

An urban campus's resource pantry journey between social work students, faculty, and community partners

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Abstract

Food and/or resource inequity is a growing problem for many college students in America. Nontraditional students have additional considerations, such as having dependents in their homes, working full-time jobs, and being financially independent. Sources found that food insecurity can have many effects on people, including major health concerns (a), lowered performance at school or work (b; c), higher levels of stress (d), and mental health or sleep concerns (e; f). Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the struggles students may face in getting the help they need when it comes to resource inequality.

Introduction

To combat the crisis of food insecurity for their students, staff, faculty, and students at West Chester University in Philadelphia have advocated for a resource pantry to be opened on their campus. To prove the need for this service, the university administered two needs assessments in 2019 and 2022 to collect student feedback so we could expedite the process of opening the pantry. Since opening, we have been able to give away over 2,200 pounds of product and continue to expand our products offered where it be safe sex supplies, menstrual products, etc.

Methods

A mixed-methods methodology to explore resource needs for the university community was conducted before the pandemic in 2019 and one needs assessment was administered in spring 2022 during the pandemic. We employed two needs assessment surveys with Qualtrics designed by students and faculty using convenience sampling which is a non-probability sampling to hear the needs of the campus community.

Results

- Students in 2019 and 2022 noted their most needed items as dry goods, fresh produce, school supplies, personal care items and feminine hygiene items.
- 50.5% of 2022 respondents stated that pre-ordering and picking up items would be most convenient.
- 15 respondents in 2022 stated that COVID-19 caused them to experience food insecurity.
- Weekday evenings were noted to be the best time for pantry hours in 2019 and 2022.
- In order, 2022 respondents listed their other needs as childcare, transportation, health, and housing. One student noted a need for a sense community on the Philly campus.

Data

2019 Results	2022 Results
Total responses: 159	Total responses: 91
Gender Identity	Gender Identity
Male: 24 (15.1%)	Male: 16 (20%)
Female: 130 (81.8%)	Female: 61 (76.25%)
Nonbinary: 5 (3.1%)	Nonbinary: 3 (3.75%)
Age	Age
18-24: 27 (17%)	18-24: 7 (8.75%)
25-34: 65 (40.9%)	25-34: 44 (55%)
35-44: 34 (21.4%)	35-44: 21 (26.25%)
45-54: 26 (16.4%)	45-54: 6 (7.5%)
55-74: 7 (4.4%)	55-74: 2 (2.5%)
Children in household	Children in household
Yes: 60 (42.3%)	Yes: 7 (25.93%)
No: 82 (57.7%)	No: 20 (74.07%)
Would you use a pantry on campus?	Would you use a pantry on campus?
Yes: 84 (52.8%)	Yes: 34 (47.89%)
No: 24 (15.1%)	No: 12 (16.9%)
Maybe: 44 (27.7%)	Maybe: 25 (35.21%)
No response: 7 (4.4%)	

Conclusions

The issue of food insecurity in college students is a large problem in America, and we found that our small satellite campus is not exempt. The purpose of the development of our urban campus's resource pantry was to provide students experiencing food insecurity or financial insecurity access to free services, and supplies with food to use for their families. Food insecurity comes with physical health concerns, mental health concerns, and social consequences such as lowered performance at work and school (Coakley et al., 2022). By doing a literature review and two needs assessments to better understand our campus population and the needs of our students, we were better able to tackle the issue of food insecurity for West Chester University's Philadelphia campus. The University's main campus already contained a thriving resource pantry that provides food, personal hygiene items, and school supplies for students; however, the newer Philadelphia Campus lacked the same resources for students with similar needs. The Philadelphia Campus was able to open our resource pantry in late fall 2022 and is available for our student body to utilize. Since opening the pantry, the campus has distributed over 2,200 pounds of product through its partnerships with food rescue networks Philabundance and Sharing Excess.

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Timeline

