Challah for Hunger

The Campus Hunger Project
Year 1 Report

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Why the Campus Hunger Project?
In October 2015, we met with our partners at MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger to discuss ideas for a new advocacy project. During this meeting, our partners introduced a hidden form of hunger that was growing, but wasn't being covered by the media or addressed in a significant way on a local, state or federal level: food insecurity on college campuses.

We were shocked. How could college students, the audience that we had been working with for more than a decade to fight hunger at home and abroad, be experiencing hunger themselves?

As we learned more about this issue through recent reports, new articles and conversations from organizations working in this field, we came to understand the complexity of the issue as well as the widespread effect on students at both community colleges and four-year institutions. Recent studies have found that nearly 66% of community college students and nearly 20% of students at four-year institutions experience food insecurity.¹

In response to the lack of awareness of this issue and our own desire to empower college students to make positive change, we launched the Campus Hunger Project.

In the first year of the Campus Hunger Project, we sought to better understand food insecurity on college campuses through research conducted by our student volunteers. We also aimed to raise awareness about this problem with our students, alumni, parents and the wider Jewish community.

This report summarizes the findings of our research and explains how we intend to improve the Campus Hunger Project to empower our student volunteers to make change.

We are hopeful that in partnership with our students, partner organizations, and caring community members, that we can find long-term solutions to end food insecurity on college campuses.

Carly Zimmerman
CEO
About Challah for Hunger & Our Campus Program

Challah for Hunger builds communities inspired and equipped to take action against hunger. Our campus program is a chapter-based leadership development program in 30 states at 36 public and 38 private colleges and universities.

At these chapters, student volunteers come together to bake challah bread. While dough rises, they discuss local and global hunger issues and advocacy tactics. They sell the challah to fellow students, university staff and community members. 50% of profits are donated to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger and 50% to a local nonprofit fighting hunger in their community.

Since 2004, our volunteers have donated more than $1 million to fight hunger.
Project Summary

In this report, we summarize and reflect on findings from 32 interviews conducted at 23 colleges and universities between August 2016 and May 2017. Student volunteers interviewed administrators in offices and departments that included Student Affairs, Financial Aid, and Student Life.ii

During our students’ interviews, approximately **80% of administrators stated that food insecurity was a problem on their campus**. Of these administrators, **65% said there is no official campus-wide policy to address food insecurity**.iii

Overall, our findings are consistent with formal and anecdotal studies of campus food insecurity. Types of emergency aid, which include food pantries, meal vouchers and emergency grants or loans, vary from institution to institution, as do methods for disseminating information about types of aid. Perhaps most importantly, administrators’ knowledge of aid programs and of procedures and policies for connecting students to aid programs vary as well.

A Note on Our Approach

The data presented comes from notes students took during and after interviews. Interview notes were taken by hand and then typed into an online form. Interviews were not digitally recorded. The information provided during interviews about resources and policies for addressing campus food insecurity represents an individual administrator's knowledge of their institution, confidence in their knowledge, and willingness to share this information with students.

We do not presume to claim that our students' interviews and our interpretation of the findings meet the rigorous standards of academic research. Our intent is not to portray ourselves as trained researchers but rather to engage students and their communities in challenging yet meaningful dialogue about an issue of national concern.
Project Design

Throughout the spring of 2016, we sought to learn about this issue from a group of experts that included: student affairs professionals, campus food pantry coordinators, staff at the College and University Food Bank Alliance, and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab. We also spoke with representatives of various advocacy groups and hunger-relief nonprofits such as the National Campaign Against Hunger & Homelessness and Swipe Out Hunger.

After speaking with experts and reviewing policy reports, data briefs, and media coverage of the problems related to campus food insecurity, we worked with a student committee and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger to develop interview questions and a process for reviewing interview findings. (See Appendix A for the interview questions.)

Students accessed the interview form in the digital Campus Hunger Project Toolkit on the Marketplace, our online resource center. (See Appendix B for components of the current Toolkit.)

Research Hypothesis

At the onset of the project, we predicted that resources for food insecure students and policies to address food insecurity would vary between schools.

We also laid out four reasons why schools may not have resources or policies that included:

1. Lack of coordination (e.g. insufficient communication between campus offices and/or between students and university officials that prevent campus-wide problem solving from occurring)
2. Problem recognition (e.g. campus administrators are unaware of the magnitude/prevalence/impact of hunger among their students)
3. Knowledge constraints (e.g. limited knowledge of (a) the relationship between hunger and other student circumstances/requirements and/or (b) the resources available to food insecure students, such as local food pantries or SNAP)
4. Resource Allocation (e.g. budgetary constraints combined with competing campus-wide priorities)
Demographics of Participating Schools

Volunteers conducted 32 interviews in 12 states at 23 universities (12 private universities and 11 public universities). The annual cost to attend these schools ranges from approximately $13,700 to $36,100. The socioeconomic diversity of students ranged as well. At these schools, the populations of low-income students also varied from 7% to 33%. (See Appendix C for a full list of schools and states where volunteers conducted interviews.)

Demographics of Administrators Interviewed

Student volunteers requested interviews with administrators via email and office visits. The majority of administrators interviewed worked in offices of Student Affairs/Student Services or Deans of Students/Student Life and Campus Life. The other category includes a diverse group of campus administrators including the President of a University and Director of Counseling.
Summary of Findings

Three major themes arose from our research:

1. Food insecurity is an identified problem at the majority of universities, however, the majority of universities do not have policies or resources in place to address this problem.
2. Even when universities and college had resources and policies, they varied greatly from institution to institution.
3. For the majority of our student volunteers, this was the first time they had heard about this issue and engaged with a member of their campus administration to learn more about the topic.

Approximately 80% of administrators interviewed stated that food insecurity is a problem on their campus. Of these administrators, 65% said there was no official campus-wide policy to address food insecurity.

![Figure 3: Response to “Is food insecurity a problem on this campus”](image)

![Figure 4: Response to “If yes [food insecurity is a problem], then is there an official campus wide-policy to address this situation?”](image)
Before elaborating further on schools where administrators identified food insecurity as a problem, we want to recognize that food insecurity could still be present at schools where administrators said campus food insecurity was not a problem and at schools where administrators described minimal or no resources and policies for assisting food insecure students. Even with financial aid, millions of college students struggle to cover the price of tuition, textbooks, transportation, housing and food despite working part or nearly full-time and receiving financial aid.

Overall, volunteers reported that administrators expressed concern for the well-being of students and understood the importance of meeting students’ basic needs. Administrators provided different explanations for how they knew food insecurity was a problem on campus. Several administrators had personal experiences with students coming to their office asking for help affording food. One administrator shared that a colleague had seen a student digging through a trash bin, possibly in search of food. Another explanation that administrators offered was that the presence of a campus food pantry was evidence of the problem.

From this research, we identified three categories that described the current status of resources and policies on each campus:

**Low Support Institutions**

- Administrators exhibit limited knowledge of (a) the relationship between hunger and other student circumstances/requirements and/or (b) the resources available to food insecure students, such as local food pantries or SNAP
- Contradicting responses by administrators about the prevalence and impact of hunger among their students
- Limited number of resources available, such as meal vouchers and off-campus referrals

We found 3 schools fit into this category.

When asked about available resources for food insecure students, administrators described giving meal vouchers or free meal swipes to students. One administrator at a private university recommended that students seek out campus events with free food. We were initially hesitant to assign 2 schools to this category because administrators had mentioned that the schools recently established food insecurity committees to understand the scope of the problem. In the end, we categorized the schools as Low Support Institutions because the goal of our project is to assess the current landscape of the support rather than a projection.
Medium Support Institutions

- Several resources available, such as a campus pantry and emergency loans or grants, but are not widely known or advertised to students
- Administrators refer students on a case-by-case basis to specific offices or programs
- Administrators cite budgetary constraints on resource allocation
- No official campus-wide policy for addressing food insecurity

The majority of schools fall into this category. At these schools, administrators were well aware of the problem of campus food insecurity and named a variety of campus offices where they would advise students to go for help affording food. Offices included Financial Aid, Multicultural Affairs, Diversity/First-Generation Office, Community Service, Dean of Students, and Residence Life.

When asked to describe available resources for food insecure students, administrators at 12 schools said they would advise students to apply for emergency funds in the form of low-interest or interest-free loans and grants. A few administrators however, cautioned that emergency funds are usually intended for family crises or urgent medical needs and not typically used for food.

When asked about organizations off-campus that are trying to help food insecure students, 4 administrators mentioned local religious organizations such as nearby churches. A handful of administrators mentioned campus or local farms that offered low-price CSAs (community supported agriculture). Notably, administrators at only 5 schools mentioned SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) as a resource available for students looking for help affording food.

High Support Institutions

- Multiple resources available and administrator describes a systematic approach for connecting students to these resources
- Administrators cite an official campus-wide policy for addressing food insecurity

One of our defining characteristics for this category was the existence of an official campus-wide policy to address food insecurity. However, at two of the four schools administrators who said an official campus-wide policy existed, also said that food insecurity was not a problem on campus. This included an administrator who said food insecurity was not a problem on campus, but answered yes when asked if students ever came to their office to find help affording food.

We realized after interviews concluded that we should have more explicitly defined High Support Institutions. A topic of frequent discussion between volunteers and staff was the communication channels that administrations use to promote resources and student supports. In conversations with staff, volunteers often discussed their difficult experience navigating Financial Aid and Student Affairs websites to find pertinent information about resources like emergency funding. In a particularly memorable conversation, a volunteer reported that an administrator was wary of publicizing emergency scholarships or loans because of limited funds. The administrator was also fearful that publicizing emergency funds would result in a rush of applications, and thus reduce funding for students in critical need of support.
Next year, we plan to add a specific interview question about the various communication channels (e.g., email, phone, website, word-of-mouth) through which schools promote resources. We will also expand the description of High Support Institutions to include the following characteristic: administrators describe multiple communication channels through which a food insecure student can learn about available resources.

**Impact on Student Volunteers**

As a student development organization, we not only wanted to learn about the current status of food insecurity on these campuses, but also sought to understand the impact this experience had on our students volunteers.

Many volunteers expressed surprise and disappointment that their schools did not have a formalized process to identify and work with food insecure students. Other volunteers felt the opposite: they were impressed by their school’s resources and described administrators as helpful and knowledgeable.

Below is a volunteer’s reflection on her interview with an administrator in the Office of Housing and Residence Life. She also served on the national student committee for the Campus Hunger Project.

> [My involvement] with the Campus Hunger Project changed the way I viewed hunger in my city and my school. Before [getting involved], I viewed hunger as something that affected other communities, but not mine. However, as I became more involved with the [Campus Hunger Project], I began to notice the food insecurities that many of my peers face. I am truly grateful for everything I have learned throughout the first year of this project, and I am interested to see the impact it has on my community.

Bridget Ott, University of Arizona

**Recommendations and goals**

Based on these findings and our overall experience in the pilot year of this program, we are compelled to dive deeper into this issue and commit resources and time to finding a long term solution.

There were three major takeaways that have impacted our decisions to alter our approach:

1. Although we were able to categorize the universities into low, medium, and high support, the status of food insecurity and the policies and resources varied too much to make a single recommendation or recommendations of how to help food insecure students get the support they need.
2. We were able to educate hundreds of our stakeholders about this issue, but still feel the greatest hurdle is the lack of knowledge that this problem even exists.
3. While there is no central organization or government body that is set up to research and implement policies for long-term change, there is a network of research institutions, student engagement and anti-hunger non-profits, and local and state governments who are collaborating to address this issue.
The next two years of The Campus Hunger Project will build on this research project and the educational campaign that accompanied, but will also introduce new program aspects.

Over the next two years, we will:

1. **Increase the number of our volunteers who are aware of this issue and taking the initial step to conduct interview on their campus.**

   By 2019, 75% of our chapters will be active participants in the Campus Hunger Project and 90% of our volunteers will have increased their awareness of issues related to food insecurity and have taken at least one action to fight hunger.

   We are developing more ways for students to engage with the project which include an updated toolkit on the Marketplace, revised interview forms, and an updated library of resources about this issue. Our Program Associate, Ellie, will be responsible for recruiting new chapters to participate in the project.

2. **Mobilize leaders to build campus-specific projects to help feed food insecure students.**

   By 2019, 20 students will participate in a cohort-based program in which they will learn from experts, form their own hypothesis on how to support students on their campus and develop and implement a project to test their hypothesis. (See Appendix D for a list of participating campuses.) Our Director of Campus Programs, Talia, will lead this initiative.

3. **Build partnerships with local and national organizations to raise awareness about this issue and develop long-term solutions.**

   We've already developed relationships with several organizations tackling this issue and look forward to participating in the Food Insecurity Network, a coalition group who will learn and act together. We will also continue sharing our data with members of this coalition group to grow the body of research on this issue.
Acknowledgements

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Thank you to the Campus Hunger Project Student Committee. Lauren Banister, Alexandra Barr, Alix Braun, Arielle Pearlman, Lauren Ross, Bridget Ott and Miriam Lipschutz dedicated a year to assist in building the project from the ground up. We also want to commend and thank all of the student leaders who participated in the pilot year of the Campus Hunger Project.

Thank you to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger for incubating the Campus Hunger Project in 2016-17.

Through our engagement in the Campus Hunger Project, we have connected with numerous organizations that are leaders in this field. Staff at the following organizations provided vital research, connections, and guidance over the past year on topics ranging from basic needs insecurities, campus organizing, and technology-based advocacy programs.

- The Wisconsin HOPE Lab (Reopening in 2018 as the HOPE Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University)
- The College & University Food Bank Alliance
- Swipe Out Hunger
- Crew2030
- The National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
- The Campus Kitchens Project
Appendix A. 2016/17 Interview Form

School & Interviewee Information
1. Challah for Hunger Name & School ________________________________
2. This school is a ____ public university ____ private university
3. Individual characteristics/demographics of the school (find this data in College Scorecard on the Marketplace)
   Annual cost of attending this school _______________
   % students receiving federal need-based grant aid (Pell Grants) ______
   % of full time versus part time students: (full)______ (part-time) ______

4. What resources are currently available for students looking for help affording food?
   Please spend at least 10 minutes researching your school, Googling around to make sure there isn’t any recent news. For example, you’ll want to know ahead of time if your school just committed to opening up a campus food pantry.

5. Name of Interviewee: ______________________________
6. Title of Interviewee ______________________________
7. Office/Department: ______________________________

Data Collection: The Interview

8. Is food insecurity a problem for students at this school?
   a. YES or NO - How do you know?

9. Do students ever come to this office to find help affording food?
   a. YES
      i. Do students come on a regular basis or at a specific time of the year?
      ii. What type of help is available? If the interviewee mentions a specific resource (for example, like an on-campus food pantry, emergency scholarships that students can apply for, help applying for SNAP/food stamps), you can ask “You mentioned xxx, where could I get more information about this?”
      iii. Is there an official campus-wide policy to address this situation?

         Yes – What is the policy?
         No – What do you suggest to students who are looking for help affording food?

   If the interviewee mentions a specific resource (for example, like an on-campus food pantry, emergency scholarships that students can apply for, help applying for SNAP/food stamps), you can ask “You mentioned xxx, where could I get more information about this?”
9. CONTINUED Do students ever come to this office to find help affording food? 
b. NO 
   i. Where would you advise students to go if they did come here? 
   ii. Is there an office or person you'd recommend?

10. Are there any organizations on/near campus that are trying to help hungry students? And if so, what type of help/services do they offer?

Post-Interview Assessment of Interview/Interviewee 
e.g. Was the interviewee helpful? Knowledgeable? Dismissive? Was the interviewee aware of this problem among students at your school? Did s/he think helping students access food was part of his/her/that department's role? Was s/he willing to refer you to other departments?)
Appendix B. Toolkit Example “How to Prepare for an Interview”

Before the Interview
1. Complete Step One of the Campus Hunger Project Toolkit on the Marketplace
2. Email Talia@challahforhunger.org so she can help you find an administrator in the Office of Financial Aid or Office of Student Affairs to interview.
3. Once you have two administrators selected, send an email to both. Use the sample emails on The Marketplace
4. If they don't respond after 7 business days, send a follow-up email. Use the template on the Marketplace.

Once the Interview is Scheduled
1. Email Talia@challahforhunger.org the date of your interview
2. Read the Interview Form to prepare
3. What to bring the day of
   • A printed copy of the Interview Form and extra paper for notes
   • A printed copy of the One-Pager
   • Confidence! You are being a real advocate by holding this interview!

During the Interview
For every question, always ask follow up questions, like “why do you think that is?” Below is a list of possible reasons why a college or university might have trouble helping food-insecure students. See if you can identify if one or more of the below reasons fits your campus.

a) Lack of coordination (e.g. insufficient communication between campus offices and/or between students and university officials that prevent campus-wide problem solving from occurring)
b) Problem recognition (e.g. campus administrators are unaware of the magnitude/prevalence/impact of hunger among their students)
c) Knowledge constraints (e.g. limited knowledge of (a) the relationship between hunger and other student circumstances/requirements and/or (b) the resources available to food insecure students, such as local food pantries or SNAP)
d) Resource Allocation (e.g. budgetary constraints combined with competing campus-wide priorities)

Follow Up to the Interview
1. Upload up your notes on the Marketplace. You’ll be directed to follow this link
2. Send a thank-you email to the administrator you interviewed. Use the template on the Marketplace.
3. Share this experience on your chapter’s social media!
4. Keep up the momentum! Share what you learned with your chapter by holding a mini info-session about the Campus Hunger Project at your next bake. Follow our easy steps on the Marketplace to organize an info session.
Appendix B. Toolkit Example “Quotes & Statistics”

The Numbers

**General Statistic:** As many as 2/3 of all community college students and nearly 20% of students at four-year schools experience food insecurity.

**Campus Food Pantries:** Today, the College and University Food Bank Alliance, a nonprofit that supports both existing and emerging campus food banks, has more than 500 members.

**Skipping meals:** In a recent survey, 20% of food insecure students reported not eating for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food.

**Connection to Homelessness:** In a recent survey, 64% of food insecure students also reported experiencing some type of housing insecurity, including homelessness, in the past 12 months.

**First Generation students:** According to a recent survey, more than half of all first-generation students were food insecure, compared to 45% of students who had at least one parent who attended college.

**Financial Aid:** Three in four food insecure students received some form of financial aid.

**Work:** 56% of food insecure students reported having a paying job.

Organizations to Know

The organizations listed below have done the most comprehensive research on issues related to college food insecurity.

- The Wisconsin HOPE Lab
- College & University Food Bank Alliance
- National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
- National Student Government Resource Center
- Student Public Interest Research Groups

Quotes from Students

**Quote 1:** “Almost as bad as the hunger itself is the stress that you’re going to be hungry...I spend more time thinking ‘How am I going to make some money so I can go eat?’ and I focus on that when I should be doing homework or studying for a test.” *Student at George Mason University*

**Quote 2:** “Food insecurity can mean anything from skipping dinner because you can’t afford it to planning your entire week’s schedule around events with free food.” *Tori Airaksinen, Barnard Student*

**Quote 3:** “You have to choose between things you shouldn’t have to choose between...I have almost always chosen classes based off how expensive the textbooks are.” *Cornell Class Confessions*
Quote 4: “A lot of my friends who have taken time off here are low-income... No one really seems to notice that they’re gone. No one really talks about this being an issue.” *Princeton Class Confessions*

How to Use Statistics and Quotes
Quotes and statistics are a way to explain why food insecurity is an issue for millions of college students. Here are 3 ways to use them.

**At a Challah for Hunger Bake/Event:** Print out the quotes and have volunteers take turn reading the quotes out loud. Ask for reactions. Were people surprised? Upset? Curious to learn more?

**On Social Media:** Share a statistic about campus hunger on your chapter’s Facebook with the #KnowtheNumbers #CampusHungerProject and tag @challahforhunger and @mazonusa. Link to the Campus Hunger Project website at [http://challahforhunger.org/the-campus-hunger-project/](http://challahforhunger.org/the-campus-hunger-project/)

**At the Sales Table:** Print statistics or quotes to display on a poster at the Sales Table and to tie/tape to each challah bag.

Take It A Step Further

**Plan a 30-minute information session:** Organize a longer, more in-depth conversation about the issue of college food security. Follow the steps on the Marketplace in the *Campus Hunger Project Toolkit*. You can access news articles to read and discuss with volunteers, a colorful one-pager, and more.

**Write about this experience:** Contact Talia@challahforhunger.org to share your experience learning about campus hunger and what your chapter is doing to spread awareness of this issue.

**Appendix C: Chapters Participating in 2016/17**
- American University
- SUNY Binghamton University
- Brandeis University
- Brown University
- Colgate University
- Columbia/Barnard
- Harvard University
- Indiana University Bloomington
- Ithaca College
- Lehigh University
- Occidental College
- Penn State University
- Scripps College
- Stanford University
- Towson University
- University of Arizona
- University of California - Berkeley
- University of Massachusetts - Amherst
- University of Pittsburgh
- University of Vermont
- University of Virginia
- University of Wisconsin- Madison
- Washington University in St. Louis
Appendix D: Chapters Participating in the 2017-2018 Cohort Program
Barnard College
Stanford University
SUNY Binghamton
Temple University
University of Arizona
University of California - Davis
University of Southern California
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Additional Notes and References
ii One of the 32 interviews was a group interview with administrators from Offices of Financial Aid, Counseling, Campus Life, Student Services and Dining Services. We created a category for “Other” that includes: Office of Advancement, Office of the President, Diversity & First Generation Office, Center for Educational Equity and Excellence, and Counseling.
iii These include: Lehigh University, Indiana University, Columbia University, University of Massachusetts Amherst, SUNY Binghamton, Stanford, Ithaca College, University of Wisconsin Madison, Occidental College, Brandeis University, University of Arizona, Pennsylvania State University (2x), University of Vermont, University of Virginia, and American University.
iv Annual cost of attending this school: average annual net price for federal financial aid recipients, after aid from the school, state or federal government. For public schools, this is only the average cost for in-state students. College Scorecard, U.S Department of Education. (2017). Retrieved from https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/
v As measured by the percent of students that have a family income less than $40K and receive an income-based federal Pell Grant to help pay for college. College Scorecard, U.S Department of Education. (2017). Retrieved from https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/
vi These include: Lehigh University, Indiana University, Columbia University, University of Massachusetts Amherst, SUNY Binghamton, Stanford, Ithaca College, University of Wisconsin Madison, Occidental College, Brandeis University, University of Arizona, Pennsylvania State University (2x), University of Vermont, University of Virginia, and American University.
vii These include: Lehigh University, Colgate University, and Ithaca College.
viii These include Berkeley, Brandeis University, Brown, Binghamton, Columbia, University of Massachusetts- Amherst, University of Virginia, Lehigh University, Ithaca College, Stanford, University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Washington University of St. Louis.
ix References to religious organizations were made during interviews at Colgate University, Pennsylvania State University, Ithaca College, and University of Arizona.
x References to campus or local farms were made during interviews at Brown, Colgate University, Columbia, and Berkeley.


College Confessions are online forums or Facebook groups where college students share personal struggles with finances and academics. These forums were some of the first places documenting the issue of food and housing insecurity among college students.