus.

Appendix

Additional Resources

Recommend resources in guiding the research and implementation process include Whatcom County Community Food Assessment²⁰, University of Minnesota Morris²¹, and Humboldt State University²². Though it does not specify students from residents, the WSU Whatcom County Community Food Assessment provides information and a model for performing research in the same region. The University of Minnesota Morris collected data for students and city residence, monitored, and implemented programs surrounding healthy food using a 5-year grant for \$125,000 per year from the Blue Cross. The food assessment research took one year. Subsequent projects stemming from the research include educating students on healthy eating, adapting the menu of their on campus dining services, and adding a campus community garden. Humboldt State University's OhSNAP program initially had support from a graduate student project. Subsequent research has been performed by the university with plans to conduct even more through research. OhSNAP! provides online and physical resource for both students in need and students wanting to involve themselves with the program.

²⁰ <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/cfa/>

²¹ <https://www.morris.umn.edu/healthyeating/foodassessment/>

²² <http://hsuohsnap.org>