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## Intersecting Disparities: Food Insecurity on College Campuses

Montserrat Alejandre Jimenez

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, malejandr001@csbsju.edu*

Keira Johnson

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, kjohnson006@csbsju.edu*

Nicole Lefebvre

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, nlefebvre002@csbsju.edu*

Isabelle Scheffler

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, ischeffle001@csbsju.edu*

Fabian Venegas-Ramos

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, fvenegasr001@csbsju.edu*

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# Intersecting Disparities: Food Insecurity on College Campuses

Montserrat Alejandre Jimenez, Keira Johnson, Nicole Lefebvre, Isabelle Scheffler, and Fabian Venegas-Ramos

## Background

Food insecurity affects a range of demographics across our nation. As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2021, “food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” Food insecurity impacts college students, including students on our campuses. In the U.S., college students are disproportionately food insecure when compared to the general population (Henry 2020), with studies suggesting that 30-40% of college students are food insecure (Bruening et al. 2017). At our schools, more than one third of students reported experiencing food insecurity in survey data (Heying & Nash 2021). Issues of food access, dining availability, money, and time affect levels of student food insecurity.

## Findings

- Students developed strategies such as planning their meals, sharing food with roommates, shopping at more economical stores, and relying on their friends for transportation.
- Challenges with dining services and their lack of accommodation
- Dietary habits and restrictions; time also greatly affected students and created barriers to eating, many students reported choosing homework over meals
- Other barriers included lack of transportation and dining service hours of operation conflicting with student work schedules or class schedules

*“I feel like honestly, the Perk is there to just eat up all your money the Schu as well like, just flex it for drinks, all these sugary drinks that are literally not healthy for you and also like just probably cause more anxiety in college students because of the amount of caffeine and like energy stuff they have in them”*

*“So like, in the beginning, I would have a time. Time to eat but then after that like homework was starting to be given out and I would like spend more time on that and then I wouldn't eat as much”*

*“ Oh, yeah, so yesterday, I had like a test like for my first class, so instead of like going, I mean, I think I ate something super, super quick, I think I just got like some grapes or something. And then I went like to the library and just like studied and everything. Later on, like at night I had like chips with like my friend cuz we were watching movies, but that's pretty much it that I ate. I didn't really eat much yesterday now that I think about it”*

## Suggested Action Items

- Increase accessibility to food during breaks by having longer hours for dining services and snack bins for students
- Advertise resources using campus organizations and departments, such as student Senates, and Multicultural Student Services.
- Decrease stigma by raising awareness, encouraging conversations about food insecurity on campus, and having programming around cooking affordable foods and budgeting
- Have a student advocate for dining policy decisions who can act as a point of contact for those experiences food insecurity
- Maintain student privacy
- Implement free or reduced cost meal plan

## Discussion

Our findings illustrate how students navigate food insecurity and barriers to accessing food and dining services. Research indicates that the intersection of food insecurity and marginalized identities, housing insecurity, and student financial aid are strongly connected (Paybe-Sturges et al. 2018). These overarching themes in connection with our research suggest that there are a wide range of factors associated with higher risk of food insecurity on college campuses. Further research connects the themes of access to transportation, gender, race, ethnicity to be factors in higher levels of food insecurity (Mirabatur et al, 2016). While the literature on food insecurity is growing, it must consider a student's intersecting identities and how they shape their experiences with food on campus. Many effects and implications of food insecurity remain unexplored and must be investigated to properly address the consequences of food insecurity and to create transformative solutions. It is also necessary to examine the relationship between food insecurity and food management skills, which include education, budgeting, and planning.

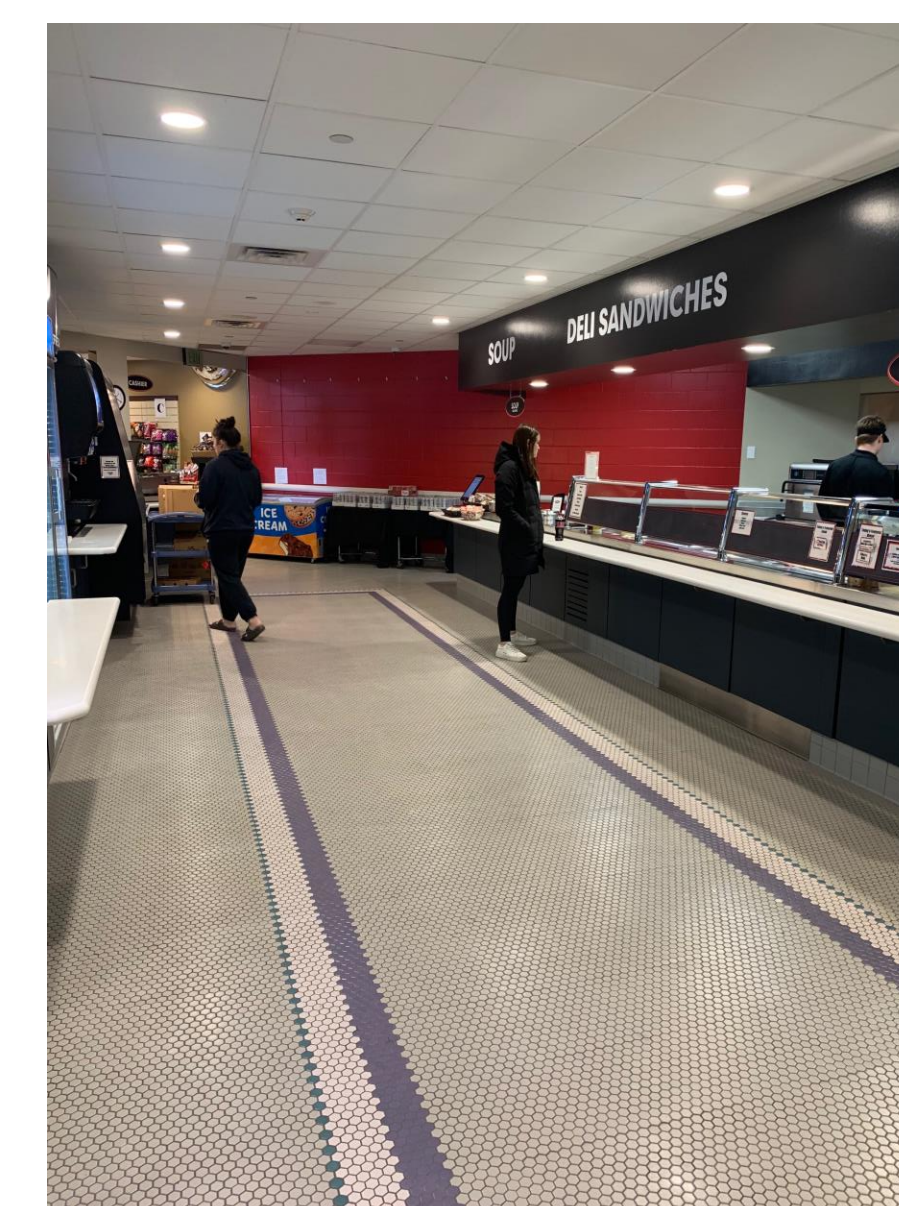
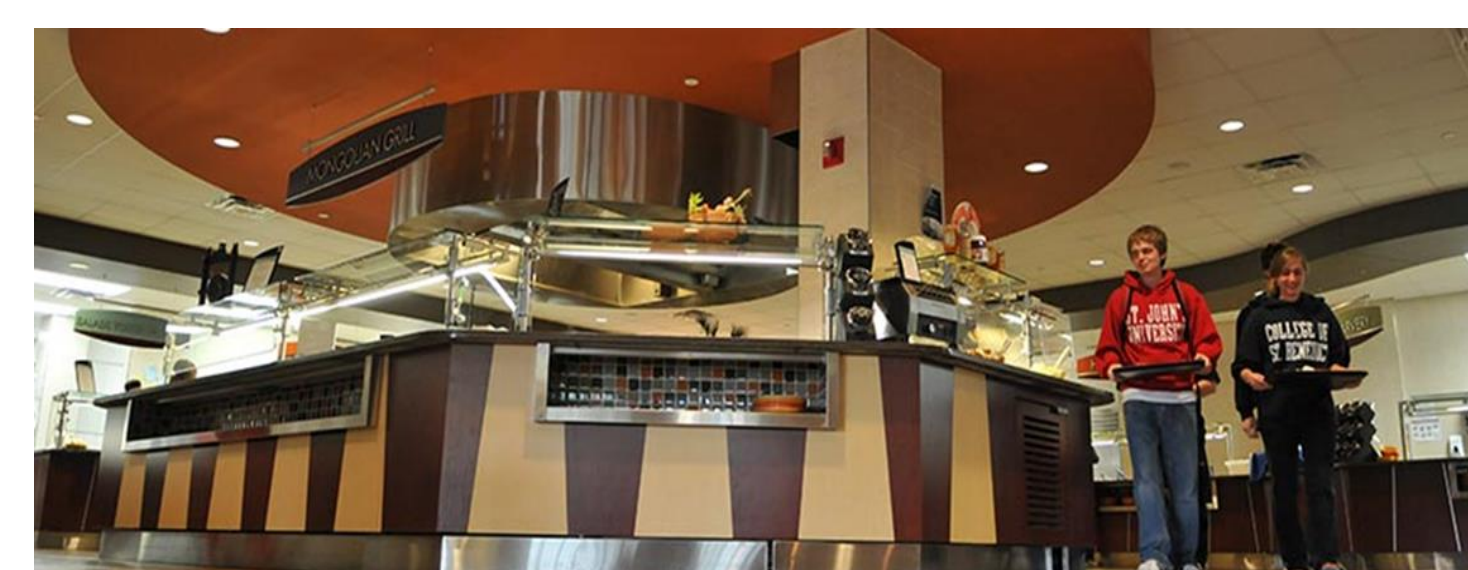


Images were taken from the csbsjuconfessions page on Instagram.

## Methods

As students who attend a small midwestern university, we have realized that food disparities and insecurity is an often-overlooked problem. Drawing on a broader dataset, we analyzed how students are affected by food insecurity.

- 15 transcripts of student interviews were analyzed
- A codebook was developed, and interviews were coded, focusing on three central themes:
  1. Lack of awareness of resources on or near campus
  2. Student strategies to mitigate food insecurity
  3. Dietary habits and restrictions



The bottom left image was taken from the CSBSJU website.

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