

FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS AT OSU

Program Implementation Details and Refinements to Reduce Barriers to Access

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BACKGROUND

- 10.2 percent (approximately 13.5 million) of households in the United States (experience food insecurity at some point during the year¹.
- 39 percent of college students in the US experience food insecurity during the year as compared to the national average (10.2%)^{1,2}.
- Food insecure students are often denied SNAP benefits due to restrictive eligibility requirements (such as not meeting the work or residency requirements).

WHAT ARE THE FOOD PROGRAMS AT OSU?

Oregon State University's Basic Needs Center (BNC) provides resources to OSU students in a community setting³. The BNC's services range in scale from emergency housing to textbook lending, but most of the programming focuses on food security.

The BNC's food resources include:

- Assisting with student applications and appeals for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Hosting a weekly food pantry open to members of the OSU and broader Corvallis communities
- Offering weekly Healthy Beaver Bags that provide a unique and educational meal kit to OSU students
- Engaging in peer-to-peer connection to provide students in need access to pre-packaged, well-balanced meals through the Food-for-Thought program
- Bridging the gap in food assistance for SNAP ineligible students through the Mealbox and Full Plate Funds programs via the Food Assistance Application (FAA)

The Mealbox and Full Plate Funds food assistance programs support 300-800 students each term, providing \$100-\$300 each to help support their food security needs. These programs are funded by Corvallis campus OSU student fees and have historically been administered by a current BNC Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA).



Photo source: The Harvard Gazette

OBJECTIVE

To describe our process and improve the delivery of the Food Assistance Application to:

- Reduce the burden of information sharing on applicants
- Reduce subjectivity in food assistance determinations
- Reduce the time between receipt of applications and disbursement of food assistance funds



Photo source: Basic Needs Center

METHODS

The previous Food Assistance Application determined levels of student need using a comprehensive list of contributing factors, but were based on a subjective assessment of:

- Financial status
- Family support
- Living arrangements
- and more.

Our team reevaluated the program goals and reviewed the results of several ongoing studies of food insecurity assessment to restructure the FAA. The revised application provides:

- An objectively scored set of items
- Uniform evaluation metrics
- A reduced total number of questions
- A direct self-assessment of food security
- And a reduced evaluation period

We replaced the 103 original questions with 10 questions adapted from the USDA U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module (FSSM)⁴. The FSSM questions were adjusted based on recommendations by Nikolaus and colleagues⁵ to more accurately measure food insecurity among college students.

RESULTS

The Basic Needs Center's revised Food Assistance Application:

- Shortens the time spent on application processing from 3-4 weeks to 1-2 weeks
- Reduces the amount of information solicited from program participants
- Provides data that can be objectively assessed

Additionally, the application now prompts students to self-screen for SNAP eligibility. This helps promote SNAP to those not familiar and provides support resources to eligible students who have not yet applied.

IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Basic Needs Center continues to develop student centered approaches to food insecurity and other basic needs. This work provides an opportunity to consider how food security is addressed by safety net programs in the US and reveals areas where people fall through the cracks. While OSU's Basic Needs Center has programs to provide support to food insecure students, there are countless students at other universities struggling to succeed in school while experiencing food insecurity.

The restructuring of the Food Assistance Application reduces barriers to access and points students toward other resources if they do not qualify. This process made successful improvements to the FAA while highlighting additional needs that may be addressed in future improvements. The FAA will continue to grow and evolve as new GTAs take on the programs in the future.

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Photo source: Koin 6

REVISED QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions are used in the BNC's current iteration of the Food Assistance Application.

1. In the last 30 days (1 month), did you ever run low on money to buy food?
2. In the last 30 days (1 month), I felt **worried/stressed** that my food would run out before I got money to buy more. (For this question, consider food from all sources including purchased food, foods from campus dining plans, food assistance programs, etc.)
3. In the last 30 days (1 month), I ran out of food before I had money to buy more.
4. In the last 30 days (1 month), I didn't have enough money to eat balanced meals. (For this item, a balanced meal is defined as a meal including a grain food (bread, rice, noodles, etc.), a protein food (meat, fish, beans, dairy, tofu, etc.), and fruit or vegetables) (Please answer according to your ability to buy balanced meals and not based on your eating preferences)
5. In the last 30 days (1 month), did you ever eat less (cut the size of your meals, skip meals, etc.) **because there wasn't enough money for food?**
6. In the previous question, you indicated whether you ate less (cut the size of your meals, skipped meals, etc.) **because there wasn't enough money for food.**
- 6a. In the last 30 days (1 month), how many days did this happen?
7. In the last 30 days (1 month), were you ever hungry but didn't eat **because there wasn't enough money for food?**
8. In the last 30 days (1 month), have you noticed physical changes (e.g., changes in weight, clothes fitting differently, etc.) **because there wasn't enough money for food?**
9. In the last 30 days (1 month), did you ever not eat or drink anything (other than water) for a whole day **because there wasn't enough money for food or other beverages?**
10. In the previous question, you indicated whether you did not eat or drink anything (other than water) for a whole day **because there wasn't enough money for food or other beverages.**
- 10a. In the last 30 days (1 month), how many days did this happen?