Scrap & Leftovers:
the challenges and strategies of food insecure university students

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The Class

Anthropological Field Methods
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Why are black male retention rates so low at The University of Akron?

Understanding 17% Persistence:
A comparative study of African American/black student experiences, university planning, and resource utilization to address retention and graduation

The Worm in the Apple:
Exploring Food Insecurity on The University of Akron Main Campus

Scraps & Leftovers:
The challenges and strategies of food insecure university students
**Pilot Study**

**Food Survey Results: 466 usable responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>Percentate</td>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
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<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>36.91%</td>
<td>609</td>
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In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

In the last 12 months, have you ever had to make the choice to pay for school or education related expenses instead of food?

Have you ever considered leaving school, "dropping out", because there wasn't enough money for food?

![Pie chart showing food security status](chart.png)

- **63.1%** are food secure
- **36.9%** are food insecure
Rates From Previous Research

- Oregon State University, 59% (Patton-Lopez et al. 2014)
- Illinois University system, combined, 35% (Morris et al. 2016)
- University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa, 14.1% (Gaines et al. 2014)
- University of Massachusetts Boston, 27% (Silva et al. 2017)
- University of Hawaii – Manoa, 45% (Chapparo et al. 2009)
- Arizona State University, 32% (Breuning et al. 2016)
- University of North Texas, (Henry 2017)

University of Akron, 36%
The University of Akron

- Enrollment, 25,157 (2015/2016 academic year)
  White 72.6%, African American 11%
  Female 46.8%, Male 55.4%

- Commuter students, 84%
- Pell eligible, 34.7%
- Majors, 300~
- Grad students, 3,000~
The presidency
Methods

- Surveys using an Opportunistic Random sample.
- Interviews using a Purposive sample.
- Participant observation.
- Monitoring social media.
- Walk-by Fruitings.

I'm not who I would have thought I’ve been in high school. (Kaylee)

Well, actually that help wasn’t out there, so we’re really – I’ve actually been in starvation mode. I’ve lost weight. So, I know exactly what that’s like. You literally starve. (Zoe)
Questions to answer

• Who are the food insecure students?
  Are there any correlations between their life situation like housing or work?
  What about a correlation with their family situation?

• What kinds of coping strategies are they using?
  How do these strategies affect their success?

• How is this affecting them as students and as emerging adults?
  Are they sticking with school?
  Are they getting out of it what they are supposed to?

• What resources are available to them?
  Which ones are really useful?

• Is the lack of food impacting their success beyond college?
Determinant Questions

- In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?

- In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?

- In the last 12 months, have you ever had to make the choice to pay for school or educations related expenses instead of food?

- Have you ever considered leaving school, “dropping out”, because there wasn’t enough money for food?
Characteristics of the Food Insecure Sample

- **Currently using SNAP**: 22 (10%)
- **Gender: Female**: 114 (53%)
- **Gender: Male**: 95 (45%)
- **Gender: Other**: 4 (2%)
- **Has a child**: 10 (4%)
- **Has child support**: 2 (1%)
- **Independent Student**: 89 (42%)
- **International Student**: 3 (1%)
- **Lives off campus**: 180 (84%)
- **Lives on campus**: 34 (16%)
- **Share food with others**: 26 (73%)
- **Use Pell grant funds**: 80 (30%)
- **Use Credit Card for food**: 77 (47%)
- **Working**: 148 (70%)
Correlations

- Race; (p=.038)
  - 72% white
  - 14% African American
  - 13% various other
- Pell grant eligibility, 30% (p=.002)
- Housing, 84% off campus (p=.210)
- Dependent/Independent, 42% (p=.00000350)
Interviews

- Climate affects sample size.
- With few supports, an operational bottleneck doesn’t exist.
- I knew people who were food insecure, who would converse with me – and still would not talk on the record.
- Relevance vs validity.
Campus Climate

Social Media Postings

Yik Yak
Have you ever been so broke you had sleep for dinner?

Yik Yak
I haven't eaten since 12 pm yesterday #poverty

Fruitings

You know you're broke and hungry when...

“You haven’t eaten anything but plain pasta in a month.”
“When you see a sign for free fruit and immediately hunt it down.”
“You go to campus events just for food!”
“You are both broke and hungry…”
“You have sleep for dinner.”
“You don’t have spam or ramen noodles or you make sugar sandwiches.”
“You have popcorn for dinner.”
Golden Nuggets

In colleges everywhere it all starts with education within the school. We shouldn’t feel ashamed that we have to go get food.

- Sue

I cannot concentrate...that’s how it is...it distracts me from what I need to do and what I should be thinking about.

- Megan

Friends don’t really want...want me to hang out with him anymore because, um, I’ll oftentimes ask to crash the night.

- Raymond

It was hard to focus during lectures, it was hard to take notes....

- Helen

It’s pretty expensive [campus food], it’s hard for a lot of college students to be able to afford that.

- Reanne

It’s like life just imploded with the extra pressure.

- Zoe

Everybody feeds each other, helps out in some way.

- Kylee
Traditional Students & Liminality

• Transformative time and place, historically a Rite of Passage.

• Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood.

• Brain growth, that last 5%, skull sutures seal, dendrites and dendritic spines are still growing.

• Synaptic connections become fully developed.

• Identity Construction, away from familial identity and establishing individual.

• Expectations of independence with limited ability to carry this out.
Non-traditional Students and Social Roles

• In 2009 40% of college students were non-traditional
  - 25 years old or older
  - 17% of them are over 35
• More likely to have long-term liabilities.
• More likely to be parents.
• More likely to be care-givers.
Independence

Dissonance between legal definition and cultural understanding.

- Social independence
- Housing
- Financial
- Insurance
- Health care
- Taxes
- Financial Aid
Financial Cycle

• Student income can be inconsistent and infrequent.
• Loan disbursement is on a semester basis.
• Stipends disbursed on monthly or semi-monthly basis.
• Living expenses are generally more frequent.
• Traditionally aged students often are just learning budgeting skills that are stretched by this dissonance.
Coping strategies
– the acceptable ones

- Working multiple jobs.
- Skipping class to work, or to minimize gas expense.
- Asked family for food or money for food.
- Sold academic work, writing papers, doing homework.
- Lied to family to get money.
- Sold belongings.
- Asked an advisor or an administrator for help.
- Crashed a party.
- Worked extra shifts.
- Stole lunches from a public space.
- Pulled food from the trash.
- Mooched food from friends.
Coping strategies
- the Risky Ones

- Offering sexual favors for food or money for food.
- Shoplifting food.
- Selling drugs for money for food.
- Stealing cash from friends or family.
Biological Effects

- When the brain is deficient in nutrients during the period of Emerging Adulthood, synapses are undeveloped, diminishing cognitive abilities.

- Nutrient deficiency can lead to depression, fatigue, and aggression.

- Overnutrition leads to obesity and an increase in lifestyle diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.

- Physical growth is slowed or stunted.

- Increased allostatic load, which is the physical manifestation of stress, decreases telomeres and negatively affects longevity.
Two Networks

Need Based
- Friends, family, social acquaintances, members of social groups.
- Provide groceries, food, money, emotional support, transportation.

Professional
- Professors, Administrators, internship supervisors.
- Provide letters of rec, experiential opportunities, career growth, mentoring
Social Effects

• Academic underachievement.
  - GPA shown to be a full point lower in food insecure samples.
  - Helen, Zoe and Reanne all stated unequivocally, that their grades were affected.
• Diminished ability to socialize and develop networks.
• “I’m not who I thought I would be”, impact of morally and ethically dubious decisions.
Dreams Become Chains

• 24% of students that drop out default on their loans within two years.

• An individual that defaults on student loans is not eligible for additional loans until the first is resolved.

• When a student leaves a school with an outstanding balance, re-enrollment is not possible until the old debt is resolved.

• Student loans cannot be discharged through bankruptcy.

Dropping out means losing, pretty much having to pay everything that I’ve put into it so far without having anything to go on for the future.  
- Reanne

I know what I want to do. I know my vision for my end result is so cut, clear, and dry, that sometimes I think I’d rather not eat.”  
- Zoe
UA’s Response

“I don’t think we know enough of the scope and size of the issue to, of the problem, to say alright, here’s four or five things that, that could help to address that, but I think we really need to, to really understand that first.”

- Wayne Hill, VP Marketing
Next time, next place

• We need to know how the income cycle affects student food security.
• Create a SFSSM.
• How does the level of dependence/independence affect behavior and reaction?
• Do the campus food pantries work?
• Does a more accepting campus climate help students find solutions?
• What solutions can be offered without damaging the development of social capital for these emerging adults?
• Better response rate.
• The integrative audio survey.
Thank You

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