

The 2023 Feed Your Future Cookbook:

Destigmatizing and Addressing Food Insecurity and Its Impact on UCSB Undergraduate and  
Graduate Students

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The “Feed Your Future Cookbook” is a pamphlet-style recipe guide created in response to the highly prevalent issue of food insecurity currently plaguing the undergraduate and graduate student populations at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide UCSB students with the information (recipes, tips/tricks, resources, etc.) they need to keep themselves fueled throughout the day regardless of their financial situation, living situation, or prior knowledge about cooking. With this resource, students will have access to a range of easy, low-cost and low-prep, recipes that can be made from staple pantry ingredients consistently available at the food banks, pantrys, and other basic needs services at UCSB. In addition to recipes, the pamphlet will also provide instructions on how to access and utilize the range of basic needs services available at UCSB. Although this resource was designed specifically for use by students, marketing for the Feed Your Future Cookbook will also target faculty and staff at UCSB. First and foremost, my hope is that this resource increases students’ abilities in, and comfort with, accessing their basic needs, providing them tools they need to be able to take steps to increase their food security. However, I also hope that this project serves as a starting point for the greater conversation about the importance of de-stigmatizing food insecurity on college campuses, as well as address the role it plays in feeding the intergenerational cycle of poverty and inequality.

The transition from high school to college puts most students in a situation where, for the first time, they find themselves entirely responsible for ensuring that all of their basic human needs are being met: a seemingly simple task, but one that requires proper knowledge, tools, resources, and support. In their multi-institutional study on the prevalence and correlates of U.S. undergraduate food insecurity, Zein and colleagues found that more than half of their sample

population of college students facing food insecurity did not report childhood food insecurity<sup>1</sup>, indicating students are lacking preparation for this new stage of life. Their plates already full (no pun intended) with the many requirements coming from being in classes, working jobs and internships, getting involved in research, planning for the future, not to mention trying to have a social life, undergraduate students simply do not have the bandwidth to stress about how and where they are going to get their next meal.

Looking at the causes of undergraduate/graduate student food insecurity, it becomes clear how this issue is due, in part, to the ‘invisible’ nature in which it appears in the lives of students; with the majority of students not even aware of the dangerous state they are living in. Food insecurity is defined simply as not having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food. For college students, specifically, food insecurity can look different from one situation to the next. Whether a student lacks sufficient funds to pay for groceries, doesn’t have the proper tools/kitchen space to cook for themselves, is without a consistent means of accessing a grocery store, hasn’t been taught how to prepare a properly nutritious meal, or simply doesn’t have time to eat between classes<sup>2</sup>; any barrier getting in the way of students feeding themselves consistently and sufficiently throughout the day quickly snowballs into this greater issue with serious, dangerous, and long-lasting implications.

Research consistently finding food insecurity experienced by undergraduate students to be directly correlated with lower GPA’s, worse attendance, and a higher risk of dropping out<sup>3</sup> shows the dangers of these common, daily experiences of college students. And these concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Zein, A., Shelnut, K.P., Colby, S. *et al.* “Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among U.S. College Students: a Multi-Institutional Study”. *BMC Public Health*. 19, 660 (2019).

<sup>2</sup> University of California. “2022 Multi Year Compact Annual Report: Pre-Release Draft”. *UCOP Multiyear Framework*. 2022.

<sup>3</sup> McCoy, Maureen. “Food Insecurity on College Campuses: The Invisible Epidemic.” *Forefront Group*, 2022.

only escalate as daily ‘inconveniences’ become normalized and accepted as “just a part of the normal college lifestyle”. If universities truly are dedicated to ensuring the success of their students, in school and in future prospects, they must make the health and wellbeing of their students a top priority. All people should be well-versed and well-equipped with the proper knowledge, tools, and resources to meet their basic needs, especially college students, but this is not, and has never been, a priority for our educational system.

This massive issue is only compounded when intersecting issues of poverty, inequality, and injustice are taken into account. The long list of barriers getting in the way of students’ ability to access consistent, sufficient meals only gets longer when looking at historically marginalized and oppressed populations. A recent study examining food insecurity in California’s public university system found that, while this dangerous state was highly prevalent regardless of race or ethnicity, White/Caucasian students were less likely to be food insecure when compared to any other population<sup>4</sup>. This evidence exposes how food insecurity not only impacts students’ success and future prospects, but feeds the deadly cycle of intergenerational poverty by creating barriers to already marginalized populations. Further evidence showing that a college education leads to a higher likelihood of future employment, higher wages, and reduced need for future public assistance<sup>5</sup> show how food insecurity experienced by undergraduate students keeps hard-working, deserving young adults from reaching their full potential.

Looking at the prevalence of this issue on UCSB’s campus, data collected from the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UC UES) over the past decade show not only the

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<sup>4</sup> Martinez, Suzanna M., Karen Webb, Edward A. Frongillo, and Lorrene D. Ritchie. “Food Insecurity in California’s Public University System: What Are the Risk Factors?” *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 13, no. 1 (2017): 1–18.

<sup>5</sup> Payne-Sturges, Devon C., Allison Tjaden, Kimberly M. Caldeira, Kathryn B. Vincent, and Amelia M. Arria. “Student Hunger on Campus: Food Insecurity among College Students and Implications for Academic Institutions.” *American Journal of Health Promotion* 32, no. 2 (2017): 349–54.

dangerously high rate of food insecurity present among UCSB's student population, but serious a lack of attention and action being taken to address this massive issue. In the spring of 2022, the UC UES found that 43% of UCSB students were living in conditions of either "low food security" or "very low food security"<sup>6</sup>. While these numbers show slight improvement from previous years, with 48% of UCSB undergraduate students in 2016 reporting food insecurity, they nonetheless expose UCSB as a college campus with almost half of its 23,000 students actively struggling to meet their basic human needs. In light of this, food insecurity at UCSB reveals its true colors: a systemic issue actively feeding the cycle that keeps marginalized populations at a disadvantage, with detrimental implications for the success of all students in achieving higher education and maximizing future prospects.

I became passionate about the issue of undergraduate food insecurity during my work as a Food, Nutrition, Basic Skills, and Health Equity intern at UCSB's Department of Health and Wellness. Interactions with students coming to our events first exposed me to the sheer number of students facing food insecurity at UCSB as a result of a lack of education in, preparation for, and ability to take care of their own mental and physical well-being. Our education system, charged with preparing young citizens with all the knowledge and tools they need to become active and successful members of society, falls flat when it comes to teaching young adults on how to meet and maintain their basic human needs. The mission of Health and Wellness, and the work that I do as an intern, is to ensure all students are physically and mentally on the same playing field so they have an equal opportunity to pursue and achieve academic and future success.

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<sup>6</sup> UC EDU. "Student Basic Needs" University of California, September 27, 2022. Accessed February 7, 2023.

I noticed this massive gap in the education of students surrounding proper nutrition, and realized that the majority of students, and people for that matter, were oblivious to the serious dangers and implications that improper nutrition can have on their health and their futures. In conversation with my boss Mallory Russell, we came up with the idea to host an event in honor of Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week where I would address this highly stigmatized issue of hunger and food insecurity among students. She pointed out something I was beginning to witness in my time at Health and Wellness: the sheer number of students who were unaware of and/or not utilizing the range of basic needs resources available to them. The “Easy and Quick No-Cook Recipes” Event provided students with information about all these resources, specifically food resources, available to them on campus and in the greater Isla Vista/Goleta community. My intentions with this event were to de-stigmatize the terms ‘hunger’ and ‘food insecure’; explaining to students the different ways in which this issue may show up in their lives, emphasizing how and why they should be taking advantage of these resources to help them increase their food security. It was this event that inspired me to create the “Feed Your Future Cookbook”, a pamphlet guide providing easy & quick, low-cook/no-cook recipes that can be made from staple pantry ingredients.

The Feed Your Future Cookbook provides students a guide on how to cook for themselves in college while taking into account the range of obstacles each student may face. With a range of easy, low-cost and low-prep recipes, this cookbook gives students the tools and information they need to turn staple pantry ingredients into versatile, nutritious meals. The “no-cook” and “low-cook” nature of the recipes makes this cookbook applicable and accessible to all students, taking into account the fact that not all students have access to common kitchen appliances or tools, if any. When deciding which recipes to include in the cookbook, I

interviewed with Celest Sorrentino, UCSB student and Partnerships & Marketing Coordinator at the UCSB AS Food Bank, to determine which pantry ingredients are consistently available to students on our campus for free. The structure of the cookbook revolves around these staple, pantry ingredients; giving students a number of nutritiously complete and easily customizable recipes to choose from that can be using each of these five ingredients as the base of their meal. Accompanying these recipes are tips and tricks on how to manage properly fueling themselves despite the many barriers that a “college lifestyle” imposes: from how to meal prep breakfast for early morning class to packing sufficiently nutritious lunches and snacks for a full day on campus. At the end of the cookbook, students will find a complete list of the basic needs resources on UCSB’s campus and in surrounding IV community; from the departments that provide support to the places where they can get their food and groceries.

An easily accessible, user friendly, and population specific pamphlet, the Feed Your Future Cookbook addresses UCSB students lack of access to and knowledge about how one manages meeting their basic needs with what they have available to them. When deciding what format this cookbook should take form, I opted for a pamphlet as opposed to a website after specific instruction from my supervisor who emphasized how projects with similar goals as the Feed Your Future Cookbook tend to be short-lived when they take the form of a website, as they get lost in all the chatter online. Students will be able to pick up copies of the Feed Your Future Cookbook pamphlet at the Health & Wellness’s offices and other basic needs partners located around UCSB’s campus. An online version of the pamphlet will also be made available to students on the Department of Health & Wellness website. With this cookbook, UCSB students will have the tools and information they need to increase their food security and overcome the many barriers hindering them from reaching their full potential. At the end of the cookbook,

students have the chance to read a special author's note addressing the issue of undergraduate food insecurity and the stigma around it. With this, I hope to start the much needed conversation about de-stigmatizing the experience of food insecurity on UCSB's campus and address the role that this issue plays in feeding the intergenerational cycle of poverty, inequality, and injustice.

In the 2019 report titled "Addressing Food Insecurity Among College Students", the non-profit organization Feeding America cite a range of facilitating factors they identified that have been shown to drive successful college hunger efforts. At the top of the list, awareness: "survey and interview data identified the vital role that cultivating an understanding of the realities of college hunger among college leadership and students plays in successful college hunger initiatives"<sup>7</sup>. When it comes to supporting students' health, success in school, and prospects for the future, proper nutrition is essential and irreplaceable by any other means or method. The Feed Your Future Cookbook will provide students the information, resources, and support they need to increase their food security, with marketing and distribution efforts for the pamphlet serving as a catalyst for a greater conversation on campus about the detrimental implications of this issue for students' success in school and their futures.

In the spring of 2023, I will be hosting an event with Health & Wellness to promote the Feed Your Future Cookbook to students, faculty, and staff at UCSB. Looking at the final version of the pamphlet, I am immensely proud of what I created. While this cookbook is not the end-all, be-all solution to the issue of food insecurity on UCSB's campus, I hope that it serves an important step in emphasizing the importance of addressing this issue. With more time and resources, I would have loved to expand the cookbook with more recipes, tips, and tricks for students. This in mind, I see potential for a second edition of the 2023 Feed Your Future

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<sup>7</sup> Berry, Tiffany. "The Landscape of the Feeding America Network: Addressing Food Insecurity Among College Students." *Claremont Graduate University Center*.



Cookbook with more no-cook and low-cook recipes using different pantry staples. Although I will be graduating at the end of the 2023 academic year and leaving my position as Food, Nutrition, Basic Skills, and Health Equity intern, I know the work on campus to de-stigmatize and address the issue of food insecurity at UCSB has only just begun. In all the work I did to ensure the Feed Your Future Cookbook is both accessible and pertinent to UCSB students, my hope is that this pamphlet and its impact on students knowledge about and experience of food insecurity will live on once I have left.

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