

FOOD INSECURITY

AT THE VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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Introduction

The stereotype of the “starving college student” is much more severe than previously perceived. College students already worry about studying for classes, passing exams, and graduating to pursue future success. Some may also struggle financially: having to pay for tuition and textbooks, which can leave them insufficient funds for basic necessities. Investigation reveals students may sacrifice food security in order to afford college.

Food Insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as “the economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” The goal of the study is to estimate the prevalence of food insecurity for students at the Ventura County Community College District (VCCCD), to investigate the presence of correlations that can be used to predict food insecurity, and the relationship between food insecurity and outcomes such as grade point average in the VCCCD.

Methods

A survey was conducted among students at the three VCCCD schools; Moorpark, Oxnard, and Ventura.

Instruments

- Questions were based on existing survey sources, including USDA's six-item Adult Food Security Survey Module (AFSSM) to assess food security status.
- Other questions were based on research conducted at the University of California in 2015 for the Food Access and Security Study and on a guide developed by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab.

Distribution Methods

- Randomly selecting and contacting individual professors and requesting they share the survey link with students.
- Physical flyers, social media posts through the student governments, and online advertisement in the student newspaper.
- Presentation to VCCCD Board of Trustees.

Results

42% of students at the VCCCD are food insecure, with 22% reporting low food security and 20% reporting very low food security.

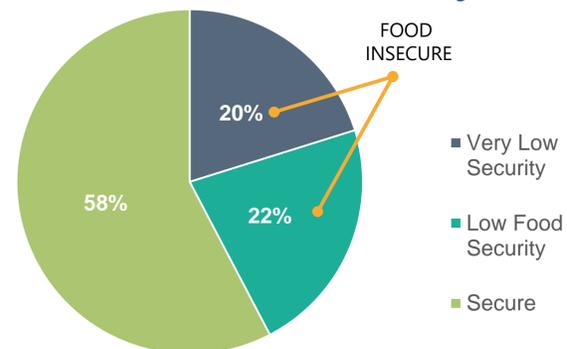
Demographic correlates include:

- Historically underrepresented ethnicities (Hispanic and African American students) *
- Pell Grant recipients **
- Students who are 25 years of age or older *
- Students in the process of looking for a job **
- Students with a lower self-reported household income **

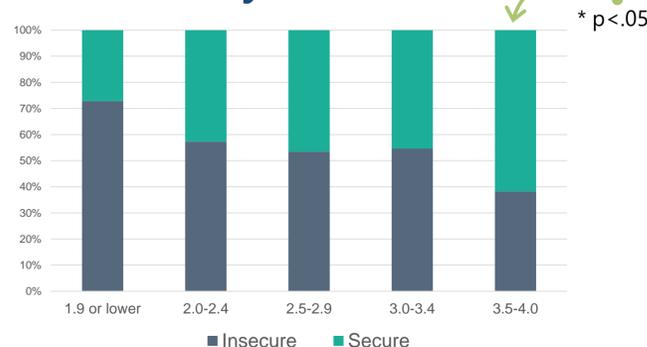
Additionally, more food insecure students utilize campus food banks and receive CalFresh benefits.

* p<.05; ** p<.001

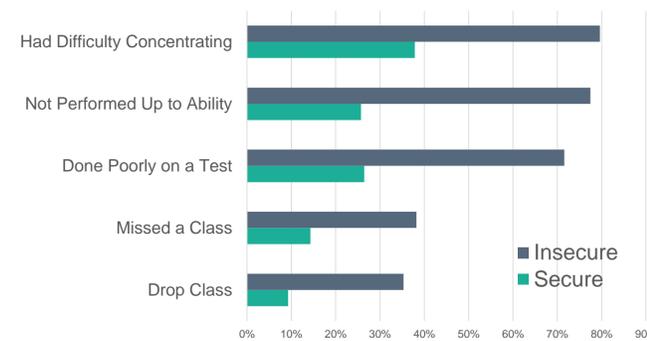
Presence of Food Insecurity



Food Insecurity and GPA



Self-Reported Consequences of 'Feeling Hungry'



Discussion

This study determined that 42% of the student population in the Ventura County Community College District is food insecure, much higher than the county average of 7.6%. The percentage indicates that food insecurity is a prominent issue in the colleges and is likely to affect more students than might commonly be expected. The results are similar to many food insecurity rates determined by other researchers, such as the Cal State system (42%) and the UC system (40%).

Some students were more prone to food insecurity than others based off of their demographics. Additionally, students who are food insecure are somewhat more likely to have lower grade point averages overall. More food insecure students also report facing negative academic consequences due to hunger, implying that a notable relationship exists between the academic success of students and their food security. Food insecurity is concerning to colleges because its potential to inhibit the students' academic progress.

Additionally, students who do not have adequate access to food are understandably more likely to use and benefit from programs such as CalFresh and Food Banks since they serve the purpose of providing food assistance to their users. Notably, only a small number of students are receiving CalFresh benefits and not all students are aware of or use food banks on campus. Based on the level of food insecurity determined by the study, many more students are potentially in need of the program, which could help with their food security levels.

Conclusion

- Findings in line with other research
- Food Insecurity a present issue on VCCCD campuses (but less than neighboring LA County)
- Some demographic factors can be used to predict who is more likely to be food insecure
- The link between food insecurity and academic outcomes makes this issue important to colleges

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Might not be representative of entire population
 - Campus
 - Gender
 - Full time vs part time
- Response bias
- Statistical analysis shows correlation, not causality

Further Research / Future

- Encourage survey of all students by VCCCD
- Utilize 10 or 18 point food insecurity scale
- Screen students based on FAFSA form (financial aid) to direct students to resources on campus or in community
- Encourage student applications for Cal Fresh
- Lobby to increase amount given through Pell Grant and other forms of financial aid to include accurate cost of living

References

1. Martinez, Maynard, & Ritchie, 2016
2. Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Kinsley, 2017
3. Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018
4. Martinez, et al., 2016
5. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service, 2012
6. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2018