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

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 college 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 have the ability to help tackle this issue head-on and provide security to students who would otherwise go without certain meals. United Educators (UE) recommends that you:

* **Assess food insecurity on your campus**. Unlike K-12 schools, which track how many students qualify for food assistance, higher education institutions do not maintain such data. Instead, they must use available data, such as financial aid records, to evaluate populations most at risk for food insecurity.
* **Establish programs that promote food security**. Your institution should explore alternatives and determine which work best for your culture. Consult legal counsel and risk management to mitigate any associated concerns. Possible programs 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 turned into a national movement on over 26 campuses where students can donate unused meal swipes to help hungry classmates eat.
	+ **Grocery store gift cards**. You may also 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 have never lived on their own. However, food-insecure students tend to have even less literacy around subjects like budgeting, healthy meal planning, and food sourcing. Consider including these topics in student orientation or as standalone seminars throughout the semester for all students.
* **Take a systemic, long-term approach to addressing food insecurity**. Your institution should 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 develop programs aimed at fighting food insecurity, which will help ensure that all students have the basic necessities to thrive on campus.

**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)

*By Kimberly Cole, risk research counsel*