**[Combatting Food Insecurity](https://www.edurisksolutions.org/Templates/template-blogs.aspx?pageid=47&id=3621&blogid=100&pageid=47)**

***Growing numbers of students struggle with food security—learn how you can support them.***

Food insecurity is simply the lack of resources to obtain nutritious food. The number of college students affected by food insecurity continues to grow steadily, driven by rising tuition costs and an increase in first-generation students with lower incomes, or those who are juggling responsibilities of work and school. [Feeding America](http://www.feedingamerica.org/), a national nonprofit network of food banks, estimates that in a given year, nearly half of its college clients (approximately two million full-time students) must choose between educational expenses (such as tuition, books, supplies, and rent) and food.

Fortunately, many higher education institutions can help tackle this issue head-on and provide security to students who would otherwise go without certain meals. Take these steps to get started.

**Assess food insecurity on your campus**  
Unlike K-12 schools, which track how many students qualify for food assistance, higher education institutions don’t maintain such data. Instead, make use of the data available to you, such as financial aid records, to evaluate populations most at risk for food insecurity.

**Establish programs that promote food security**  
Explore the program options below and determine which work best for your culture. Consult legal counsel and risk management staff to mitigate any concerns. Programs might include:

* **Food pantries**. A food pantry or bank is the most common response to food insecurity on campus. According to the [College and University Food Bank Alliance](https://sites.temple.edu/cufba/) (CUFBA), while only four college food banks existed in 2008, 121 were in operation by 2014, and 350 were established by 2016. CUFBA provides resources and offers best practices to institutions interested in starting a food bank. The [Michigan State University Food Bank](http://foodbank.msu.edu/), considered a model for many colleges, emphasizes operating with discretion and sensitivity.
* **Meal donations**. Some institutions allow students to donate meals from their meal plans to students in need. [Swipe Out Hunger](http://www.swipehunger.org/), one such program, has become a national movement on more than 26 campuses.
* **Grocery store gift cards**. Approach local grocery store chains to solicit donated gift cards to distribute to students in need.
* **Food and financial literacy programs**. Many students come to school with little financial literacy since they’ve never lived on their own. However, food-insecure students tend to have even less experience with budgeting, healthy meal planning, and food sourcing. Consider offering these topics for all students in student orientation or seminars throughout the semester.
* **A systemic, long-term approach**. Examine college affordability and consider ways to provide greater access to programs for at-risk students. For example, expanding aid, such as emergency grants, book grants, or loaner laptop programs, may provide financial relief to students in need. Because housing is a great concern for this population, consider whether you can provide emergency housing assistance or shelters.

By considering these measures, schools can reduce food insecurity and help ensure that all students have the foundational necessities to thrive on campus.

**Additional Resources**

Feeding America’s [Hunger in America 2014](http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/hunger-in-america/) Report

[Swipe Out Hunger: A Guide to Creating Your Campus Sustainable Meal Sharing and Recovery Program](http://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/_files/Swipe%20Out%20Hunger%20Guide_Final.pdf)

[Risk Policies for NC State University Food Pantries and Food Banks](https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/food-pantries-and-food-banks/)

[How to Start a Food Pantry](http://www.mfbn.org/files/howtostartafoodpantry-final.pdf)

[How-To Manual for Starting a Food Bank](http://www.tenriversfoodweb.org/uploads/8/1/6/1/81615248/so-you-want-to-start-a-campus-food-pantrypdf.pdf) (see risk management considerations on page 27)

[Wisconsin HOPE Lab: Still Hungry and Homeless in College](http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf)

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