

Universities as Producers, Managers, and Opponents of Poverty: The Case of Food Insecurity on Campus

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ABSTRACT

Given growing awareness of and actions to address food insecurity challenges in higher education, this paper is a response to the Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy 2022 Symposium call to examine universities as producers, managers, and opponents of poverty. Bringing together the unique perspectives of a faculty scholar and two recent undergraduates who worked on the frontlines to end hunger on campus, we argue that student-led food pantries are a critical way in which universities manage poverty on campus, but they are unable to oppose or eliminate food insecurity alone. As such, we examine the strengths and challenges of a student-led campus food pantry model, providing insights into best practices and models for university engagement. We conclude with a call for universities and policymakers to match students' actions for a better tomorrow where experiences of hunger and food insecurity no longer impede students' educational goals, so that we can go from merely managing poverty to opposing it, once and for all.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Charged with the call to examine universities as producers, managers, and opponents of poverty for the *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* 2022 Symposium, we take this broad theme and apply it to the case of food insecurity on college campuses. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of college students and seventeen percent of instructional staff reported that they were food insecure, meaning they were unable to secure consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.¹ Compared to the national household average of eleven percent,² rates of food insecurity are higher on college campuses and among certain subgroups who are minoritized and structurally disadvantaged in the United States. Those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Person of Color, LGBTQ, or women; those with low incomes or who grew up in poverty or foster care; those with significant responsibilities including student parents and working students; and those who have tested positive for COVID-19 are more likely to report challenges with food insecurity than their peers.³ Among college students in particular, food insecurity challenges are associated with feelings of shame, isolation, and lack of belonging as well as increased likelihood of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.⁴ Poorer physical and mental well-being likely

1. Aydin Nazmi et al., *A systematic review of food insecurity among US students in higher education*, 14 J. OF HUNGER & ENVTL. NUTRITION 1, 8 (2018); VANESSA COCA ET AL., BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTRUCTIONAL WORKFORCE 8 (2020), https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/RC_FacultyReport.pdf.

2. Econ. Res. Serv., *Food Security and Nutrition Assistance*, USDA (Nov. 8, 2021), <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/#:~:text=In>.

3. CHRISTINE BAKER-SMITH ET AL., #REALCOLLEGE 2020: FIVE YEARS OF EVIDENCE ON CAMPUS BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY 18–22 (2020), https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf; Sara Goldrick-Rab et al., *Self-reported COVID-19 infection and implications for mental health and food insecurity among American college students*, 119 PROC. OF THE NAT'L ACAD. OF SCIS. 1, 1–2 (2022); J. Luke Wood & Frank Harris III, *Experiences with “acute” food insecurity among college students*, 47 Educ. Researcher 142, 142–45 (2018); Econ. Res. Serv., *supra* note 2.

4. Katharine M. Broton et al., *Basic Needs Insecurity and Mental Health: Community College Students’ Dual Challenges and Use of Social Support*, CMTY. COLL. REV. (forthcoming 2022) (manuscript at 1) (on file with authors); Daniel A. Collier et al., *Coming to College Hungry: How Food Insecurity Relates to Amotivation, Stress, Engagement, and First-semester Performance in a Four-year University*, 1 J. OF POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUCCESS 106, 106, 121–23, 127 (2018); Sara Goldrick-Rab et al., *supra* note 3, at 1–3. *See generally* LISA HENRY, EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN COLLEGE (2020) (explaining how stigma and shame emerged as a predominant theme in her research on college students who experience food insecurity, even though she did not ask any questions about the topic).

contributes to the negative relationship between experiences of food insecurity and lower levels of academic achievement and attainment in college.⁵

As a result of the significant problem of food insecurity on college campuses—and significant added burden of the COVID-19 pandemic—higher education institutions and the federal government have stepped in to provide additional services and support. For example, the disbursement of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF I, II, III) has enabled colleges to address food insecurity by expanding offerings at campus-based food pantries and other initiatives.⁶ While college staff and faculty have long served food-insecure students on a case-by-case basis, the widespread and coordinated provision of institutionalized support is a relatively recent phenomenon.⁷ Ten years ago, staff from the Michigan State University Student Food Bank and the Oregon State University Food Pantry launched the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA); a national network designed to bring together and help student affairs professionals address food insecurity on campus.⁸ What started with a few devoted students and professionals has exploded to a network of nearly 1,000 campus pantries in recent years, making campus food pantries the most common response to food insecurity in higher education.⁹ Other responses include the provision of campus meal vouchers or swipe initiatives, emergency grant aid programs, and one-stop offices that provide wrap-around case management services.¹⁰ Despite the crucial role that pantries play in helping students meet their immediate needs and obtain additional resources like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps,¹¹ little research has examined how they

5. See Brandon Balzer Carr & Rebecca A. London, *Healthy, housed, and well-fed: Exploring basic needs support programming in the context of university student success*, 6 AERA OPEN 1, 2, 5–10, 12 (2020); Anthony Meza et al., “*It’s a feeling that one is not worth food*”: A qualitative study exploring the psychosocial experience and academic consequences of food insecurity among college students, 119 J. OF THE ACAD. OF NUTRITION & DIETETICS 1713, 1718–20 (2019); Julia A. Wolfson et al., *The effect of food insecurity during college on graduation and type of degree attained: Evidence from a nationally representative longitudinal survey*, 25 PUB. HEALTH NUTRITION 389, 394–96 (2022).

6. U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC., USING HIGHER EDUCATION EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND (HEERF) INSTITUTIONAL PORTION GRANT FUNDS TO MEET THE BASIC NEEDS OF STUDENTS, FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) 12 (Jan. 22, 2022).

7. See generally FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020) (providing deeper context to and specific examples of the changes in institutionalized support over time).

8. Clare L. Cady, *If Not Us, Who? Building National Capacity to Address Student Food Insecurity through CUFBA*, in FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION 33, 34 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020).

9. Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady, *Conclusion* to FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION 265 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020).

10. *Id.*

11. Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield & Samuel Chu, *Addressing Student Hunger through Policy Change: Leveraging Federal Food Benefits to Support College Completion*, in FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION 240, 252–53 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020); U. S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-19-95, FOOD INSECURITY: BETTER INFORMATION COULD HELP ELIGIBLE COLLEGE STUDENTS ACCESS FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE BENEFITS (2018).

work or the implications for student success.¹²

In this paper, we bring together the unique perspectives and first-hand experiences of a faculty member and two recent undergraduates to examine the ways in which universities produce, manage, and oppose poverty through the lens of their on-campus pantry. Broton has studied basic needs insecurity among college students for the past decade and supports the pantry team. Lenkaitis was a pantry volunteer and manager prior to becoming the executive director of the Food Pantry at Iowa in 2019. Henry was also a pantry volunteer and University of Iowa Student Government vice president before graduating and working full-time at the campus pantry as an AmeriCorps member in 2020. The combination of our backgrounds and expertise provides an opportunity to bring together the perspectives of students and faculty engaged in everyday front-line pantry work and food insecurity research in higher education. This not only highlights the importance of practitioners' knowledge, but also demonstrates how teams of practitioners and researchers can form partnerships around common goals. This partnership provided an all-too-rare opportunity to share and learn from one another, while focusing on best practices, lessons learned, and ways to alleviate food insecurity on college campuses. Together, we argue that student-led campus food pantries are one important tool to *manage* college food insecurity and student involvement should remain a top priority. However, without meaningful investment from university leadership and a holistic, multifaceted, systemic approach to fighting hunger and food insecurity in higher education more broadly, a pantry is inherently unsustainable and unable to fully *oppose* poverty, resulting in inconsistent quality of services and an unfair burden of responsibility placed on student workers and volunteers.

II. UNIVERSITIES AND THE PRODUCTION OF POVERTY

American higher education is well-known for its ability to break cycles of poverty and promote upward social mobility.¹³ As a result, almost all young people recognize college as a necessary step in their lives, rather than the exclusive purview of the uber smart or wealthy.¹⁴ A college credential affords a host of economic and social benefits, including higher wages, better benefits, increased

12. Cady, *supra* note 8, at 33, 50.

13. Robert Haveman & Timothy Smeeding, *The Role of Higher Education in Social Mobility*, 16 THE FUTURE OF CHILD. 125, 127–28 (2006). See generally PAUL ATTEWELL ET AL., PASSING THE TORCH: DOES HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED PAY OFF ACROSS THE GENERATIONS? (2009) (showing that increasing access to college for students from disadvantaged backgrounds helps the next generation as well. Specifically, when women from underprivileged backgrounds went to college, their children were also more likely to succeed in school and earn college degrees themselves).

14. KEVIN EAGAN ET AL., THE AMERICAN FRESHMAN: NATIONAL NORMS FALL 2016, at 8 (2017). See generally Kimberly A. Goyette, *College for some to college for all: Social background, occupational expectations, and educational expectations over time*, 37 SOC. SCI. RES. 461 (2008); Brian A. Jacob & Tamara Wilder Linkow, *Educational expectations and attainment* 3–5 (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Res., Working Paper No. 15683, 2010) (discussing factors that influence students' expectations and actualities of enrollment in post-secondary education).

well-being, and greater civic participation.¹⁵ Despite the rising price of college attendance, it remains a financially sound investment in most cases.¹⁶ Indeed, higher education provides one of the few remaining pathways to the stability of a middle-class lifestyle.¹⁷

Since the middle of the twentieth century, there have been significant improvements in college access as the massification of the higher education system opened new opportunities for those from historically excluded and marginalized groups.¹⁸ Federal financial aid programs and informational initiatives, in particular, helped women, racial/ethnic minorities, and those with low incomes enroll in college.¹⁹

College attainment rates, however, have not kept pace with increased access.²⁰ Among those born in the early 1980s, three in ten students from families in the lowest income quintile attended college, but fewer than one in ten earned a bachelor's degree by age twenty-five.²¹ This stands in sharp contrast to the rates of college completion among those from more affluent families. For example, a 2018 study indicated that while only eleven percent of young adults from the lowest socioeconomic status (SES)²² quartile earned a bachelor's degree or higher by their mid-twenties, twenty percent and forty-one percent of students from the second and third quartiles, respectively, and fifty-eight percent of those from families in the highest SES quartile had earned a degree.²³ These disparities in college attainment by family background persist even after accounting for level of

15. Michael Hout, *Social and economic returns to college education in the United States*, 38 ANN. REV. OF SOCIOLOGY 379, 380 (2012); Philip Oreopoulos & Uros Petronijevic, *Making College Worth It: A Review of the Returns to Higher Education*, 23 THE FUTURE OF CHILD. 41, 46–47 (2013).

16. Douglas Webber, *Are College Costs Worth It? How Ability, Major, and Debt Affect the Returns to Schooling*, 53 ECON. OF EDUC. REV. 296, 296 (2016); Douglas Webber, *Is College Worth It? Going Beyond Averages*, THIRD WAY (Sept. 18, 2018), <https://www.thirdway.org/report/is-college-worth-it-going-beyond-averages>.

17. MELANIE ZABER & JEFFREY WANGER, RAND CORP., LIMITED OPPORTUNITY: CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT AND THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS 1–2, 4, 6 (2021).

18. See generally JOHN R. THELIN, A HISTORY OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION (2d ed. 2011) (explaining the development of U.S. higher education, including an examination of social class, race, ethnicity and gender).

19. SARA GOLDRICK-RAB, PAYING THE PRICE: COLLEGE COSTS, FINANCIAL AID, AND THE BETRAYAL OF THE AMERICAN DREAM 12–13 (2016).

20. See generally Martha J. Bailey & Susan M. Dynarski, *Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion* (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Res. Working Paper No. 7633, 2011) (using nearly 70 years of data from the U.S. Census and the 1979 and 1997 National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, the authors track college entry, persistence, and graduation rates by family income and gender).

21. Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest & Kenneth T. H. Lee, *Parent Income-Based Gaps in Schooling: Cross-Cohort Trends in the NLSYs and the PSID*, 2 AERA OPEN 1, 4–6 (2016).

22. Students' composite socio-economic status is based on their parents' education and occupations, as well as prior family income.

23. THE PELL INST. FOR THE STUDY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUC., ET AL., INDICATORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY IN THE UNITED STATES 99 (2018).

academic preparation,²⁴ and those who leave college without a degree often cite the high price of attendance as a major contributing factor.²⁵

Today, the average total cost of attendance at a public four-year university is \$27,330 for in-state students, including nearly \$11,000 in tuition and fees.²⁶ At public two-year colleges, our nation's most affordable postsecondary option, the average in-district cost of attendance is \$18,830 for tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and personal expenses.²⁷ Most students, however, do not pay the full cost of attendance thanks to grants or scholarships that do not have to be paid back.²⁸ Those from low-income families are eligible for need-based financial aid, like the federal Pell Grant, as well as merit scholarships available from states, institutions, and other organizations.²⁹ Grant aid significantly reduces the price of college attendance and need-based grants, in particular, can increase college access and success.³⁰ Today, the maximum Pell Grant is worth \$6,495 and the average Pell Grant per recipient was \$4,220 in 2020-21.³¹ After all grant aid is considered, the average annual net price of attendance at a public four-year university is \$19,230, while those attending a public two-year college have to pay \$14,370.³² Thus, the Pell Grant, our nation's flagship need-based academic financial aid program, is falling well short of its goal to cover the cost of attendance. At its inception in the early 1970s, it covered the majority of the cost of attendance, but its purchasing power has significantly decreased in recent decades.³³ Between the rising price of college, limited financial aid, and stagnant

24. NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STAT., U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., *THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 2015 27* (2015), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015144.pdf>. Although different studies use different measures of academic preparedness, here academic preparedness is measured by standardized math exams.

25. GOLDRICK-RAB, *supra* note 19, at 21.

26. JENNIFER MA & MATEA PENDER, COLLEGE BOARD, *TRENDS IN COLLEGE PRICING AND STUDENT AID 2021 3* (2021).

27. *Id.*

28. See Mark Kantrowitz, *Who Pays the Full Sticker Price for a College Education* (Aug. 16, 2017), <http://studentaidpolicy.com/who-pays-full-sticker-price-for-a-college-education.html>; *Understanding College Affordability: Net Price*, URBAN INST., <http://collegeaffordability.urban.org/prices-and-expenses/net-price/#/>.

29. See MA & PENDER, *supra* note 26, at 3. See generally JUDITH SCOTT-CLAYTON, *UNDERGRADUATE FINANCIAL AID IN THE UNITED STATES*, AM. ACAD. OF ARTS & SCIS. (2017) (providing an overview of undergraduate financial aid in the U.S., including the main types of aid, key features of each type, and who provides aid).

30. Sigal Alon, *The Influence of Financial Aid in Leveling Group Differences in Graduating from Elite Institutions*, 26 *ECON. OF EDUC. REV.* 296, 296, 298 (2007); Benjamin L. Castleman & Bridget Terry Long, *Looking Beyond Enrollment: The Causal Effect of Need-Based Grants on College Access, Persistence, and Graduation*, 34 *J. OF LAB. ECON.* 1023, 1056-60 (2016); Susan M. Dynarski, *Does Aid Matter? Measuring the Effect of Student Aid on College Attendance and Completion*, 93 *AM. ECON. REV.* 279, 285 (2003); Sara Goldrick-Rab et al., *Reducing Income Inequality in Educational Attainment: Experimental Evidence on the Impact of Financial Aid on College Completion*, 121 *AM. J. OF SOCIO.* 1762, 1801-04 (2016); Larry D. Singell Jr., *Come and Stay a While: Does Financial Aid Effect Retention Conditioned on Enrollment at a Large Public University?*, 23 *ECON. OF EDUC. REV.* 459, 469-70 (2004).

31. MA & PENDER, *supra* note 26, at 4.

32. Net price is the price students actually pay, after subtracting financial aid that does not have to be repaid from the total sticker price. *Id.* at 26.

33. GOLDRICK-RAB, *supra* note 19, at 13-17.

family incomes, today over half of college students face a net price greater than twenty-five percent of their family income, including nearly one-quarter of all students and eighteen percent of community college students whose net price is equal to or exceeds total family income.³⁴

Students and their families employ several strategies to cover the net price of college attendance. Most work while enrolled in college, and those from low- and moderate-income families are even more likely to work than those from higher-income households.³⁵ However, the high price of attendance means that students can no longer work their way through college with part-time employment during the school year and full-time work in summers.³⁶ Increased precarity in the labor market, especially for those without a college degree, and significant labor market discrimination against Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other People of Color as well as women and trans individuals further impedes the ability to simply work your way through college.³⁷

As a result, students—and especially Black students whose families have less wealth—rely on loans to help cover the cost of college attendance.³⁸ Among bachelor's degree recipients from public four-year universities, fifty-five percent borrowed federal loans, with an average debt level of \$26,700.³⁹ Since federal loans are capped well below the average amount of unmet need (e.g., \$5,500 for

34. Robert Kelchen, *Trends in Net Prices by Family Income*, ROBERT KELCHEN: KELCHEN ON EDUCATION (June 6, 2018), <https://robertkelchen.com/2018/06/06/trends-in-net-prices-by-family-income/>.

35. ANTHONY P. CARNEVALE & NICOLE SMITH, GEORGETOWN UNIV. CTR. ON EDUC. & THE WORKFORCE, *BALANCING WORK AND LEARNING: IMPLICATIONS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS* 9–12 (2018); Jessica Davis, *School Enrollment and Work Status: 2011*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Oct. 2012), <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2012/acs/acsbr11-14.pdf>; Josipa Roksa & Melissa Velez, *When Studying Schooling is Not Enough: Incorporating Employment in Models of Educational Transitions*, 28 RES. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION & MOBILITY 5, 5–6 (2010); Judith Scott-Clayton, *What Explains Trends in Labor Supply Among U.S. Undergraduates?*, 65 NAT'L TAX J. 181, 181 (2012); Marybeth Walpole, *Socioeconomic Status and College: How SES Affects College Experiences and Outcomes*, 27 REV. OF HIGHER EDUC. 45, 54–55 (2003).

36. Katharine M. Broton et al., *Working for College: The Causal Impacts of Financial Grants on Undergraduate Employment*, 38 EDUC. EVALUATION & POL'Y ANALYSIS 477, 479–90 (2016).

37. Paula England, *Progress Toward Gender Equality in the United States has Slowed or Stalled*, 117 PROC. OF THE NAT'L ACAD. OF SCIS. 6990, 6993–94 (2020); SUSAN J. LAMBERT ET AL., *PRECARIOUS WORK SCHEDULES AMONG EARLY-CAREER EMPLOYEES IN THE U.S.: A NATIONAL SNAPSHOT* 16–17 (2014); A.C. Lange, *How Transgender Students Get In, Pay For, and Explore Gender in College* (May 2021) (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Iowa) (on file with author); Devah Pager, *Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment*, 74 AM. SOCIO. REV. 777, 777 (2009). See generally ARNE L. KALLEBERG, *GOOD JOBS, BAD JOBS: THE RISE OF POLARIZED AND PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1970S–2000S* (2011) (documenting the increasingly polarized labor market and precarious employment situations in the U.S., especially for those with low levels of educational attainment and those from marginalized backgrounds).

38. Jason N. Houle & Fenaba R. Addo, *Racial Disparities in Student Debt and the Reproduction of the Fragile Black Middle Class*, 5 SOCIO. OF RACE & ETHNICITY 562, 562–63 (2019); Andre M. Perry et al., *Student Loans, the Racial Wealth Divide, and Why we Need Full Student Debt Cancellation*, BROOKINGS INST. (June 23, 2021), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/student-loans-the-racial-wealth-divide-and-why-we-need-full-student-debt-cancellation/>.

39. MA & PENDER, *supra* note 26, at 43.

first-year dependent students) and not all students attend colleges that participate in the federal loan program, they generally need to be used in combination with other college funding strategies.⁴⁰ Of course, the implications of student loan debt can be long-lasting, even for those who take out relatively small loans.⁴¹ However, under-borrowing or failing to take out loans when they are needed can also have the unintended consequences of poorer student academic performance and worse financial outcomes.⁴² Thus, loans are a particularly complex funding strategy for students and families to navigate.

Given the relatively high net price of college attendance, limited financing options, and growing income inequality,⁴³ some students go without adequate food and other basic needs like housing, transportation, internet, and other personal items in order to cover the cost of attendance.⁴⁴ The public social safety net is designed to provide some assistance to those with material need, but public housing programs cannot meet the high demand and the largest federal assistance program designed to address food insecurity, SNAP, is difficult to navigate.⁴⁵ A recent analysis from the U.S. Government Accountability Office identified 3.3 million college students who were likely eligible for SNAP but found that just forty-three percent (1.4 million) participated due to complicated rules and lack of awareness.⁴⁶ Moreover, at least 1.3 million additional students are food insecure, but ineligible for SNAP assistance.⁴⁷

In short, students are making short-term sacrifices—including skipping meals and cutting food intake due to a lack of money—in hope of long-term gains associated with a college degree. For too long, tropes about “starving students”

40. Debbie Cochrane & Laura Szabo-Kubitz, INST. FOR COLL. ACCESS & SUCCESS, *States of Denial: Where Community College Students Lack Access to Federal Student Loans* 1, 1–5 (2016).

41. Houle & Addo, *supra* note 38, at 571; MA & PENDER, *supra* note 26, at 8; Perry et al., *supra* note 38.

42. Andrew Barr et al., *The Effect of Reduced Student Loan Borrowing on Academic Performance and Default: Evidence from a Loan Counseling Experiment* 19 (Annenberg Inst. at Brown Univ., EdWorkingPaper No. 19-89, 2019); Angela Boatman & Brent J. Evans, *How Financial Literacy, Federal Aid Knowledge, and Credit Market Experience Predict Loan Aversion for Education*, 671 ANNALS OF THE AM. ACAD. OF POL. & SOC. SCI. 49, 54 (2017); Angela Boatman et al., *Understanding Loan Aversion in Education: Evidence from High School Seniors, Community College Students, and Adults* 3 AERA OPEN 1, 2 (2017).

43. MA & PENDER, *supra* note 26, at 3–4.

44. BAKER-SMITH ET AL., *supra* note 3, at 3–7; Katharine M. Broton & Sara Goldrick-Rab, *Going Without: An Exploration of Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates*, 47 EDUC. RESEARCHER 121, 121 (2018); Nazmi et al., *supra* note 1, at 8–10.

45. Duke-Benfield & Chu, *supra* note 11, at 248–50.

46. U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, *supra* note 11, at 18.

47. FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION, *supra* note 7, at 627. *But see*, Parker Gilkesson, *Frequently Asked Questions About SNAP and Students* 3, CTR. FOR L. AND SOC. POL'Y (April 2021), https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021_faqsnapstudent_0.pdf (discussing SNAP rules, including two additional temporary student eligibility criteria lawmakers added for SNAP to expand access and support students during the COVID-19 public health crisis: eligibility for federal- or state-funded work study or have an expected family contribution of \$0 and receive a full Pell Grant. These temporary student eligibility changes for SNAP will remain in effect until 30 days after the federally declared COVID-19 public health emergency ends).

eating ramen noodles as a rite of passage have inhibited higher education leaders and policymakers from acknowledging and addressing this serious problem. As one student explained, “[t]here was a lot of perception that there was not really an issue [of food insecurity], that this was kind of normal. There’s that joke about starving kids and college students or whatever, you know.”⁴⁸ This lack of visibility leads some students to feel stigmatized, shamed, and like they do not belong.⁴⁹ Coupled with the stress and anxiety around finding one’s next meals,⁵⁰ a student explained, “[w]hen you’re so stressed about food all the time, that takes a lot of mental power . . . if all that’s in your head is cluttered, everything becomes blurry, you’re not focusing on the bigger picture, you’re only focused on what’s happening next.”⁵¹ Students are resilient, though, and as one put it, she “learned to work around [her] hunger” by employing various strategies,⁵² including getting help from friends, family, public benefits, and other charitable organizations, since “every bit helps.”⁵³ So while college is often necessary to break the cycle of poverty and to obtain economic stability,⁵⁴ the current economics of higher education mean that too many students must endure poverty and material hardship during the process.⁵⁵

Students are not the only ones on college campuses struggling to make ends meet. According to a survey conducted just prior to the pandemic, seventeen percent of instructional staff experienced food insecurity in the past month.⁵⁶ Those in precarious work arrangements, including contingent and adjunct faculty as well as those on the tenure track appear to be particularly hard hit.⁵⁷ Results from a study of contingent and adjunct faculty show that one-third reported problems of anxiety about consistently accessing adequate food, including six percent who reduced food intake because of a lack of money or other resources for food.⁵⁸ Moreover, staff from minoritized and disadvantaged backgrounds, including People of Color and those who identify as LGBTQ, as well as younger staff from generations Y and Z, are at disproportionately higher risk of food insecurity.⁵⁹ As

48. Lisa Henry, *Understanding Food Insecurity Among College Students: Experience, Motivation, and Local Solutions*, 41 ANNALS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRAC. 6, 7 (2017).

49. Collier et al., *supra* note 4, at 106, 121–23, 127. See generally HENRY, *supra* note 4, at 45–57.

50. Broton et al., *supra* note 4, at 1; Goldrick-Rab et al., *supra* note 3, at 1–2.

51. Meza et al., *supra* note 5, at 1715.

52. Michael J. Stebleton et al., *Understanding the Food Insecurity Experiences of College Students: A Qualitative Inquiry*, 43 REV. OF HIGHER EDUC. 727, 737 (2020).

53. Katharine M. Broton et al., *Hunger in Higher Education: Experiences and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among Wisconsin Undergraduates from Low-Income Families*, 7 SOC. SCIS. 179, 194 (2018).

54. ZABER & WANGER, *supra* note 17, at 2.

55. GOLDRICK-RAB, *supra* note 19, at 9.

56. COCA ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 13.

57. *Id.* at 22. See also AM. FED’N OF TCHRS, AN ARMY OF TEMPS: AFT 2020 ADJUNCT FACULTY QUALITY OF WORK/LIFE REPORT 5 (2020), https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/adjuncts_quality_worklife2020.pdf.

58. AM. FED’N OF TCHRS., *supra* note 57, at 13.

59. COCA ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 14–19.

one adjunct instructor put it, “[y]es, college students are struggling, and that’s truly horrible. Unfortunately, many of their instructors are, too.”⁶⁰

In response to the immediate food needs of students and staff on campus, many colleges operate on-campus food pantries. Pantries are a popular response to food insecurity on campus, despite their position as a stopgap measure that is unable to end hunger and food insecurity in the same way that consistent public policy can do so.⁶¹ According to a recent survey, students were involved in the creation of seventy percent of those pantries, often leading campus efforts; community partners helped to support the establishment of pantries about forty percent of the time.⁶² Most pantries receive community donations, including from local food banks and businesses, to stock their shelves; half also purchase food at discount or market rates.⁶³ Pantries tend to rely heavily on volunteer labor; just under half are able to pay someone—typically an undergraduate or graduate student—to staff the pantry.⁶⁴ Only fifteen percent of campus pantries have used or currently use the AmeriCorps program for staffing needs.⁶⁵ Student organizations or student governments operate about one in five pantries, while the division of student affairs oversees two in five pantries.⁶⁶ When pantry leaders were asked about their priorities for the coming year, the most common response was ensuring that their food sources and funding streams were sustainable; fewer than one in ten pantries were able to focus on expanding services beyond providing food or engaging in campus-wide education on poverty among college students.⁶⁷

III. WAYS IN WHICH UNIVERSITIES MANAGE POVERTY: A STUDENT-LED PANTRY

The University of Iowa is a flagship public research university in the Big Ten conference located in Iowa City, Iowa.⁶⁸ In fall 2021, it had a total enrollment of approximately 30,000.⁶⁹ Students in the University of Iowa community face food and basic needs insecurity at rates comparable to other colleges, with fifty-eight percent of students in 2018 reporting they skipped or cut the size of meals because they did not have enough money for food, including sixteen percent who reported that they did this at least somewhat often.⁷⁰ There are several resources

60. COCA ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 23.

61. JANET POPPENDIECK, SWEET CHARITY?: EMERGENCY FOOD AND THE END OF ENTITLEMENT 3–5 (1999); Cady, *supra* note 8, at 33.

62. SARA GOLDRICK-RAB ET AL., HOPE CTR. FOR COLL., CMTY., & JUST., CAMPUS FOOD PANTRIES: INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY 6 (2018).

63. *Id.* at 7.

64. *Id.* at 8.

65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. *Id.* at 11.

68. *About Iowa*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://uiowa.edu/about-iowa> (last visited May 17, 2022); *Flagship Institutions and Tuition by State*, OGLETHORPE UNIV., <https://oglethorpe.edu/flagship50/flagship-institutions-and-tuition-by-state/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

69. *About Iowa*, *supra* note 68.

70. Sarah Bruch, *Food Insecurity at the University of Iowa*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://imu.uiowa.edu/food/food-pantry/research/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

on campus to help students meet their basic needs, including Hawkeye Meal Share, a program that allows students to request dining hall meal swipes that have been donated by other students, and the Student Life Emergency Fund, which can be used for various emergency situations.⁷¹ However, the Food Pantry at Iowa plays the largest and most central role in the university's management of hunger and food insecurity; it is also one of the only campus food resources available for staff and faculty.⁷² In the academic year 2020-2021, the pantry served 545 unique clients and distributed over 64,500 pounds of food.⁷³

Like at many institutions, the idea to create a campus pantry was devised by a group of students who identified food insecurity as a salient issue on campus. After a year of collecting basic needs data, researching other campus pantries, and garnering funding and support, the Food Pantry at Iowa was established in the fall of 2016. Within the university structure, the food pantry was categorized as a student organization and was housed under the Division of Student Life, whose mission is to “foster[] student success by creating and promoting inclusive educationally purposeful services and activities within and beyond the classroom.”⁷⁴ But unlike most of the 500 student organizations on campus, the food pantry was designed to help students, staff, and faculty meet their most basic of fundamental needs, rather than simply a space to congregate around a shared interest or activity (e.g., running club, magic club, and cultural affinity groups).⁷⁵

As a student organization, the food pantry is almost entirely funded through the Student Activity Fee, which is allocated by the Student Government. Most of this funding goes towards operating costs and student executive member stipends. Additionally, a small portion of food distributed at the pantry is purchased at local grocery stores. However, most of the food is provided by in-kind donations from individual donors and invaluable community partnerships. A local food bank, food rescue organization, and crisis support center were vital partners during the food pantry's early years, providing crucial support, guidance, and food to stock the shelves. These partnerships have continued to remain important sources of information and food.

71. See *Basic Needs and Support: Food*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://basicneeds.uiowa.edu/resources/hawkeye-meal-share> (last visited May 17, 2022); *Student Support Initiatives: Student Life Emergency Fund*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://dos.uiowa.edu/assistance/student-support-initiatives/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

72. Charlotte Lenkaitis, *Campus food pantries: Exploring sustainability of student-led pantries and perceived administrative support* 34 (May 7, 2021) (Undergraduate Honors thesis, University of Iowa) (on file with author) (“First, students should not be the main operators of a university-wide service that is acting as a foundational pillar, as described by some employees, for the University’s overall strategy to address food insecurity on campus.”).

73. *FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA, APRIL 2021 REPORT 1* (2021).

74. *Division of Student Life*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://studentlife.uiowa.edu/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

75. *Student Organizations*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://leadandserve.uiowa.edu/student-organizations/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

The founding mission of the food pantry was “[t]o alleviate food insecurity among University of Iowa students, faculty, and staff.”⁷⁶ For the organization’s first four years, the food pantry operated out of a former hotel room located in an obscure location in the student union. There were advantages and disadvantages to such a location. One benefit of the space was that it provided privacy to food pantry clients. However, it was also difficult to find, and because it was not a highly trafficked area, many students, staff, and faculty were not even aware that the food pantry existed. Due to the small storage capacity, pantry managers struggled to find a balance between food intake and outtake. Moreover, a lack of cold storage meant that the pantry was only able to provide non-perishable goods, such as dry, canned goods, shelf-stable produce, and personal hygiene products, which limited its capacity to fully achieve its mission as perishable goods provide critical nutrients and greater choice to clients. Once a fridge and freezer were donated, food pantry leaders were able to provide a larger array of nutritionally dense food items that are traditionally more expensive in grocery stores, including dairy and meat.

A. Student-Centered Structure

As a student organization, the Food Pantry at Iowa has always followed a student leadership model. An executive team, composed entirely of students, holds the primary responsibility to maintain daily food pantry operations, which takes at least thirty hours per week.⁷⁷ Key positions within the team include an executive director, pantry manager, volunteer coordinator, outreach and events coordinator, and social media strategist. In addition to daily operations, executive members have regular meetings to work on special projects, discuss long-term goals, brainstorm new partnerships and opportunities for expansion, and solve problems that arise during the week.⁷⁸ As compensation for their work, student executive members receive a small stipend that is not comparable to an hourly wage. To try to meet increasing demands, the leadership team has grown from five to nine members. In addition, student volunteers make up the backbone of the organization, providing crucial support to staff the pantry during open hours, collect donations, and stock the pantry. Lastly, per student organization requirements, the food pantry has a staff advisor. Throughout this section, we will discuss the successes and challenges of a student-led food pantry by analyzing the limitations and benefits experienced by the food pantry and its student leaders, including those created by factors like time commitment, institutional support, and organizational structure.

76. UNIV. OF IOWA, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY: OPERATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 1 (2016) (on file with Food Pantry at Iowa staff).

77. SARAH HENRY, FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND RESTRUCTURING 3, 6 (2021) (on file with author).

78. *Id.* at 3.

University staff and administrators, especially within the Division of Student Life, highly encourage students to engage in leadership positions in student organizations and endorse such experiences as a means to acquire transferable skills that will be useful in future education and/or employment. For many past and present student leaders of the food pantry, the primary motivation for taking on an executive role was to do exactly that: develop their leadership skills and invest time in a worthwhile cause that will look impressive on their resumes. However, part of any student leadership development process includes the opportunity to take risks and even fail. Yet, the Food Pantry at Iowa is not like most other student organizations. Responsible for helping students, staff, and faculty meet their basic food needs, the stakes are very high. And as a pseudo university service tasked with supporting those who are hungry, former pantry student leaders have expressed that they feel like failure is simply not an option.⁷⁹ Still, not all executive teams have been effective at managing the food pantry. With limited experience and training, competing demands, and the natural ebb and flow of interest and dedication that plagues other student-led programs, it should not be surprising that the ability to run the pantry—let alone plan for the future—varies over time and across cohorts. The community's demand for food, however, has been rising. In short, serving on the pantry executive team is unlike any other campus leadership development opportunity.

Operating a quasi-university service with a team strictly composed of students requires extreme adaptability and resilience. For those involved, it is often a strenuous time commitment requiring personal sacrifices. Since institutional support has not matched the students' commitment or growth of the community's demand, it leaves students to bridge the swelling gap between what resources are needed and what can be provided. Student executive terms are yearly commitments. Some students serve for more than one term; however, it is more common that each position will have a new occupant every year. Due to the high turnover rate, crucial organizational knowledge is lost between terms and transitions are challenging, despite the creation of operations manuals, transition documents, and shadowing opportunities. Given the significant demands on the leadership team, it may take an entire semester before students fully understand their role and responsibilities. One student leader explained, "it takes four or five months, at least, to get into your role and to learn everything, and then we can start making growth again"⁸⁰ While new team members are getting up to speed, returning team members often bear a larger load of food pantry tasks, jeopardizing the successful day-to-day functioning of the food pantry, inhibiting organizational growth, and creating stress for already-busy student leaders. During transition periods, clients may experience reduced services and university and community partnerships can be damaged if communication is not consistent. Even the loss of seemingly insignificant knowledge can severely impact the success of food

79. *Id.* at 2.

80. Lenkaitis, *supra* note 72, at 22.

pantry work given extremely tight timelines and budgets. For example, the food pantry depends on banana boxes for effective organization.⁸¹ These boxes are strong, stack easily, and are useful for transporting and storing food. If a new team member accidentally recycles the boxes, it results in reduced operational efficiency and often requires additional time from the team.

The inflexible and often unpredictable nature of food pantry operations is another point of tension, given many students' crowded and rigid schedules. As student leaders, pantry staff are often juggling multiple responsibilities, including coursework, employment, and other student organization activities. At the same time, the pantry must be stocked and staffed at certain times each week and food deliveries or donations from partner organizations do not necessarily arrive at the same time every week. In some cases, the pantry is alerted of a food delivery with very short notice, and not wanting to miss out on an opportunity to stock the shelves, staff or pantry leaders must quickly react to accept the delivery. Student leaders are sometimes faced with the decision to go to class/work or fulfill food pantry duties. If students are unable to adjust their schedules or something does not go as planned, the whole week's operations can be affected. Figuring out how to respond rapidly and effectively to unpredictable situations requires students to juggle many conflicting responsibilities, sometimes prioritizing the food pantry over academic obligations. This juggling act can become extremely taxing as the students intimately understand the gravity and importance of the work that the pantry does to help meet clients' basic needs.

In addition to emergency situations or changes to delivery schedules, instructional breaks create added challenges for pantry operations. Clients still depend on food pantry services during these times, but there are very few students available to continue operations. Moreover, with student schedules changing each semester, it is difficult to clearly communicate adjustments to food delivery times or the pantry's operating hours with partner organizations and clients.

Though the student-centered structure of the food pantry has presented challenges, it has also, in many ways, strengthened the pantry's ability to fight food insecurity on campus. Students provided the original motivation to open the food pantry, and the food pantry has remained a viable service because of students' passion and dedication to fighting food insecurity on campus. Students' creativity, hard work, and determination have resulted in the growth of the organization in terms of increased student leader and volunteer opportunities, campus and community partnerships, number of clients, and pounds of food collected and distributed.

During their executive terms, student leaders without personal experiences of hunger and poverty often develop more in-depth understandings of food insecurity by engaging in unique educational experiences where they observe the first-hand consequences of food insecurity. One student leader shared, "I don't think

81. *Id.* at 23.

any of us would have even realized these problems if we weren't on the executive board now. So, I think a big part of it is getting students in positions of power to recognize these larger structural issues."⁸² As understanding of the complexities of food insecurity increased, student leaders have realized that a food pantry is a band-aid response that does not address the complex and overlapping systemic issues that ultimately lead to food insecurity. Over the years, students have responded to this reality by increasing local- and state-level advocacy efforts and educational efforts on campus to try to adjust the status quo rather than simply meet an existing need. Currently, the pantry team is developing plans to explore new ways to stock the pantry with its most-needed items, apply for external grants, and connect members of the university community with other food resources, such as SNAP and Hawkeye Meal Share, to meet the ever-growing demand for improved basic needs resources.⁸³

Over the years, executive team members have been able to leverage their status as students to gain access to various university and community circles, which has allowed them to form new partnerships and increase awareness of college food insecurity and the basic needs resources available on campus. Students on the leadership team have made frequent appearances at student organization fairs, classes, club meetings, and staff meetings to share details about the pantry and their work. These outreach efforts have frequently resulted in people donating time, food, or funds. In 2020, for example, the pantry executive director met with the Vice President of Student Life to discuss ongoing initiatives to address food insecurity on campus and the need for increased support for the pantry. During the meeting, the Vice President invited the executive director to present at the Division of Student Life all-staff meeting, which included over 150 attendees. After the presentation, pantry students and Division staff saw immediate changes in staff involvement with and contributions to the pantry, demonstrating how clearly the students' advocacy efforts had aided awareness of food insecurity on campus.

Despite the meaningful impact of student voices on campus, there are significant limitations within a rigid bureaucratic structure. In gaining an increased understanding of how a food pantry serves to manage poverty—and its inability to be a sustainable solution to end food insecurity—student leaders knew that simply distributing food to those in immediate need was not enough. The pantry team wanted the university to take a more holistic and systemic approach to addressing the lack of basic needs resources on campus. However, when food pantry student leaders advocated for more structural changes, they reported not being taken seriously by university staff and administrators,⁸⁴ despite their significant actions to address food insecurity on campus.

82. *Id.* at 19.

83. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 2.

84. Lenkaitis, *supra* note 72, at 25.

B. The Pantry Matures and COVID-19 Strikes

In less than five years since opening, the pantry has nearly doubled its executive board, relocated and expanded to include a second location, grown its funding, and drastically changed its operations to better serve its growing list of clients.⁸⁵ As the food pantry has become more solidified in its place on campus and relationships and resources have become more established, the goals and objectives of the food pantry have shifted. This shift can be detected in the food pantry's updated mission statement: "Our mission is to provide nutritious food and necessities for University of Iowa students, faculty, and staff in need and to fight food insecurity through education and advocacy."⁸⁶ Due to the maturation of the organization and increasing staff support, students are now able to dedicate more time and energy to creating new initiatives, focusing on improving the quality of pantry services and increasing advocacy and outreach efforts that illuminate the underlying structural causes of food insecurity. For example, one of the goals of the 2020 executive team was to emphasize evidence-based decision-making. To do so, they created a client survey to better understand clients' satisfaction with the pantry and find ways to improve services.⁸⁷ In the same year, increasing stock of culturally diverse foods in the pantry became an important initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to provide staple food products that reflected the diverse backgrounds of our clients. In doing so, pantry leaders recognized that food is more than simply a source of energy but something that has deep and important cultural connections. This initiative served to make clients feel more welcome at the food pantry and increase their sense of belonging.

In March 2020, the Food Pantry at Iowa, along with all other registered student organizations, was shut down as part of the university's response to the spread of COVID-19. Because of the food pantry's unique status as a fundamental basic needs service, this decision impacted the organization differently than other clubs, and because the staff was mostly students, they were not included in the decision-making process. Throughout the rest of the spring 2020 semester, as students adapted to virtual classes and exams and as news stations showed community food pantry lines stretching for blocks,⁸⁸ the executive team worked together to write a proposal advocating for the reopening of the campus food pantry.⁸⁹ The proposal contained results from a client survey that demonstrated the

85. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 2.

86. *Food Pantry at Iowa: Our Story*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://imu.uiowa.edu/food/food-pantry/our-story/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

87. *See generally* Charlotte Lenkaitis & Sarah Henry, *Food Pantry at Iowa Client Survey* (2021) (on file with author) (providing survey questions and results to inform the work of the food pantry).

88. Nicholas Kulish, 'Never Seen Anything Like It': Cars Line Up for Miles at Food Banks, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 8, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/business/economy/coronavirus-food-banks.html>; Phil Reed, *University of Iowa food pantry seeing an increase in need*, KCRG (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://www.kcrg.com/2020/11/20/university-of-iowa-food-pantry-seeing-an-increase-in-need/>.

89. *See generally* FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA COVID-19 RECOMMENDATIONS (2020) (on file with author).

need for food pantry services and outlined detailed procedures for the intake and distribution of food, which closely followed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and university health and safety guidelines.⁹⁰ In May 2020, the proposal was approved and the food pantry reopened at the beginning of summer under a completely new operational model, which was carried out by student executive members and volunteers who were advised by a staff member. Student leaders worked tirelessly to meet the increased need during the first months of the pandemic, serving an average of three times more clients and giving out five times more food each week compared to the previous year.⁹¹ To ensure client and volunteer safety and follow university safety guidelines, the pantry moved their entire operation outdoors, which had never been done before.

All of these new changes required clear, consistent communication with clients. To do so, the pantry team significantly increased their social media presence to share information about their new COVID-19 protocols and report weekly updates about how COVID-19 was impacting the community. Because pantry staff were trying many new operational methods, they also created short, anonymous surveys, periodically asking clients about their experiences. Client responses proved extremely helpful in making real-time changes to food distribution efforts.

As the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the demand for food pantry services, investing in existing community partnerships became even more crucial. The pantry formed new partnerships to expand their stock of available food for clients. At the beginning of the pandemic, the pantry depended most greatly on a regional food bank that distributes food via the United States Department of Agriculture's Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program. This food was received at no cost. Without this resource, the food pantry would have been unable to reopen at the scale it did in the summer of 2020, as access to other sources of food was severely limited.

The pandemic was the biggest test to date for the food pantry and its leaders, as it exposed many systemic issues already present within the food pantry leadership structure and the university's response to basic needs insecurities. Without the passion and motivation of a small group of committed students, it is unlikely the food pantry would have resumed activities with the same urgency and success. The executive team successfully fought against the bureaucratic hurdles that so often cripple progress in institutions of higher education and completely re-imagined the procedures for food donations, deliveries, and distribution to continue serving the community.

Because COVID-19 further exacerbated many systemic issues like food insecurity, the increased national attention helped the food pantry gain awareness, which led to more resources and support. For example, Student Government leaders sought organizations, services, and projects to which they could allocate extra

90. *Id.* at 1.

91. FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA, FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA: FALL 2020 REPORT WEEKS 1-6 2 (2020).

funding, aware of the strain the pandemic was putting on students' access to basic needs. Pantry staff advocated for the pantry as a potential recipient, eventually securing additional funding equal to sixty-five percent of their annual allocation, which enabled them to increase student leaders' stipends, purchase more food each week, and make needed improvements to the pantry space.

Colleagues across the university also reached out, hoping to connect the pantry to additional resources to support their mission. In 2021, for example, a colleague in the Division of Student Life introduced the pantry to a local business selling organic, free-range, and pasture-raised eggs. This relationship resulted in the food pantry receiving a large donation of fresh eggs every week, a product that they had previously struggled to provide. Additionally, during the pandemic, the student team partnered with the University Office of Sustainability to take advantage of the state of Iowa's COVID-19 response and apply for a cold storage grant. As a result, they secured three new convertible fridge and freezer units and additional rolling shelving units, doubling cold storage capacity and significantly expanding the pantry's ability to accept fresh food donations.

In the winter of 2020, a university employee encouraged the pantry team to apply for the Iowa City Human Rights Commission's Social Justice and Racial Equity Grant, which awards local organizations funding for projects to advance racial equity in the community.⁹² Though the grant's focus did not specifically mention food pantries or food distribution and the team had no grant writing experience, they approached the application process with open minds and determination. As previously mentioned, the food pantry team had spent almost one year working on an initiative to increase culturally diverse options; foods that catered to diets of the various countries, religions, and ethnicities that were part of the pantry's client community. In light of the connection between the pantry's need to increase culturally diverse food options and the grant's goal of lessening racial inequity, the pantry applied for—and was awarded—enough funding to double their monthly culturally diverse food budget.⁹³ This experience served as a lesson to continue to be creative in acquiring additional funding to support existing food pantry initiatives.

Staff members in the Division of Student Life recognized the drastic increase in the number of clients accessing the food pantry in the summer of 2020 and joined in students' calls for a larger pantry space. Although student leaders had long advocated for moving the pantry out of the obscure old hotel room and into a larger, more central, and higher trafficked location, it only became a reality when

92. *Social Justice and Racial Equity Initiatives*, CITY OF IOWA CITY, <https://www.icgov.org/city-government/departments-and-divisions/equity-and-human-rights/social-justice-and-racial-equity> (last visited May 17, 2022).

93. Stefanie Bowers, *City Council Resolution Adopting the Social Justice and Racial Equity Grant Allocations for Fiscal Year 2021* (Apr. 6, 2021), <https://www.iowa-city.org/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=1992467&dbid=0&repo=CityofIowaCity&cr=1>; Mary Green, *Grant to Help University of Iowa Food Pantry Expand Culturally Diverse Offerings*, KCRG (Apr. 18, 2021), <https://www.kcrg.com/2021/04/19/grant-to-help-university-of-iowa-food-pantry-expand-culturally-diverse-offerings>.

staff members, who have more influence within the university structure, agreed and joined students in their request for change. The new space has allowed for significantly more food storage, currently housing eight fridges and freezers. In comparison, the old food pantry space was only able to support one refrigerator and one freezer.

In the early years of the pantry, paid staff support came in the form of the student organization's advisor, though advisors were typically unable to dedicate much time to the pantry due to their own heavy workloads. However, in 2019, an AmeriCorps position was introduced as the pantry's new advisor when staff in the Office of Leadership, Service, and Civic Engagement recognized a need for long-term strategic planning and full-time support in the pantry. The addition of the AmeriCorps position has greatly improved the pantry team's ability to accomplish their mission and has lessened the amount of responsibility on students' shoulders. Additionally, because of the relatively low cost of hosting an AmeriCorps position, this resource came with a much smaller investment from the university than a paid staff member required. However, because of the nature of AmeriCorps positions, there are some limitations. AmeriCorps positions are temporary and short-term, so there is regular turnover among the team. Additionally, because AmeriCorps is a service program and does not offer a competitive wage and benefits package, it is not always a valid option for potential candidates that might otherwise be able to contribute a lot to the pantry. That being said, adding the AmeriCorps position and moving the food pantry to a bigger space reflected an understanding from staff within the Division of Student Life that the food pantry, and basic needs work in general, were important investments that needed more focused support. However, these changes have not done enough to address the underlying structural issues present in the student-led food pantry operational structure.

All in all, the Food Pantry at Iowa has provided a continual learning opportunity. The past five years have been filled with many successes and even more challenges. It is our hope that the first-hand experiences of an executive director, staff advisor, and faculty member serve to help university administrators and policymakers understand the unique position of a student-led campus pantry to address food insecurity and provide current food pantry operators with ideas for how to reimagine their current model and method of functioning. Our experiences can be summarized in three key points. First and foremost, the power of students' voices and leadership abilities should not be underestimated. Many of the food pantry's biggest successes are the result of student creativity, passion, and determination. Second, university and staff investments in campus pantries are critical, yielding positive and substantial effects. At the University of Iowa, staff support and advocacy contributed to a larger food pantry location, increased funding, long-term planning efforts, the bolstering of initiatives, and growth of the executive team. Lastly, progress was made when food pantry efforts were aligned with the latest research on basic needs insecurity and other basic needs initiatives within the university, reducing the previously siloed structure and encouraging

collaboration between seemingly unrelated departments and initiatives. And while this section focused on ways in which on-campus food pantries can help manage the immediate problem of food insecurity, the final section of our paper seeks to better contextualize the role of pantries and push our thinking beyond mere management of food insecurity in higher education.

IV. WAYS IN WHICH UNIVERSITIES CAN WORK TO OPPOSE POVERTY

At the University of Iowa—and at campuses across the nation—students have taken the lead in fighting food insecurity among students, staff, and faculty.⁹⁴ Their passion, dedication, and organization are unparalleled, providing around 2,000 pounds of food to an average of 100 people every week using donations and Student Activity Fees allocated by the Student Government.⁹⁵ This has come at a great cost to many of the involved students, citing “sleepless nights” and immense stress and pressure given the high stakes.⁹⁶ “If you don’t get the job done, university community members won’t have enough food to feed themselves and their family members,” explained one student.⁹⁷ And while it has helped individuals and families from going to bed hungry, the pantry has done little to address the root problems of food insecurity in our community. It is time for universities and policymakers to match students’ leadership and not only acknowledge the role that food insecurity plays in inhibiting student success,⁹⁸ but also take significant steps to alleviate it.

Importantly, food pantries and other meal provision services (e.g., meal vouchers) cannot eliminate food insecurity alone. Currently, they are essential, but reactive solutions to those in immediate need of food. These programs can reduce the price of college and help individual students make ends meet, but they do little to address the underlying reasons why students are struggling financially in the first place. Until more effective and permanent policy solutions can be implemented, pantries and similar initiatives should play an important, though limited, role in a college’s overall strategy and multifaceted plan to end food insecurity on campus.⁹⁹ To do so, pantries must be integrated, institutionalized, and leveraged to support the fulfillment of students’ basic needs. Pantries are well-

94. See Talia Berday-Sacks & James Dubick, *Channeling Student Idealism and Energy through Campus Organizing*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* 84, 86–88 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020); Cady, *supra* note 8, at 33, 40; Jennifer J. Maguire & Rashida M. Crutchfield, *Research as a Catalyst for Positive Systemic Change*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* 191, 203–10 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020); Rachel Sumekh, *Student Action and Nonprofit Partnership: The Swipe Out Hunger Story*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* 115, 116–119, 123–127 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020).

95. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 1.

96. *Id.* at 2.

97. *Id.*

98. Carr & London, *supra* note 5, at 2, 5–10, 12; Meza et al., *supra* note 5, at 1713, 1718–20; Julia A. Wolfson et al., *supra* note 5, at 394–396.

99. See Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady, *Introduction to FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION*, *supra* note 7, at 2–3.

suites to be students' first point of contact where they can learn about additional resources, including SNAP, free or low-cost textbook initiatives, transportation passes, cooking or budgeting classes, and more.¹⁰⁰ And though the Food Pantry at Iowa functions as a pseudo university service, its structural position as a student organization hinders its ability to reach this potential.

As COVID-19 further exacerbated the issue of food insecurity on the University of Iowa campus, it also exposed and worsened problems with the food pantry's leadership structure and ability to meet clients' demands. Even though student leaders responded to the increased demand for food pantry services at the time, they were not fully equipped to handle such a large-scale issue. The halting of food pantry operations at the beginning of the pandemic and students' single-handed efforts in pushing for its reopening raised the question, is the food pantry merely a student leadership and volunteer opportunity or an essential service that requires more institutional support?

One year later, and still facing many of the same problems, the pantry's AmeriCorps advisor submitted a proposal for more university support for the food pantry's operations in the form of a full-time staff advisor, consistent funding from the Division of Student Life, and an organizational shift to be housed under and supported by an office more focused on student care rather than service and leadership.¹⁰¹ In response, oversight for the pantry was recently shifted from the Office of Leadership, Service, and Civic Engagement to Student Care and Assistance, which is in greater alignment with the strategic goals of the pantry and is unique among student organizations.¹⁰² Since Student Care and Assistance is the university's first point of contact for students in crisis and emergency situations (e.g., medical emergencies and hospitalization, death of a family member, natural disasters, or unexpected events or challenges),¹⁰³ it provides an opportunity to bring students' food needs into the existing organizational structure and perhaps facilitate a goal of building a basic needs security resource hub.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, purview of the food pantry was assigned to a new full-time role in Student Care and Assistance focused on basic needs programming, created in part due to student leaders' past advocacy efforts, along with another initiative

100. Cady, *supra* note 8, at 33, 52–53; Sarah Crawford & Nicole Hinds, *The Trampoline of Public Benefits: Using Existing Resources to Fight Food Insecurity*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* 138, 142–158 (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020).

101. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 1.

102. Div. of Student Life, *UI Increases Student Care, Mental Health Resources as a Result of Reimagining Campus Safety Action Committee Recommendations*, IOWA NOW (Oct. 21, 2021), <https://now.uiowa.edu/2021/10/ui-increases-student-care-mental-health-resources-result-reimagining-campus-safety-action>.

103. *Student Care and Assistance*, UNIV. OF IOWA, <https://dos.uiowa.edu/assistance/> (last visited May 17, 2022).

104. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 5. See generally Crawford & Hinds, *supra* note 100 (providing several examples and models for how universities can design and implement a basic needs security resource hub).

focused on well-being.¹⁰⁵ These recent changes resulted in the shifting of some responsibility from student leaders to staff members and encouraged more cohesion between other basic needs resources at the university. However, this shift in oversight was not accompanied with an associated shift in funding from the university, even though demand for the food pantry has continued to increase rapidly.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the pantry requested approximately twice as much funding from the Student Government in 2022, compared to 2021, to try to meet the food needs of students, staff, and faculty; their request for increased funds was not met, however, leaving pantry leaders to make difficult choices about how best to proceed.¹⁰⁷

To be clear, student leaders are not interested in turning over the entirety of pantry operations to university administration.¹⁰⁸ They are concerned that such an act could undermine student voices and threaten efforts to keep the conversation and actions about ending college food insecurity moving forward on campus.¹⁰⁹ Even now, the pantry was informed that they will eventually be moving locations again, but pantry leaders do not feel like they were included in this decision. And so, we ask: what is the appropriate division of labor and resources for fighting food insecurity on college campuses? Is it fair or appropriate for Student Activity Fees (and student-written grants) to exclusively support pantry operations when over thirty percent of clients are staff or faculty,¹¹⁰ knowing that the solution is not to restrict access to much-needed food? In what ways does the university's values and mission match its actions? What are opportunities for growth?

We believe that students and those who have experienced food insecurity deserve a seat at the table. At the same time, students should not have to do this work alone. They cannot be the only ones invested in ending hunger and food insecurity on campus. Too many campuses across the nation are struggling with these same challenges: overreliance on students, lack of structural sustainability, lack of a comprehensive plan to support students' basic needs, and inadequate funding.¹¹¹ We know that a one-size-fits-all solution does not exist,¹¹² and also

105. *Student Care and Assistance*, *supra* note 103.

106. Ailis McCardle, *Food Pantry at Iowa Faces Unprecedented Demand, Volunteers Seek Additional Aid*, THE DAILY IOWAN (Jan. 26, 2021), <https://dailyiowan.com/2021/01/26/food-pantry-at-university-of-iowa-faces-unprecedented-demand-volunteers-seek-additional-aid>.

107. Katharine M. Broton personal communication with Stephanie Beecher, Basic Needs Coordinator, Univ. of Iowa (Mar. 9, 2022).

108. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 4.

109. Berday-Sacks & Dubick, *supra* note 94, at 84, 101–02; Maguire & Crutchfield, *supra* note 94, at 191, 217; Sumekh, *supra* note 94, at 115, 121.

110. FOOD PANTRY AT IOWA, *supra* note 73, at 1.

111. HENRY, *supra* note 77, at 3–4. *See generally* FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION, *supra* note 7 (detailing the challenges faced at institutions across the United States via case study examples).

112. *See generally* FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION, *supra* note 7 (using specific institutional examples throughout the book to underscore the need for contextualized responses to food insecurity on campus).

recognize promising examples of campuses that have found ways to address these barriers and promote food security and college success.¹¹³

And while we argue that there is a role for colleges and universities to play in ameliorating food insecurity and poverty more broadly, we also recognize the systemic nature of these problems and recognize that higher education cannot solve these problems alone. Efforts to reduce the price of college or increase wages would enable more students and staff to make ends meet, as would the expansion of the public safety net.¹¹⁴ Short of these major policy initiatives, coordinated actions and collaborative partnerships with community organizations and state agencies, like those that the Food Pantry at Iowa is actively engaging with, are an important part of any plan to end hunger on campus.

Today, far too many students are going without adequate food and struggling to make ends meet, hindering their ability to meet their higher education goals. While rates of food insecurity vary across campuses, none—not even flagship research universities—have escaped this problem. Like with many social movements, students were among the first to recognize this problem and take actions to address it. In many ways, they have been successful, but it is time for the rest of higher education to match their passion, determination, and vision for a better tomorrow with action so that we can go from merely *managing* poverty to *opposing* it.

113. See generally Crawford & Hindes, *supra* note 100; Russell Lowery-Hart, et al., *Amarillo College: Loving Your Student from Enrollment to Graduation*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020); Maguire & Crutchfield, *supra* note 94; Michael Rosen, *The American Federation of Teachers Local 212 / MATC FAST (Faculty and Students Together) Fund*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020); Denise Woods-Bevly & Sabrina Sanders, *Transformational Change for Student Success: The California State University Basic Needs Initiative*, in *FOOD INSECURITY ON CAMPUS: ACTION AND INTERVENTION* (Katharine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady eds., 2020) (highlighting promising examples at different institutions of higher education).

114. Duke-Benfield & Chu, *supra* note 11, at 254–57.