

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

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Thesis

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By

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to identify factors related to food insecurity and the housing vulnerability of undergraduate college students. Research has shown that students facing housing and severe food insecurity are more likely to fail or withdraw from classes. Intentional practices also play a role in housing and food insecurity in college students. Many offer community resources to students, but students are often unaware of resources available to them or fear stigma associated with asking for help. Results drawn from a sample of nine on-campus and off-campus students show that 44 percent experienced some level of food insecurity and that 67 percent depend on loans to cover living expenses. Several common themes were expressed in focus groups including the recognition that rising housing costs were a major stressor, resulting in sacrifices made in exchange for affordability (e.g., safety, distance to campus, cutting out other budgetary items). Conclusions found that food and housing insecurity among college students remains an issue when resources fail to address the needs of vulnerable students. Improving resource education and accessibility may reduce financial stressors and improve the quality of education for at-risk students.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Dedication**

This study is dedicated to the participants who shared their perspectives and any student experiencing housing or food insecurity at Ohio State. Also my parents who have supported me every step of the way in this journey.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

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Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	3
Dedication.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Table of Contents.....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	11
Chapter 4: Results.....	17
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	23
References.....	30
Appendices.....	33

# Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The overall objective of this research was to understand food insecurity and housing vulnerability of undergraduate college students. Research has found that 60% of students must borrow money using loans to pay bills and 25% actively seek free meals and food (Sackett, Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Research also suggests that around 5% of students experience homelessness (Broton, & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). A 2015 survey conducted by the Ohio State University Center for The Study of Student Life found that 19.9% of students surveyed were hungry but did not eat because there wasn't enough money for food (Ohio State Center for Study of Student Life, 2015). For off-campus students, gentrification and urban development in residential communities surrounding the campus area makes living in proximity to campus increasingly financially unsustainable (Macintyre, 2015). Students facing housing and severe food insecurity are more likely to fail or withdraw from classes. Research shows students experiencing housing insecurity are more likely to skip class or drop-out (Silvia et al., 2015). A limitation with research is that many students are unaware of resources available to them through universities or fear stigma associated with asking for these resources. (Sackett, Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

### **Research Aims**

The overall objective of this research is to understand food insecurity and housing vulnerability of undergraduate college students. The first aim is to identify factors related to housing vulnerability and food insecurity that college students living on campus and off campus experience. The second aim is to identify policies or programs that exist or may be developed that would be intended to help them address identified factors and consequences of housing vulnerability and food insecurity.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

College students are a vulnerable population when it comes to housing and food insecurity. Many full-time students are not able to work full time jobs and many students take out loans to afford their cost of living (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Recently more research is being conducted on this phenomenon as the cost of higher education increases and financial aid remains stagnant (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Since 2007, over 30 studies have been done on college housing and food insecurity and 22 of those studies found that more than 30 percent of student were food insecure (Harris, 2019). Research has found that 60% of students must borrow money using loans to pay bills and that 25% actively seek of free meals and food (Sackett, Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Research also suggests that around 5% of students experience homelessness (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Often students have to sacrifice purchasing required books for classes and internet access in order to remain in school (Hallett, 2017). Studies have also found that food and housing insecurity can lead to higher odds of mental health issues and unhealthy eating and drinking behaviors. Food insecurity can also have long term effects on health and well-being overall (Bruening, Brennhofner, Woerden, Todd & Laska 2016).

Financial aid often doesn't cover full cost of attendance and students must fill these gaps to fund themselves. This is especially troubling for students in urban areas where cost of living and rental prices can be above the national average (Silvia et al., 2015). On-campus students also have to worry about rising costs as more universities update infrastructure and facilities which has resulted in raising the cost of on-campus housing and food expenses (Macintyre, 2015). For off-campus students, gentrification and urban development in residential communities surrounding campuses makes living in proximity to campus increasingly financially

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

unsustainable (Macintyre, 2015). Studies have found that tuition and cost of living are often mismatched for students as many assume universal parental financial support (Maynard, Meyer, Perlman & Kirkpatrick, 2019).

A 2015 survey conducted by the Ohio State University Center for The Study of Student Life found that 19.9 percent of students surveyed were hungry but did not eat because there wasn't enough money for food. The study also found that non-traditional students experience food insecurity at a higher rate. The conclusion from the study found that campus-based food pantries would be very beneficial for the students experiencing these issues (Ohio State Center for Study of Student Life, 2015).

Research has shown that students facing housing and severe food insecurity are more likely to fail or withdraw from classes. Many students experiencing housing insecurity are more likely to skip class or drop-out (Silvia et al., 2015). A limitation with research is that many students are unaware of resources available to them through universities or fear stigma associated with asking for these resources (Sackett, Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Researchers have identified several risk factors for college students who experience food insecurity which include living off campus, being financially independent, and not having access to their own vehicle (Food Research and Action Center [FRAC] ResearchWire, 2019). Other studies also found that upperclassmen are more likely to experience higher level of food insecurity and that student with jobs tend to also have lower food insecurity (Mcarthur, Ball, Danek & Holbert, 2018).

Intuitional practices also play a role in housing and food insecurity in college students. Many universities take a local approach to the way interventions are offered to students by offering community resources to students. Each university may choose a different approach

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

depending on available resources and funding. It important for universities to recognize policies that create financial gaps for students such as when financial aid disbursement occurs and cost of books (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Among food insecure students, the majority to do not enroll in public assistance programs mostly due to a large stigma and a lack of education (Broton, & Goldrick-Rab, 2017).

Several universities have changed their practices to adequately address the needs of students as food and housing insecurity rises. In Tacoma, Washington, local community colleges have partnered with housing authority to tackle student homelessness (Smith, 2019). This program that started in 2014 has expanded each year and now serves over a hundred students annually. UC Berkley opened a basic needs center for its students (Sabri, 2019). The idea of a basic needs center has expanded to all UC campuses. Many questions remain as to whether students are being informed about their financial aid package in a reasonable amount of time and how much money students should set aside for books. Understanding what students experience can help universities form better policies and programs to help vulnerable students facing housing and food insecurity.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In order to better understand housing and food security issues for undergraduate students it is best to obtain students' perspectives directly (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Using a qualitative method, such as a focus group is the best approach because every student has different needs, and this research is aiming to get broad feedback from students. Certain students receive monetary help others may not. Students may receive help with housing, but not food. This study used a mixed-methods design that included two kinds of qualitative methods and a quantitative survey. To accomplish Aim 1, focus groups were used to obtain perspectives about housing and food insecurity from on-campus and off-campus Ohio State University (OSU) undergraduate students. To accomplish Aim 2, a review of Ohio State-based resources was conducted, in addition to including some questions about resources in the focus groups. A supplemental cross-sectional survey of focus group participants was used to collect participants' demographic and descriptive information related to housing and food insecurity.

#### **Sample**

The sample for this study included nine undergraduate OSU students. Three focus groups with an average attendance of three people, were conducted at the OSU Union and Stillman Hall on OSU's Columbus campus. A fourth focus group was cancelled due to lack of attendance. This study was intended to gain deeper insights and explore the complexity of issues related to housing and food insecurity for OSU students, so the sample was intended to be representative of OSU undergraduate students in terms of inclusion of diverse voices, but not comprehensive because of limitations of feasibility for the time and scope of the study.

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Recruitment.** Students were recruited during the Fall 2018 semester through flyers (Appendix C) that were posted at Counseling and Consultation Services, the Student Advocacy Center, and the Student Wellness Center, which are spaces where students experiencing stresses related to housing and food insecurity are likely to visit. In order to also reach students who do not know of those resources, students who don't use resources, and students who live off campus, recruitment information was posted in the Ohio Union, classroom buildings, and the Recreation and Physical Activity Center (RPAC). In order to ensure confidentiality, we did not have potential participants contact the researchers ahead of time; they were asked to attend whichever focus group time and location worked for them. On the flyer, it was clear that students needed to be on time to participate and once the group was at 10 people, any additional participants would be asked to attend another one or turned away from the study. Consideration was given to variations of times and locations for the focus groups to make it accessible for students. Once inside the focus group room, researchers administered an eligibility screening instrument prior to collecting written informed consent. To be eligible, students needed to be between 18 and 24 years of age, able to speak/understand English, and identify as a current undergraduate student at Ohio State. All students were able to participate regardless of sex, race, gender, sexual orientation, or other identifying characteristics beyond the age and language requirements. Each study participant received a \$10 Kroger gift card. Food was also provided during the focus group sessions, and participants were allowed to take uneaten food at the end of the focus group session.

### **Measurement and Instrumentation**

**Demographic Survey.** The self-administered Demographic Survey (see Appendix A) included questions about the participants' race, gender, class or economic status, grade level, and

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

whether the student currently lived on or off. This information was used to assess if certain students might be more at risk for housing or food insecurity. Specific questions on housing payments and funds in addition to questions on how many meals were skipped were used to determine housing and/or food insecurity. Food insecurity questions were developed using the USDA six-item Household Food Security Module (USDA, 2012). The final four questions on the demographic survey were used to determine whether a student had experienced food insecurity during their time in college. We modified the USDA food security module, a valid and reliable measurement tool, to determine how many students who participated in the study experienced food insecurity. The survey also included several questions on housing and how expenses are currently covered by participants. The survey also asked participants if they have ever utilized specific campus resources related to housing, food insecurity, or financial challenges.

**Focus Group Guide.** The Focus Group Guide (see Appendix B) was developed from background literature and similar instruments (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009). The focus groups were organized in a guided discussion context to obtain the most authentic answers from students without giving them suggestions to ensure limited response bias. Ten questions were posed in the focus group discussion, in addition to an overall concluding question asking for additional feedback and comments. The guide features two introductory and contextual questions and eight primary discussion questions. Four questions feature sub-questions that aimed to delve deeper into student perspective and gather more specific information. The contextual and introductory questions gave participants an idea of the research being conducted and were used to collect general information about whether students thought food and housing insecurity is an issue affecting Ohio State and what they believe to be the cause

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

of these issues. The primary questions of the Focus Group Guide served as a way to obtain students' perspectives on their experiences in relation to food and housing insecurity.

### **Detailed Study Procedures**

**Focus Groups.** A local stenographer from PRI Court Reporting was hired to attend and use live transcription for the 90-minute focus group sessions. The CITI-approved researchers screened participants using the Eligibility Screening Tool and then had participants review and sign the Informed Consent form. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants used only their first name during the focus group. The court reporter also assigned numbers to each person speaking so first names were not recorded directly in the report and participants could not be linked to their comments. Study participants were also asked to keep the conversation confidential and not continue the conversation beyond the focus group. After finishing the discussion, the researcher summarized the group discussion and asked for any clarification on topics discussed. The court reporter transcribed and no identifiable information was collected. Once the focus groups ended, the court reporter provided the transcribed files to the researchers. Digital copies are retained in OSU Box. Paper copies of Informed Consent forms are locked in a cabinet locked in Dr. Michelle Kaiser's office. Incentives for participation included Kroger gift cards in the amount of \$10 and food provided during the focus group session.

**Demographic Survey.** Demographic Surveys were given to participants before the focus groups started, and participants were given 15 minutes to complete the surveys. Participants did not share their name and no information was be connected to the number, first name, or fake name used during the focus groups. The survey data was entered, cleaned, and analyzed in SPSS and Excel. Paper copies of Demographic Surveys are locked in a cabinet locked in Dr. Michelle Kaiser's office.

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Resource Review.** The researcher emailed and called different campus resources to conduct a review and gain a better understanding of the scope of their resources. The researcher started with emailing the Student Advocacy Center in the summer of 2018. A week after that initial email a follow up hour-long phone conversation was held with the interim director of Student Advocacy, Kim Pachell. In the spring of 2019, the researcher emailed student run organizations, Buckeye Food Alliance and Best Food Forward, to set up in person interviews. Both organizations aim to reduce food insecurity on the Ohio State campus. The researcher met with representatives of each student organization and took notes regarding their practices and philosophies.

### **Internal Validity**

Food and housing insecurity can be a very stigmatizing issue for students facing food and/or housing insecurity and many students may fear coming forward with this issue. The most important part of this research is protecting the identities of students who participate and being conscience of how this issue is discussed. The issue can be intersectional and understanding how this issue can disproportionately affect different groups of students is valuable in reducing its prevalence. Researchers avoided threats to internal validity by not asking the focus any question that would have guided them to a specific answer. During the process of research, no threats to external validity were encountered.

### **Analytic Methods**

**Focus Groups.** Focus groups were transcribed by a court reporter and then coded for analysis. A theming process was utilized to analyze the focus group discussions. Using Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran's (2009) qualitative framework about how to identify themes, the student researcher reviewed each focus group and identified common

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

content and areas of overlap among the focus groups. The researcher developed a coding naming mechanism, organized around the common themes representing the most salient points made by students. The research mentor reviewed the themes independently. Then the research mentor and student researcher discussed any questions, clarified the themes, collapsed the themes, and renamed them. Specific quotes were used to represent those themes.

**Demographic Survey.** Survey data was entered, cleaned, and analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze information collected in the demographic survey. In order to compare groups, we split the file between students who were food secure and those who were food insecure, based on a modified USDA food security survey. We ran frequencies and descriptive statistics using SPSS. The modified food security scale was calculated through summing the positive responses to determine students who would be classified as food insecure. Descriptive statistics were conducted to compare food secure and food insecure students for the remaining survey answers.

**Resource Review.** A resource review was done using content analysis. The researcher contacted representatives from specific campus support services and conducted one hour interviews with each representative. After drafting notes during these conversations the researcher analyzed the content to show a clear picture of what each service does on campus. A similar method to the qualitative framework (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) was used for analyzing each resource interview.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Demographic Survey

The demographic survey administered to participants was used to determine which students were at risk for food and housing insecurity. Over 33% of our participants experienced food insecurity. Despite a small sample size, these numbers are in line with the national average which is 35% (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Results are shown in Table 1.

None of our participants were experiencing housing insecurity, although nearly half identified their living expenses as unreasonable and one-third revealed they forgo other necessities in order to afford rent. Nearly two-thirds of participants relied on loans to cover their living expenses, though when the data was divided between food secure and food insecure students, 100% of the food insecure students relied on loans to pay their expenses and only 25% of those students received help from someone (e.g., a parent, grandparent) else with living expenses. None of the students interviewed in the focus groups attended or attempted to utilize the food pantry or Student Advocacy Center services. Nearly all students identified as having access to healthy food while only six identified their housing as safe and affordable. Only five participants see their living expenses as reasonable and none of our participants were able to afford their living expenses with their current job.

General demographics from the survey showed that all of participants were white and over 60% of participants were women. In comparison to the Ohio State statistical summary of the student population which has an even split of 50% for men and women, the population of women was over sampled by 10% (OSU Institutional Research & Planning, 2019). The numbers for on-campus students as compared to off-campus students was fairly even, with slightly more off-campus students participating.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Table 1. Demographic Survey Results**

Variables	All Participants (N=9)		Food Insecure Participants (n=4)		Food Secure Participants (n=5)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	6	66.7	2	50.0	4	80.0
Male	3	33.3	2	50.0	1	20.0
<b>Race</b>						
White	9	100	4	100	5	100
<b>Living Situation</b>						
Off Campus	5	55.6	3	75.0	2	40.0
On Campus	4	44.4	1	25.0	3	60.0
Access to Healthy Foods	8	89.9	3	75.0	5	100
Access to Safe & Affordable Housing	6	66.7	2	50.0	4	80.0
Use Campus Food Pantry/Student Advocacy	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Help From Someone For Living Expenses	7	77.8	1	25.0	4	80.0
Feel rent and living expenses reasonable	5	55.6	1	25.0	4	80.0
Afford rent and living w/current job	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Use loans for living expenses*	6	66.7	4	100	2	40.0
How often do you go w/o something to afford rent?						
Some months, but not every month	3	33.3	2	50.0	1	20.0
Only 1-2 Months	2	22.2	1	25.0	1	20.0
Refused to Answer/Don't Know	4	44.4	1	25.0	3	60.0

**Focus Group Themes**

The focus group discussions were broken down into five major categories: 1) rising costs, 2) resource awareness, 3) loans and outside help, 4) transportation, and 5) stigma.

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Rising Housing and Food Costs.** Many off-campus students expressed the sentiment that it seems the university does not care about the rising unaffordability of off-campus living. Many expressed that they cannot afford rising costs without getting support from outside sources such as their parents or other family. Some students are forced to take out large loans to afford their expenses. Loans will be discussed at length in the next section. Students identified the gentrification of the surrounding campus as a driver in rising costs. Many students feel like this is an issue OSU can address. Two students offered city planning perspectives to explain the increasing cost and why they feel the university has the power to influence those costs. When asked about what they think of food and housing, student expressed that it was expensive. When ask to go into detail, one participant shared:

“The stress of seeing what our utilities are going to be each month, because that's always kind of -- that, like, puts you over the edge, you know, or is it okay. I don't know, ours changes a lot month to month, so you never know” (S2, F3).

**Resource Awareness.** Many student participants were unaware of some of the campus resources. Many students are relying on word-of-mouth to obtain this information. Advertising these resources in more readily available place for students such as syllabi and widely used sites like Carmen would be incredibly beneficial. Only one student throughout all the focus groups conducted had prior knowledge of a food pantry located on campus. They shared, “I remember also not having enough information coming to college about food and housing” (S1, F2). The students interviewed also mentioned the idea of having information about food and housing expenses at orientation.

**Loans and Outside Help.** Many students interviewed relied on loans to pay most of their living expenses. Since most students aren't in high earner job positions, affording housing and

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

food can be difficult for students who do not have outside help from family or other supporters.

A student shared that:

“I feel like...I'm like the only one, and I'm like in an insane amount of debt from college, because I don't have, like, my parents giving me money...they can't afford to send me through college” (S2, F3).

Many students set maximum rent limits or choose cheaper dining plan options to save money.

With these issues come the issues of off campus safety and partial dining options. One student said, “There have been times, like I said, where my meal plan hasn't been enough” (S2, F2).

Some students can only afford lower costs housing and food options and must plan or innovate around their financial situation. One student explained that all of their living expenses come from loans and another student mentioned how students are often targeted with predatory loans.

Predatory can have high interest rates for students causing them large amounts of debt that can take years to payback.

“Everything for me has to come from loans because, like, that's my only option” (S1, F3).

**Transportation.** Another factor mentioned that mostly affected our off-campus students was transportation. Our students expressed that having a car increases access to healthy food. Most grocery stores are far from where the majority of students live near campus. The stores that are within a close distance to campus CVS, Target and fast food locations don't offer affordable or healthy food. Target and CVS have limited produces and their prices are higher than the average grocery store the cost of eating out can add up quickly for students. Students also expressed that even if they were to bus to locations farther from campus there are issues with carrying their items for far distances. This means students without a car rely on friends to get a

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

ride or have to shop at places that do not provide good access to healthy affordable food. A direct quote from one student displays the issue:

“I think food off campus can be a bit of an issue, because I'm lucky because my roommate has a car. So the only time I go grocery shopping is when she has time to go grocery shopping” (S2, F1).

**Stigma.** Almost every student in the focus groups mentioned that students don't want to be singled-out among their peers, that it is embarrassing, and that it must be their fault if they struggle with this issue. The mention that stigma can stem from social settings and engagement in which students would not want their status known. Students mentioned that not fitting in with friends can be damaging to their reputation and cause unwanted attention to be directed at them. There was a lot of feedback from students regarding stigma. Several students gave their perspectives in all three focus groups. Some of the things, students said were “I think that others would feel like I was just complaining to complain”, “I wouldn't want to feel, like, outed”, and “I've never felt like I couldn't hang out with someone or do something because I don't have enough money.”

### **Resource Review**

Current resources available to students include a student advocacy center, on-campus food pantry, and additional off campus resources upon request such as food stamps and furniture banks. The Student Advocacy Center is the most well-marketed resource, and it is likely that most students are aware of this resource or are recommended to it. This is because it is a university departments that falls under the umbrella of Student Life at Ohio State. This means university employees are often recommending students to this resource. Student also receive weekly emails from the Office of Student Life that promotes this resource. The Student

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

Advocacy Center is the most accessible resource for students who may not be aware of their options beyond campus or lack transportation. The Student Advocacy Center is also able to connect students to federal programs like food stamps for eligible students.

Buckeye Food Alliance is a student run organization founded in 2016 that seeks to reduce food insecurity at Ohio State. The work in partnership with Mid-Ohio Food Bank and the Ohio State Student Advocacy Center. The food pantry is located in the basement of Lincoln Tower on West campus. They operate three days each week and serve undergraduate, graduate and professional students on Ohio State's campus. The pantry served nearly 600 students in 2018 (first initial of person you talked to followed by their last name, personal communication, and date).

Best Food Forward is an initiative for Ohio State University students and staff to increase access to fresh and healthy produce. The initiative functions as a student -run organization on Ohio State's campus. The program offers fresh produce and bulk purchase options at a reduced price. They operate on grants that they must apply for yearly and they currently operate on a grant provided by Ohio State's Office of Academic Affairs. On average, they serve about 80 people per week. Beginning in Fall 2019, they will launch a "Best Buddies" program that will allow students to access their program at a reduced cost. This program will be available to low income students who self-enroll in the program.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Demographic Survey

Through the demographic survey researchers found that over 30 percent of participants were experiencing some form of food insecurity. Compared to the study conducted by Ohio State three years ago, our sample had a higher average of food insecurity by around 10 points (Ohio State Center for Study of Student Life, 2015). There could be several reasons for this discrepancy. The first being that the sample for this study was very small and could be skewing results, this will be discussed more in the limitations section. Another reason could be attributed to the rising costs of food and housing in the campus area as told to researchers by students interviewed. There have been major updates to Ohio State's campus and surrounding area in the last three years that could be affected this increased in students identifying as food insecure. As stated in the results section, the national average for food insecurity among students is 35% (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

As the findings of the study indicate, 100 percent of the food insecure students who participated in the focus groups were relying on loans to cover their living expenses. Three out of four of those students were currently living off-campus. A recent study conducted found that there are high rates of food insecurity in students living off campus and these students often fall into financial debt to support their needs (Knol, Robb, McKinley & Wood, 2019).

### Focus Group

**Themes.** As stated in the results section, five major themes were identified through the content researchers received from participants. In each focus group there were major discussions on different issues depending upon the mixture of on campus and off campus students. On campus students tended to not be as knowledgeable about the university and its policies and

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

resources compared to older students. Off campus also tended to have more experiences at the university that they were able to draw upon.

**Rising Housing Costs.** Gentrification and the rising cost of living around campus as one of the first big issues identified by students. Every participant agreed that this was a problem happening at Ohio State. Immediately, the luxury apartment complexes which have become more common over recent years were mentioned as examples of gentrification.

When asked to elaborate on why they believe that is, two participants framed the issue from a city planning perspective. Both of these participants had different framing perspectives. One participant said that the increase in students from wealthy areas deciding to attend Ohio State has driving up the cost of living. These wealthy students have the ability to afford rising costs around campus and the more of them that choose to attend the school, the more the school and surrounding campus area cater to them. The other participant approached from a different perspective and suggested that prices rise because landlords and the university know students have to live in the surrounding campus or on campus so these institutions are able to set any price they want.

**Resource Awareness.** Students were asked directly about what resources on campus they were aware of that support student experiencing food and/or housing insecurity. Despite the resources available to students many find it difficult to access and many were unaware of the resources in place to combat food and housing issues. Many students didn't have much to answer to with this question. After researchers gave examples of some of the resources such as the on campus food pantry, few students were aware of the existence of these resources.

The second focus group consisting mostly of on-campus students expressed to researchers they are very undereducated of the support sources on the campus. They mentioned

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

that the information for these resources was difficult to find for them and that they have to rely on information from upperclassmen. These students mentioned advertising these resources in more readily available place for students such as syllabi and high traffic student sites such as Carmen would be incredibly beneficial.

**Loans and Outside Help.** As found in the results of the demographic survey, in addition to self-disclosure, several of the students participating in the focus group relied on loans to pay their living expenses. A different study found that student food insecurity most stemmed from limited financial resources which leads many student to accrue financial debt to support themselves through school (Knol, Robb, McKinley & Wood, 2019). In one of the focus groups, one student in particular mentioned that cover everything for them. Students without parental support typically have to rely on loans that can put them into debt for an extended period in their life. It important that students aren't going into large amounts of debt just to afford basic needs like shelter and food while they are in school.

**Transportation.** The topic of transportation and the effect it has on food insecurity for college students was not identified by researchers prior to conducting the focus groups. Background literature (Food Reesarch and Action Center [FRAC] ResearchWire, 2019 supports the themes on rising costs, resources, loans and sigma in relation to food and housing insecurity among college however the themes of transportation was identified directly by Ohio State students. Students informed us that it was necessary to have a car in order to adequately shop for healthy and affordable food. Options around campus including Target and CVS have very little options when it comes to produce and their prices tend to be higher than average grocery stores. Students mentioned that they rely on friends to take them to the grocery store when necessary.

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Stigma.** As found in our focus group discussions, stigma for students experiencing housing and food insecurity is high. Very few focus group participants disclosed dealing with the issue of food and housing insecurity personal despite results showing that a third of participants to experience food insecurity. This gives the implication that many might not have felt comfortable sharing in the larger focus group discussion as many referred to friends but never themselves in wider discussion. This connects very well to what we heard in the focus group that students don't want to be singled out among their peers, that it is embarrassing, and that it must be their fault if they struggle with this issue.

### **Resource Review**

Through the resource review researchers were able to identify three important campus resources, their functions, and the amount of people they service. The resources were the Student Advocacy Center, Buckeye Food Alliance food pantry, and Best Food Forward. Each of these resources handles a different aspect of support for students and have varying levels of funding attached to them.

The Student Advocacy Center (SAC) was the first resource to be reviewed and this review took place before any focus group sessions took place. Having this knowledge before the focus groups began allowed the researcher to share their knowledge with participants interested in learning how the SAC supports students. Through the review the researcher gained knowledge on several support aspects that are not marketed by the SAC public on their website. The website for this office does not mention that they can connect students to food stamps or other outside support sources. Since this aspect is not marketed publicly, there are students that are unaware that this resource can assist them in more than what is stated on their website. This could lead to several student missing out on these important and valuable resources.

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

Buckeye Food Alliance was interviewed shortly after the focus groups were conducted. Researchers gained knowledge on the number of students that are served by this food pantry and the type of students that service the food pantry. The representative mentioned that a little under a thousand students visited the pantry in 2018, for a campus with nearly 60,000 students (OSU Institutional Research & Planning, 2019). This statistics is in line with feedback received from students that they were largely unaware this resource existed on the campus.

Best Food Forward is working to get students access to healthy and affordable food. This initiative has the potential to fill the gaps of the grocery stores near campus that tend to lack fresh and affordable produce. This ties into the focus group discussion on transportation and the way it affects how students can purchase their food.

After the study concluded, the College of Education and Human Ecology opened a second on-campus food pantry (Chenoweth, 2019). This pantry covers needs of students in a different way than the food pantry located in Lincoln Tower. This new pantry gives students pre-prepared food bags and has a more central location being located in a classroom building. Many of the organization that have started to combat food insecurity on campus were started by students in response to the study conducted by Ohio State in 2015.

### **Limitations**

A limitation in my research is the small sample size of students interviewed in the focus groups. Another limitation to my research is the lack of diversity in my sample. The focus groups only consisted of white students which is not representative of the entire Ohio State population and that means we missed important perspectives. Research has shown that students of color are more likely to experience food insecurity (Mcarthur et al., 2018). As research expands on this issue, this study can hopefully be replicated on a larger scale with more diverse voices. To

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

change the outcome of the study, the researcher would use a different recruitment method that targets students more directly than flyers. Emailing the demographic survey first and then recruiting from those who respond to the survey and match criteria would ensure that diverse people and opinions are recruited. Changing the recruitment method would help to solve both issues with sample size and lack of diversity. Another limitation is that much of the feedback was about food insecurity more than housing insecurity. This study sought to hear opinions from students in both issues. Food insecurity tended to dominate the focus group conversations and most of the resources reviewed are looking to support those who experience food insecurity. To solve this issue the focus group interview guide could be redeveloped to separate the food and housing issues by section allowing for students to talk about one issue at a time.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

It is important that the university hear student experiences to know if their resources are making an impact following the original study done in 2015. Research has shown us that when students are hungry or homeless their performance in school suffers (Broton, & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). In social work, understanding the resources available for clients to connect to and their ability to actually utilize them is important. Of the students found food insecure in this study, none of them were using campus resources. We learned from their feedback that the reason they haven't used the resources is because of the lack of awareness, the accessibility, and most importantly, the stigma that comes with this issue. Having resources for clients is important but if they are not using or accessing them, are the institutional practices in place helpful at all.

It seems students at this university are passionate about the issue as most of the resources reviewed for this study were created by students who want to help their peers who may have this issue. As more resources become available on campus with a diversity in how they serve students, there is a good chance that more students will begin to access the resources. The main conclusion I draw from my research is the need for resource education and accessibility.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

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Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

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Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Appendices**

**Appendix A Demographic Survey**

For Researcher Use Only:

Location ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Moderator ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Co-Moderator ID # \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographic Information**

1. Please write your age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please place an "X" on the line(s) that you feel most closely describe(s) your race and ethnicity. You may check all that apply.

\_\_\_ Latino or Hispanic

\_\_\_ White or Caucasian

\_\_\_ Black or African American

\_\_\_ Native American or American Indian

\_\_\_ Asian or Pacific Islander

\_\_\_ Other (for example, 2 or more races): Please list: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I do not know.

\_\_\_ I do not want to answer.

3. Please place an "X" on the line that you feel most closely describes your gender.

\_\_\_ Female    \_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_ Transgender or Other

\_\_\_ I do not want to answer.

4. Do you live on or off campus?

\_\_\_ Off Campus    \_\_\_ On Campus

5. Do you feel you have adequate access to healthy food?

\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

6. Do you feel you have adequate access to safe and affordable housing?

\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_ Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

7. Do you currently use campus resources such as the food bank or student advocacy center to help support yourself?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
8. Are you receiving help from someone to pay your living expenses?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
- 

**Housing Insecurity Information**

9. Do you think you rent or living expenses are reasonable?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
10. Can you afford your rent or living expenses with your current job? (if you don't have job simply check the no.)  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
11. Do you use loans to pay for your living expenses?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
12. How often do you go without something in order to afford your rent?  
 Almost every month  
 Some months but not every month  
 Only 1 or 2 months  
 Don't Know or Refuse to Answer
- 

**Food Security and Food Access**

13. Please write down the places you purchase food on a regular basis (at least once each month). This can include grocery stores, convenience stores, corner stores, dollar stores, restaurants, or any other places where you go regularly for food and spend money. Please try to be honest and write down the one(s) that come to mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

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***Below are several statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for you.***

14. During your time in college, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes → GO TO 17A
- No
- Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

17A. How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

- Almost every month
- Some months but not every month
- Only 1 or 2 months
- Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

15. During your time in college, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

16. During your time in college, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know or Refuse to Answer

**Thank you so much for your time and participation in the survey and the focus groups!**

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Appendix B Focus Group Interview Guide**

Hello,

Thank you for taking the time to join in the discussion about food and housing in the Ohio State community.

My name is Mara Sydnor and assisting me is Michelle Kaiser. We represent the Ohio State University College of Social Work. This discussion is part of a study that is being conducted to hear your opinions about food and housing around Ohio State.

We will now review the informed consent form. In order for you to participate in the focus group and complete the survey questionnaire, you will need to sign the consent form. You should have received the form when you entered the room. I will now read the form. Please ask any questions you may have as I read the form.

*<< READ INFORMED CONSENT FORM OUT LOUD. Answer any questions. Request all participants sign the form.*

*Provide participants with a copy of the consent form and a pen.*

*If anyone chooses not to sign the consent form, thank them for their time and escort them to the door. >>*

Now please take a few minutes to complete the short information form about yourself. The form is printed on (colored) paper. Please do NOT write your name or include any personal or identifying information on the form. If you need any assistance with the form, please raise your hand and Mara will assist you. When you are done, please let us know and I/we will collect the form.

*<< Once the surveys are completed, continue with the focus group discussion. >>*

Before we begin, I will share some important ground rules.

This discussion is part of a research project to understand what kind of policies and programs Ohio State can create that will help reduce food and housing insecurity among students. We are completing 4 focus groups, including on campus students and campus students. We are tape recording the discussion because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We have asked \_\_\_\_\_ Court Reporting Agency to record the conversation and they will be taking notes.

It is very important that only one person speak at a time so that the recording is clear, so everyone's comments can be heard, and so everyone gets a chance to speak. Please do not use your real names so that no identifying information is recorded. Every person in this room is obligated to honor each other's privacy and not repeat anything that is heard in

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

this discussion. We ask that you not discuss any information that you would not want to be accidentally shared outside this room.

Remember, this discussion is confidential, and we will only be using first names and no one's names will ever be attached to their comments. If you like, feel free to use a fake name for yourself. The name cards in front of you are to help everyone remember each other's names. Please fill out the name card with your first name (real or fake).

*<< Allow time for everyone to write their own names on the card. >>*

Now please take a moment to either turn off your cell phones or set to vibrate. We ask that you refrain from using your phones during this discussion, unless it is an emergency. If you do need to take a call, please step outside of the room so as not to disturb the discussion or make it difficult for the recorder. Please do refrain from using your phones at all, which includes texting, surfing the web, or any other activity. We value your opinion and want you fully engaged in the process.

Your answers are strictly confidential, and no one will know what any particular person said or who was present for the discussions. It is important to remember that because this discussion is confidential, nothing that anyone says and no parts of the discussion should be shared any time with anyone after the discussion ends. When the findings are ready, every effort will be made to ensure that no one can identify the discussion participants.

The topics and questions for our discussion will cover different perspectives on food and housing insecurity at Ohio State. You may choose not to take part in any or all of the discussion. Pizza will be served at the end of the discussion.

Also, please know there are no right or wrong opinions in this discussion but rather just different opinions, so please feel free to be honest and share your opinion. We are interested in all opinions.

Our discussion will last 90 minutes.

### **Ice Breaker**

I would like each of you to take a moment and close your eyes. Think about some of your favorite Ohio State moments.

Now I would like people to share. Tell us about that experience.

[Highlight experiences related to cultural preferences, familial traditions, food insecurity, shared experiences].

Now think about the last few months. What comes to mind when you think about the food and housing?

## Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives on Food and Housing Insecurity

[Highlight similarities, differences, probe about preferences and barriers].

### Contextual and Introductory Questions

1. Do you think food and housing insecurity is an issue at Ohio State?
  - a. Have you ever personally dealt with this issue?
  - b. Did you seek any support or resources provided by the university? Please be specific about these programs?
  - c. Did the resources adequately address your needs? Did you feel there were any gaps in resources provided?
2. In general, what are some things that you think may cause food and housing insecurity around the university?

[Write list on large flip chart for everyone to see].

### Primary Questions

3. Do you currently feel Ohio State properly addresses the needs of students?
4. Do you feel that Ohio State policies and resources are easier to access and understand?
  - a. If not, what ways could make this information more accessible for students?
5. Do you feel resources are conveniently located?
6. From your perspective as a student what can Ohio State do better regarding food and housing insecurity?
7. Have you had to take out loans to pay any of your living expenses?
  - a. Do you feel like this is a normal part of college? How many people do you know that rely on loans to afford their living expenses?
8. Do you have access to affordable and healthy food?
  - a. How often do you skip meals?
  - b. Do you think that is a normal experience.
9. What are reasons you may not disclose that you experience food or housing insecurity? What do you feel would help reduce the stigma surrounding this issue?
10. What resources or program would you like to see available on campus?

### Concluding Questions

I would like to invite you to discuss anything else we have not talked about today related to food and housing insecurity at Ohio State.

Mara is going to read a summary of the ideas that came about in today's discussion. Please listen to the summary and let me know if there is anything that has been left out of

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

the summary, or if you have anything that you would like to clarify or add to the key points before we conclude our discussion.

*<<Moderator or co-moderator asks if anything has been left out and if anyone would like to add or clarify any key points. >>*

I want to thank you each for taking time to be part of the group discussion.

Before we conclude, I want to remind you that our discussion is confidential. Please do not share what we discussed here with anyone after you leave.

Again, we thank you for taking part in the discussion. We will now provide you with pizza and drinks. Also, please feel free to take food with you.

Thank you again.

Feed Me, House Me: Undergraduate College Students' Perspectives  
on Food and Housing Insecurity

**Appendix C Recruitment Flyer**

**Research Participation Opportunity**

Do you feel that you have adequate access to affordable and healthy food? Have you ever had concerns affording your housing? We are looking for on campus and off campus students to participate in research concerning food and housing insecurity. We want to hear from students on their personal experience thoughts and concerns. All participants will receive a gift card upon completion or participation. All research is confidential no identifiable information will be collected. There will be four sessions total 2 for each group of students (on or off campus). Students will only be allowed to participate in one session. Groups will be limited to 8 students per session and spots will be given on a first come first serve basis.

**Meeting date, time, and location TBD.**

