

Conversations on Food Justice: Food Insecurity on College Campuses

October 19, 2022

IN A NUTSHELL

Throughout the pandemic, food insecurity and hunger have been in the minds of people across the country. Yet hunger on college campuses, in spite of impacting huge numbers of students nationally, remains a hidden epidemic.

A [Hope Center Survey from 2021](#) showed that around 30% of college students were experiencing hunger, with over half of respondents unsure how to apply for support. Students have a wide range of backgrounds and needs that don't often match the preconceived notion we have of them.

But, more students are getting involved, and solutions are becoming more creative and responsive to their needs. Even with this incredible progress, more action is needed to expand research and policy to ensure that no college student is at risk for the long- and short-term consequences of hunger.

“Students are using their voice - get ready for change, the students are coming!” *Jaime Hansen*

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND QUOTES

- **We need to break preconceived ideas of who a student is.** The image we have of students doesn't match the image we have of those experiencing hunger, and that disconnect leads to students missing out on services that could prevent their food insecurity. It is increasingly more common now for students to be adults who are financially independent, might have their own dependents or are first generation college students without strong financial support systems.
 - o “Hunger doesn't look like you think it does. That framing really limits us from seeing the full picture. Reexamine your assumptions and your pictures of hunger and food insecurity.”
Jessica Owens Young
- **“There are very real examples, so many college students face every day: stay in school or follow an opportunity to make more money – when you drop out, it's that much harder to get back in [to college], to engage, and prolong your education. You managed to get in, but now you have an immediate need for food, shelter, an emergency medical issue, and you need to drop out to meet that need. From a longer-term perspective, we all see inequities in cities across the country, when you have individuals drop out, their path back is through minimum wage jobs, and that pathway does not lead to financial stability in the long run. Living wage jobs would put them on completely different trajectory. [This has] intergenerational implications and inequities, and food and housing is a large portion of that need.”** *Radha Mutthiah*
- **Students are leading conversations on hunger and food insecurity** in their classrooms and schools, which reduces stigma and increases the number of people who access services.
 - o “Some students don't know what a food desert is or didn't know the term food insecurity and they realize they grew up in food desert or were food insecure themselves; it was so

normalized and hushed. They realize it's an issue, and an issue worth talking about." *Anna Bowden*

- **Students use their various educational programs and areas of expertise to come up with solutions.** For example, law students may contribute ideas for policy, business students bring their expertise on business models; nutrition students contribute to ideas regarding promoting health in pantries. These grassroots efforts lead to better programs, since they are informed by the very people who will use them.
 - **There are specific programs that can break barriers and stigma.** Some on-campus pantries have moved to a shopper model, and some offer delivery options for students who have other obligations like work or childcare. These types of adaptations increase dignity and connection and address real barriers to access.
 - **More research is needed to get a better picture of who is experiencing hunger,** and in order to do that on a national scale, the research field needs to decide on a consistent definition of food insecurity. National demographics of student hunger will help to identify areas where resources should be focused to optimize equity. In particular, we should invest in data collection in Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic majority schools.
 - **The time is ripe for energizing efforts in advocacy.** The [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) in September highlighted a renewed national interest in food and nutrition. In particular, there are many barriers to enrolling in SNAP, such as work requirements, challenges with completing the applications and awareness of program availability. Pre-pandemic, only 31% of students who qualified actually received SNAP, so efforts much be made to close that gap.
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TAKE ACTION

- Support a Hunger Free Campus Bill in your state. To learn more about how to get involved visit: <https://www.swipehunger.org/hungerfree/>
 - Call your legislators to let them know that hunger on campus is a priority for you. [You can find your legislators here](#) or search "Find my legislator" and your state.
 - If you work in an on-campus pantry, consider setting up a visit for your legislators.
 - Help connect on-campus pantries with local food banks.
 - Consider donating to on-campus pantries in your community.
 - Talk about hunger and food insecurity to destigmatize and normalize the issue in your communities.
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CONTINUED LEARNING



Read more about the impact, current efforts and recommendations for next steps [here](#).



In 2021, Swipe Out Hunger conducted a survey of pantries on college campuses to determine the basic needs and barriers pantries were experiencing. Read the [full report](#).



Capital Area Food Bank conducted social research in 2022 to better understand the scope of hunger and food insecurity and hunger in the Washington, DC area in light of the pandemic. This [population-level survey](#) was the first of its kind, and breaks down the data by a variety of demographics to get a clear picture of who is impacted by hunger.



[Farm Link Project](#) connects farms with surplus produce to communities experiencing food insecurity. Not only are they addressing food insecurity with food donations, they also were started by college students and continue to employ college students which gets to some of the root causes of hunger.



Read more about the [Role of Institutions of Higher Education in the Food Justice Movement](#), written by moderator Johanna Elsemore, presenter Jessica Owens Young and Anastasia Snelling

FEATURED PANELISTS



Anna Bowden

Campus Life Program Assistant, Chair of the Food Pantry Board of Director, and No Kid Hungry Youth Ambassador, Louisiana State University

Anna Bowden is in her senior year of pursuing a Nutrition and Food Science degree with a concentration in Nutrition, Health, and Society and a minor in Business Administration. She is working towards tackling the pervasive problem of food insecurity through sustainable methods at Louisiana State University. In her short career she has worked her way up from being a student worker in the LSU Food Pantry to the Chair of the Board of Directors for the pantry. Also, in her time at LSU she has been the director of Volunteer LSU and is currently one of seven students in charge of managing all volunteer and student events at LSU. This past summer she served as a Youth Ambassador for Share Our Strength in New Orleans working with the Summer Feeding Program. Anna is currently working on a collaborative fundraising event between LSU and Ole Miss to provide meals for both communities. She plans to continue her work with food systems and connecting food waste to food insecure communities.



Jaime Hansen

Executive Director, Swipe Out Hunger

Jaime Hansen is the Executive Director at Swipe Out Hunger. With over 20 years in the community benefit sector, Jaime has worked with national, state, and multi-county agencies to achieve stability and mission-driven success. Jaime currently resides in Boise, Idaho — a state with a strong agricultural community but large barriers to food and nutrition access. Her passion for justice and equity for basic needs is shaped by her childhood. With nomadic parents, she was offered an opportunity to live in different states across the country. Jaime has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychological Sciences as well as a Master's Degree in Public Administration and returns to school every fall to teach Nonprofit Management at Boise State University. You can often find Jaime in the vast wilderness of Idaho on a raft or in snowshoes. She loves all things food and regularly experiments in cooking with her partner Xanti, a 5-year-old with dance fever, and their two dogs.

Follow for more:

1. [Swipe Out Hunger website](#)
2. Swipe Out Hunger Instagram: [@SwipeOutHunger](#)
3. Swipe Out Hunger Twitter: [@SwipeHunger](#)
4. Swipe Out Hunger Tik Tok: [@swipeouthunger](#)
5. [Jaime's LinkedIn](#)

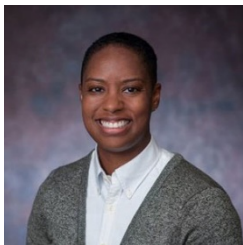


Radha Muthiah

President and CEO, Capital Area Food Bank

Radha Muthiah currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Capital Area Food Bank. As CEO, she leads a team that will distribute 50 million meals of good, healthy food, directly and through a network of 400+ partners, to more than 540,000 food insecure people in the greater Washington region each year. Since joining the food bank in March of 2018, Muthiah has led the food bank in its development of a new strategic plan that both addresses hunger today and begins to tackle the root causes of food insecurity. Under Muthiah's leadership, the CAFB is responding to the increase in the region's food insecurity as a result of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. She is also focused on the development of programs and services that bundle food with education, skill development, financial literacy training, housing, health and more in order to effect catalytic change in the lives of those the food bank serves.

Prior to her role at the food bank, Muthiah has led and grown both start-up and established organizations spanning multiple sectors in the US and internationally. Most recently, Muthiah served as CEO of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (now Clean Cooking Alliance), a public-private partnership hosted by the United Nations Foundation. Muthiah has also worked at CARE International USA, ICF International, the American Red Cross, Mercer Management Consulting, and the Council on Foreign Relations. She serves as a member of the Greater Washington Board of Trade and of the Public Health Institute Board of Directors, and is a Trustee of the Federal City Council. She holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in economics from Tufts University and a Master of Business Administration degree from Stanford University.



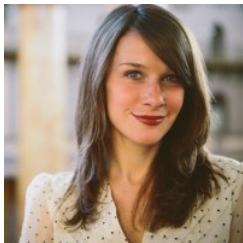
Jessica Owens Young

Professor of Health Studies, American University

Jessica Owens-Young is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Studies at American University. Her research centers on investments and policies that improve health through community and economic development and the roles race and racism play in shaping these investments and policies. Prior to American University, she was a Program Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation where her work focused on the connections between health and early academic success. She has a Ph.D. in Health Policy and Management from Johns Hopkins University, a M.S. in Health Promotion Management from American University, and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Follow for more:

Twitter: [@jessowensyoung](https://twitter.com/jessowensyoung)



Johanna Elsemore, Moderator

Manager, Media & Public Affairs, Share Our Strength | No Kid Hungry

Johanna Elsemore manages media & public affairs for Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign. She's an alumna of American University, where she received her Masters of Science in Nutrition Education with a concentration on food justice. During her time at American, Elsemore designed a food justice curriculum for undergraduate students and published an article in the [Journal of Food Studies](#) examining the critical role of colleges and universities in the food justice movement, from developing the next generation of food justice leaders to addressing food insecurity on college campuses. She's a passionate foodie, self-taught chef and triathlete living in Washington D.C. with her husband and two pit bulls.

HOST INFORMATION



[Food & Society](#) at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.



[Share Our Strength](#) is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

Keep the conversation going! If you have any questions about this or other sessions, or want to suggest a topic or panelist, please email us at foodjustice@strength.org.