

Abril Avila  
SEF Report  
Dr. Gallaher,  
Dr. Borre

## Food Insecurity Among College Students on Campus

Through out the years the cost of a higher education has been increasing, and with the cost of a higher education comes the need for textbooks, campus housing and other academic supplies. Tuition, textbooks and housing tend to take priority over many other personal necessities such as a good, adequate balanced meal. Food insecurity among college students on campus has become a major issue that most people are unaware of. In a journal written by Maya E. Maroto and Anastasia Snelling, they state that roughly 50.1 million Americans lack adequate healthy meals or have a hard time acquiring food. They did a study that demonstrates the correlation between food insecure students and their GPA and showed that food insecure students have lower GPA's than those that are food secure. Dr. Gallaher and Dr. Borre have created this project to gather more data on our campus here at NIU and I had the pleasure to assist them on this project.

Initially for this project, I started my journey by going to each organization on campus. The goal of this was to try and get college students to help us acquire more data regarding food insecurity with their own experiences as a student here at NIU. Last year, a short survey was disseminated across campus and the first set of data was gathered. With the data collected, it was evident that minority students, mainly African-American and Latinos did not answer the survey and therefor the data was not well rounded and did not properly represent the minority

communities. In order for me to reach these students I had to go through the gate keepers of these organizations. I quickly found that this was going to be a harder task than I anticipated as I discovered that minority organizations are not welcoming to the idea of being questioned regarding food insecurity. Understandably so, Dr. Borre and Dr. Gallaher created a new approach to collect the data needed. The new plan was to create a new survey and disperse it across campus, but this time we would involve these organizations and together as one take the data that is to be collected and raise awareness to faculty members and use the appropriate channels to bring light to the growing problem that food insecurity is.

Once we had created the survey, we set up meetings with Monique Bernoudy, the Assistant Vice President of the Academic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion department on campus. We met with one of her assistants, but we were able to get very helpful and useful information to get us started on the right path. This opened many doors and new opportunities to network with other groups and organizations on campus. Our next meeting was with Mike Stang, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, who also offered advice and opportunities to maximize the potential of the survey. With this meeting we were directed to a organization that could help disperse the survey even further known as Bread for the World. With all the meetings we had, we were able to connect with new people that could help us reach more students and have surveys completed.

Once we got the stamp of approval for the survey, our next step was to gather as many students as possible. My task was to create a colorful and attractive poster to be displayed on a table in the library to reel the students in to take the survey. We offered incentives such as candy, gift cards prizes and coffee punch cards for the caribou coffee restaurant in the basement of the library. Going into this I did not realize that there would be rejection from students not wanting

to take the survey. From my observations, I noticed that if the table was alone it was harder to have students stop by and take the survey. If the table had at least one person taking the survey, people were more enticed to stop by. It was very neat to see the table at one point be filled with up to 15 students taking the survey. I feel that the more commotion there is, the more people want to see what it is all about and stop by. It was a chain reaction per se. The survey was offered to students in a new manner that I have never experienced before. We cut back on expenses and saved paper by having a QR code on a flyer that was displayed on the table and students were free to come up and scan the code using their cell phone camera and the survey would automatically open on their phone and from there, they were easily allowed to take it at their own convenience. Most of the students taking the survey were impressed and amazed by this new method of taking a survey. It was introduced to be by Dr. Gallaher, and this is something that should be implemented more often across campuses seeing as how not many students were aware of this concept.

The original plan was to have had the data collected and to have had focus groups to create a new survey, but as mentioned before, we ran into an obstacle that slightly changed the course of this project. With everything that was done this semester I feel that we have effectively done what we set out to do. The meetings with leaders on campus and talking with directors of different organizations has brought us to new places for this project. The project is still in full swing and a work in progress as we are still collecting data into the next semester.

During this project and throughout the course of this semester, I tried my hardest to stay on top of all of my school work and the project work. In my personal life, my other job also demanded more of my time as we were shorthanded 2 employees, so it required me to work full time, 6 days a week. If I learned anything this semester it is, when there is a will there is a way. I

pushed myself farther than I ever have before and I learned how to multi-task as well as to how to stay organized to keep everything clear and on track. I also learned the value of self-care because stress can affect the body and mind. More than that, I learned that even though you may have a set path for a project, unforeseen obstacles may arise, and it is okay to change the path and direction. I learned that not everything is set in stone for creating projects and timelines and deadlines may change. I also learned how to speak up and share my voice. This is something that I have never been comfortable with as I can be a shy person, and this project has taught me that it's okay to share my opinions and thoughts. I have never been good at networking which is a skill that I have always wanted to learn, and this was a great opportunity to do so as networking with college leaders on campus was one of the important factors on this project. I have learned so many new skills and valuable lessons while working on this project that I am happy to take with me and carry over into my future academic career. I am sad to leave but I am proud of the work my mentors are doing, they are making a difference in this world and I am honored to be a part of it!

### **Works Cited**

Maroto, M. E., Snelling, A., & Linck, H. (2015). Food insecurity among community college students: Prevalence and association with grade point average. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(6), 515-526.