Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute Publications

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

2018

Ram Essential

The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University
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RAM ESSENTIALS

TEAM MEMBERS

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

The underlying causes of food insecurity are complex and often intertwined with related issues that affect a student's ability to meet even basic needs, such as housing, employment and health care, forcing them to choose between their well-being and their education.

The latest *Hunger in America* report finds that about 10 percent of Feed America's 46.5 million adult clients are college students. That equates to 2 million full-time college students. "Of those surveyed by the emergency food services network, roughly 30.5 percent of students reported that they were forced to choose between food and educational expenses at some point over the last year."[1] In response, colleges and universities, including VCU, have sprung into action, and the number of campus food pantries at higher educational institutions has risen from a handful in 2009 to more than 500 in 2017.[2] But changing food insecurity to food security goes beyond providing just food. It involves a comprehensive approach to providing resources that address the causes and results of being food insecure.

Ram Essentials is a holistic approach to addressing basic needs insecurity among VCU students by asking the question, "What is essential for our students to be successful?" The project focuses on raising the awareness of all existing VCU resources and disseminating them widely through a single user-friendly portal to enhance students' experience, academic achievement and physical and mental well-being.

QUEST CONNECTIONS

This team project cuts across two strategic plans as the university phases out its existing plan and moves forward into its new plan.

Theme I from both strategic plans demonstrates the university's commitment to creating an environment and programs that allow students to thrive and succeed. The team's research, however, shows that many students face personal barriers, namely meeting their basic needs, that prevent them from focusing on their education and achieving their goals.

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[1] Feeding America. *Hunger in America 2014 National Report.* http://help.feedingamerica. org/HungerInAmerica/hungerin-america-2014-full-report.pdf. Accessed August 28, 2018

[2] Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Jed Richardson, and Anthony Hernandez (2017). *Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education.* Madison, WI: Wisconsin Hope Lab.

Quest for Distinction	Quest 2025: Together We Transform
Theme I. Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment	**Theme I**. Student Success – Transform the lives of our distinctive and diverse student population through a university culture that supports every student's success through inquiry, discovery, innovation, civic engagement, and creative expression.

In the current higher education climate, a best practice among many universities should focus on ensuring that students' basic needs are met to help them succeed while in college and better prepare them for their career once they leave campus.

Additionally, this project would provide an opportunity for faculty and staff across the university to help students in need. Quest for Distinction places an emphasis on creating a university culture that "engages faculty, staff and administrators to create resources that help students navigate university experiences focused on increasing student success." Identifying resources to combat food insecurity is a chance for many faculty and staff to make a difference in the lives of many VCU students. For many, it will truly "Make It Real."

PROJECT GOALS
1. Alleviate basic needs insecurity among VCU students
2. Implementation of Swipe Out Hunger, a program that allows students to donate their extra meal credits to support food-insecure students on campus
3. The development and dissemination of Ram Essentials on the VCU Insider app, creating a one-stop-shop for existing resources that address students' basic needs.

Many students struggle to find funds to cover their living expenses including books, supplies, transportation, health care, clothes, housing and food. In 2017, the Wisconsin Hope lab conducted the largest national survey assessing the basic needs security of four-year college and university students. This year's survey includes more than 20,000 students at 35 four-year colleges and universities in 14 states. The survey found that 36 percent of these students were food insecure in the 30 days that preceded the survey. Food insecurity (defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) among college students is directly connected to their financial situation. Students admit that food is their most flexible expenditure when determining where to cut funds, which may be contributing to the alarming rates of food insecurity across college campuses in the U.S. today.

PROJECT STRATEGIES
During the planning and duration of the project, the team utilized the Stanford d.school design thinking process[3], a framework that develops solutions to problems by involving the human perspective in all steps of the problem-solving process. Main aspects of the design are to Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test.

The team used multiple strategies and methods to accomplish the project, including: conducting two university wide student surveys to gather quantitative data on food insecurity on campus; researching best practices from other universities to see what can be replicated at VCU; meeting with key campus partners at VCU including Aramark, RamPantry, the Office of Sustainability, and the Division of Student Affairs to understand needs and possibilities;

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[3] https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources-collections/a-virtual-crash-course-in-design-thinking

researching existing campus resources and leveraging the Ram Guide mobile app to bring visibility to them for students; and developing a report with recommended best practices and policy implications. The team also communicated with organizations outside of VCU involved in addressing food insecurity to see how they have successfully implemented programs.

ACTION STEPS
- A campaign to advocate for implementing Swipe Out Hunger at VCU.
- A marketing campaign to make students, staff and faculty aware of the issue and how to access Ram Essentials to help alleviate basic needs insecurity.
- Recommendations for VCU to evaluate best practices at other institutions.
- An evaluation of existing services at VCU meeting students' basic needs.

OUTCOMES
The team developed and implemented a needs assessment survey that successfully supported previous national and VCU surveys measuring food security at VCU. The teamdeveloped Ram Essentials, a new resource for all VCU students, located in the VCU Insider App. The VCU Insider App is a resource created by the VCU Division of Student Affairs as a helpful guide for being well, getting involved and finding resources while at VCU. Ram Essentials provides a list of resources that address basic needs security for students.

SUSTAINABILITY
There is not a single solution to addressing food insecurity at VCU — and ensuring the health of our student population. The team, however, identified several points where VCU can create more awareness of the resources available to students who need them the most.

The team proposes educating the frontline members of the VCU community who interact most with students: staff and faculty. The new staff and faculty orientations should both include information about the resources available to students so that staff and faculty can serve as ambassadors in sharing the resources as they see needs among the student population. All identified resources should also be included in course syllabus statements that students receive at the beginning of the semester.

Most importantly, the Ram Essentials component of the VCU Insider app must be updated on a regular basis to ensure the resources featured are current. The app is managed by the Division of Student Affairs so this task should become part of a staff member's core duties and they should collaborate with partners across campus to ensure the all available resources are being listed and highlighted accurately.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES
The team proposes the development and implementation of a Ram Essentials marketing campaign directed at VCU students and a separate campaign directed at VCU staff and faculty. The student campaign would acknowledge the breadth and depth of the issue, describe services available within Ram Essentials and direct students to the site. The faculty and staff campaign would focus on an awareness of the issues and tools to recognize and assist students with basic needs insecurity. Deliverables would include a campuswide campaign emphasizing the de-stigmatization of basic needs insecurity. Two microlearning modules would be developed and accessed on the Division of Student Affairs webpages. Microlearning modules are short, focused videos that are designed to meet a specific learning outcome. The first module, directed to students, would de-stigmatize basic needs insecurity and provide resources available in Ram Essentials. The second module, directed to staff and faculty, would also de-stigmatize basic needs insecurity and provide resources to become campus

ambassadors for students with basic needs insecurity. We would contract with University Relations to develop the marketing campaign.

Project Budget

	Item Description	Justification	Cost
1.	Ram Essentials Marketing Campaign	Promotion of one-stop-shop that provides services that meet basic needs for VCU students.	$10,000
Total			$10,000

RECOMMENDATIONS

Food insecurity is a complex problem that requires interventions targeting multiple variables. The team recommends the university adopt two programs, Swipe Out Hunger and Ram Essentials.

Swipe Out Hunger is an organization that partners with colleges to reduce food insecurity among students by allowing those with extra dining hall meal swipes to donate them to peers experiencing food insecurity. If implemented at VCU, Swipe Out Hunger would provide students experiencing food insecurity access to free meals from VCU dining services. The team has initiated conversations with Swipe Out Hunger and has gained access to case studies of other universities that have been successful in implementing the swipe donations on their campuses, the team proposes that VCU implement a meal sharing program with consideration of the catering structure, cap and conversion rate and program details of other universities across the United States.
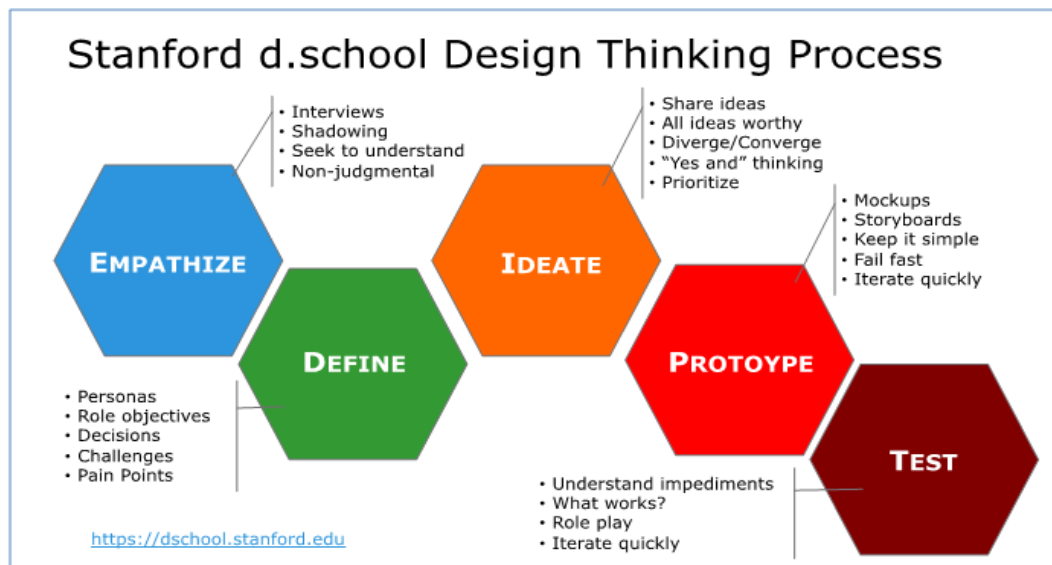
Ram Essentials is a new resource on the VCU Insider App, part of VCU RAM Guide. The VCU Insider App is a resource created by the VCU Division of Student Affairs as a helpful guide for being well, getting involved and finding resources while at VCU. Ram Essentials provides a list of resources that address basic needs security for students.

FINAL PITCH

Food insecurity is a barrier to student success. As the team learned, food insecurity is not a singular challenge; it is often intertwined with related issues that affect a student's ability to meet even basic needs, forcing them to choose between their well-being and their education.

The reality is that all universities grapple with food insecurity among students, and sometimes staff. The team believes that VCU would benefit from taking a holistic approach to food insecurity and elevating the available resources to enhance students' experience, academic achievement and physical and mental well-being.

DESIGN THINKING PROCESS

Stanford d.school Design Thinking Process

- Interviews
- Shadowing
- Seek to understand
- Non-judgmental

- Share ideas
- All ideas worthy
- Diverge/Converge
- "Yes and" thinking
- Prioritize

EMPATHIZE

IDEATE

- Mockups
- Storyboards
- Keep it simple
- Fail fast
- Iterate quickly

DEFINE

PROTOYPE

- Personas
- Role objectives
- Decisions
- Challenges
- Pain Points

TEST

- Understand impediments
- What works?
- Role play
- Iterate quickly

https://dschool.stanford.edu

BASIC NEEDS SECURITY ON A NATIONAL SCALE

Based on observations and experiences the team gathered from those who are at the forefront of the issue, we continued to develop our initial project goals and reframed our statement of need and next action steps. Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, professor of higher education policy and sociology at Temple University, and founder of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice in Philadelphia, as well as the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, visited VCU in September 2018. She said that we need to commit to a culture of caring that goes beyond charity. We need to change systems, policies, and practices.

In 2017, the Wisconsin Hope lab conducted the largest national survey assessing the basic needs security of 4-year college and university students. Two previous Hope Lab national surveys had focused specifically on Community College students. This year's survey includes over 20,000 students at 35-year colleges and universities in 14 states. The survey found that 36% of these students were food insecure in the 30 days that preceded the survey. Further, the study found that students experiencing basic needs insecurity spend as much time on college, but more time working and less time sleeping. Without their basic needs secured, students feel ashamed, along and unable to focus on learning.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEYS AT VCU
Brittini Smith and Becka Herbig, two graduate students under the supervision of Dr. Youngmi Kim, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, conceptualized a food insecurity model for VCU students, and conducted a needs assessment examining the food insecurity rate of students at VCU in the spring semester of 2018. Food insecurity was operationalized using the 10-question item created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After running appropriate statistical analyses, the study finds a statistically significant difference in food insecurity rates by race and program status, Specifically, African American students had statistically significant higher rates of food insecurity and graduate students had statistically significant higher rates of food insecurity than undergraduate students. Overall this study found that 39.5% of the 119 students surveyed experienced food insecurity, a rate that is higher than the average rate in the City of Richmond and higher than the most recent national survey of 20,000 students on university campuses.

Summary of Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	Total (%)	Food Secure (%)	Food Insecure (%)	Chi-Square Statistic	p-value
MEAL				.56	.45
No Meal Plan	59.7	57.7	42.3		
Meal Plan	40.3	64.6	35.4		
RACETH				10.0	.02*
White	39.5	57.4	42.6		
Black	31.1	45.9	54.1		
Asian	18.5	86.4	13.6		
Other	10.9	69.2	30.8		
PROGRAM				4.8	.03*
Undergraduate	76.5	65.9	34.1		
Graduate	23.5	42.9	57.1		
INCOME				2.17	.34
20,000 or less	56.9	51.2	48.8		
More than 20,000	43.1	61.3	38.7		
CAR				.01	.94
No Access	34.5	61.0	39.0		
Access	65.5	60.3	39.7		
HOUSING				.10	.75
On Campus	33.6	61.5	38.5		
Off Campus	66.4	58.4	41.6		
HOUSING2				1.62	.20
With Family	20.7	56.5	43.5		
Without Family	79.3	70.8	29.2		
TUITION				.97	.33
No Grant or Scholarship	46.6	55.6	44.4		
Grant or Scholarship	53.4	64.5	35.5		
GEN				<.00	.98
First Generation	66.1	60.3	39.7		
Not First Generation	33.9	60.0	40.0		
AGE				.60	.44
18-22	73.5	62.8	37.2		
23-39	26.5	54.8	45.2		
FULL SAMPLE		60.5	39.5		

Food Insecurity among Students at Virginia Commonwealth University, Smith, B.C. & Herbig, B, 2018

SMITH AND HERBIG CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The Smith and Herbig (2016) study identified nine potentially associated variables visualized in this conceptual framework. In order to solve this problem we need to tackle it in different fronts to allow these vulnerable students to be succeed.
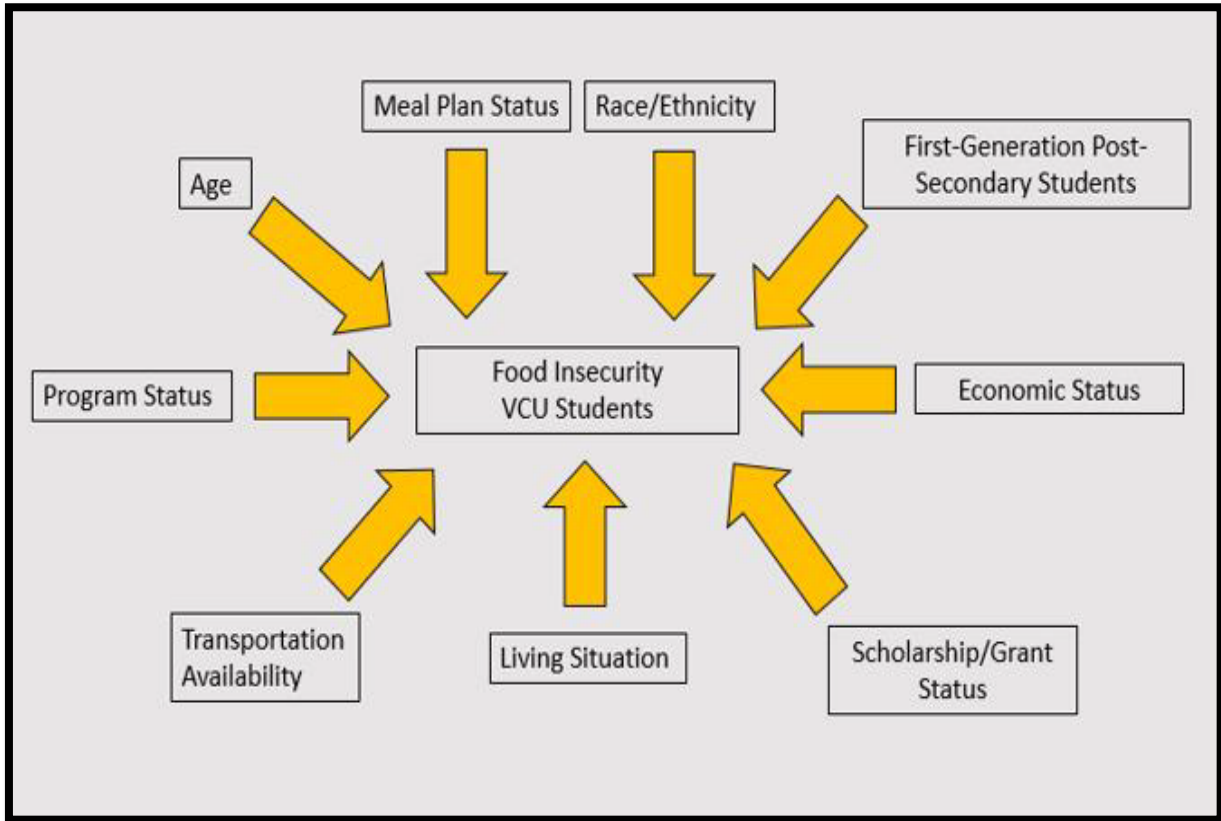
STUDENT SURVEY- MYVCU PORTAL SURVEY

Two polls were conducted to assess food insecurity among VCU students. The polls were administered through the myVCU Portal that all students, faculty and staff have access to. At the time the polls were administered, all currently enrolled students had an opportunity to answer the poll questions.

We used the Hunger Vital Sign, a two question screening for food insecurity, to identify families at risk for food insecurity. The two surveys were conducted between June 6th, 2018 and June 20th 2018, during summer session, and between August 20th and September 3rd, at the beginning of this semester. We had a self-reported, convenience sample of 817 students in the summer and 4,831 students for the fall semester.

Findings between the two dates were remarkably similar for the levels of food insecurity. We expect that the lower awareness of RamPantry in the fall semester may be due to students taking the survey who are in their first semester at VCU. The overall food insecurity level of question two is even higher, at 51% for both time periods, again very consistent between the two dates. We also note the overall level of food insecurity measured as often, or sometimes true on the third question, 38% in the summer and 39% at the beginning of the fall semester is consistent with the Smith & Herbig survey finding that overall 39% of students self-report as experiencing food insecurity. Limitations include the screening tool is only validated among low-income families with children, and it is a self-reporting convenience sample, but we were pleased to see such striking similarities between the two time-periods.
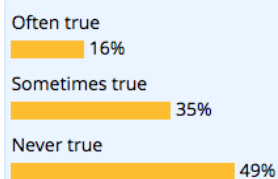
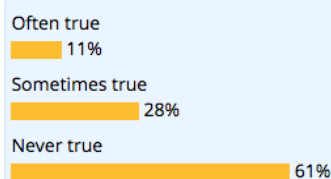## myVCU Portal Survey Results

6/6/18 to 6/20/18

I am aware of RamPantry at VCU
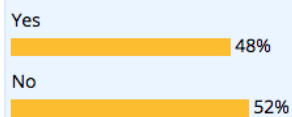
Yes — 48%
No — 52%

Within the past 12 months I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.

Often true — 16%
Sometimes true — 35%
Never true — 49%

Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

Often true — 11%
Sometimes true — 28%
Never true — 61%

total votes: 817

8/20/18 to 9/3/18

I am aware of RamPantry at VCU
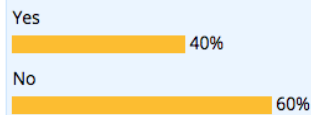
Yes — 40%
No — 60%

Within the past 12 months I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.

Often true — 17%
Sometimes true — 34%
Never true — 49%

Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

Often true — 11%
Sometimes true — 27%
Never true — 62%
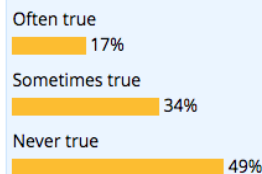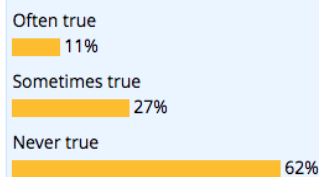
total votes: 4831

poll suggested by: Game Changers, a group part of the 2018 VCU Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

RAM ESSENTIALS RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt Swipe out Hunger. Swipe Out Hunger is an organization that partners with colleges to reduce food insecurity among students by allowing those with extra dining hall meal swipes to donate them to peers experiencing food insecurity. If implemented at VCU, Swipe Out Hunger would provide students experiencing food insecurity access to free meals from VCU dining services. The team has initiated conversations with Swipe Out Hunger and has gained access to case studies of other universities that have been successful in implementing the swipe donations on their campuses, the team proposes that VCU implement a meal sharing program with consideration of the catering structure, cap and conversion rate and program details of other universities across the United States.

Develop Ram Essentials. We propose the development and implementation of a Ram Essentials marketing campaign directed at VCU students and a separate campaign directed at VCU staff and faculty. The student campaign would acknowledge the breadth and depth of the issue, describe services available within Ram Essentials and direct students to the site.
The team proposes educating the frontline members of the VCU community who interact most with students: staff and faculty. The new staff and faculty orientations should both include information about the resources available to students so that staff and faculty can serve as ambassadors in sharing the resources as they see needs among the student population. All identified resources should also be included in course syllabus statements that students receive at the beginning of the semester.

Most importantly, the Ram Essentials component of the VCU Insider app must be updated on a regular basis to ensure the resources featured are current. The app is managed by the Division of Student Affairs so this task should become part of a staff member's core duties and they should collaborate with partners across campus to ensure the all available resources are being listed and highlighted accurately

With our campus partners and project sponsor we developed prototypes of our main deliverable: Ram Essentials, to serve as a one-stop-shop for free resources for the VCU Community. Ram Essentials is a new resource on the VCU Insider App, The VCU Insider App is a resource created by VCU Division of Student Affairs as a helpful guide for being well, getting involved and finding resources while at VCU. Ram Essentials provides a list of resources that address basic needs security for students.

Evaluation of Existing Services at VCU. The Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education is a roadmap for researchers to address these issues by conducting a needs assessment and a random control trials evaluating existing services. Our recent needs assessment results are consistent with the Smith & Herbig study and the HOPE Lab national survey. Therefore, a needs assessment has been conducted, and the next step is a high-quality evaluation of available services to ensure that students receive the help they need and that VCU is effectively investing in our scarce resources.

We propose to develop and conduct research which will evaluate services in place at VCU that address basic needs security. We have organized a VCU student basic needs insecurities research team who have been meeting to develop protocol for the RCT. The team, which includes Associate Professors Youngmi Kim, from the School of Social Work, and Susan Bodnar-Deren, from the Department of Sociology, will evaluate the impact that Ram Essentials has on addressing basic needs insecurity of VCU students. If Ram Essentials can be shown to cause an increase in food security among VCU students, this will validate the need for a campaign to disseminate Ram Essentials.

Aramark Case Studies:
Examples of meal sharing programs that operate in partnership with Aramark

	University and Catering Structure	Cap and Conversion Rate	Program Details	Impact in Spring 2018
1	**UC Irvine est. 2017 Aramark Catering**	Cap of 5 guest passes per student and 500 guest passes in total may be donated per quarter.	A drive is held in the beginning of each quarter. Students can donate up to 5 meals each to be distributed through the Emergency Meal Swipe program facilitated by the FRESH Basic Needs Hub on campus.	500 swipes were donated. ~1,500 swipes are donated per year.
2	**University of Southern Mississippi est. 2017 Aramark Catering**	Cap of 5 swipes per student may be donated each semester.	Each semester students can donate up to 5 guest swipes and Aramark will match additional swipes. The campus pantry coordinators identify students who are in need of meals and ask Aramark to transfer swipes onto their ID cards.	386 guest passes were donated.
3	**College of St. Scholastica est. 2018 Aramark Catering**	Cap of 750 swipes may be donated each semester.	A drive is held each semester enabling students to donate unused meal swipes. Meals are distributed through the Campus Ministry.	500 swipes were made available to students.
4	**Cal State East Bay est. 2018 Aramark Catering**	Cap per student depends on the meal plan.	Each semester students can donate unused swipes some of which are matched by Aramark and redistributed by the campus pantry.	1,844 meal credits were donated.
5	**Spelman University est. 2018 Aramark Catering**	Cap of 14,000 swipes per year may be distributed.	Each semester, Spelman sets aside 7,000 meal vouchers which are distributed to students in need by the Dean's Office.	7,000 meal vouchers were made available to students.
6	**Morehouse University est. 2018 Aramark Catering**	Cap of 14,000 swipes per year may be distributed.	Each semester, Morehouse sets aside 7,000 meal vouchers which are distributed to students in need by the Dean's Office.	7,000 meal vouchers were made available to students.
7	**College of Charleston est. 2016 Aramark Catering**	No cap or conversion rate.	Each semester students can donate leftover meal swipes and dining dollars at cafeteria registers, which are distributed to students facing food insecurity through the Office of Dean of Students.	TBD
8	**Cal State Fullerton est. 2016 Aramark Catering**	Cap of one meal per student may be donated each semester.	A month long drive is held at the start of the fall and spring semesters enabling students to donate one guest meal to support a classmate facing food insecurity. Aramark matches each donated meal. Meals are distributed by the Associate Dean of Students.	TBD
© 2017 - Swipe Out Hunger™				

FREE STUDENT RESOURCES AT VCU

Name	Short description (min 2 sentences, max 4)	Physical location (if there is one)	Phone number/email	Link	Proposed Bucket
RamBikes - Bike Loan Program	The bike loan program at RamBikes consists of loanable commuter cruiser bikes that are free to rent. The bikes can be checked out at RamBikes during normal business hours. Students will need to sign a liability waiver and will be issued a helmet and u-lock to be returned with the bike.	201 N. Belvidere	828-BIKE (2453+D6+D2:D1	https://bikes.vcu.edu/about/bike-loan-program/	I need transportation
RamPantry	RamPantry exists to address food insecurity by providing in-need VCU students with healthy, culturally appropriate, emergency food.	907 Floyd Ave., Box 842035, Richmond, VA 23284	rampantry@vcu.edu	rampantry@vcu.edu	I am hungry
The Money Spot@VCU	The Money Spot at VCU is a place to build your future. Develop a spending plan, control your student loans, plan your move from college and much more.	900 Park Ave Hibbs Hall room 211	themoneyspot@vcu.edu	https://www.facebook.com/TheMoneySpotatVCU/	I need financial coaching
RamSafe	The program provides safe and free transportation to on-campus locations and nearby residences and buildings within defined boundaries on the Monroe Park and MCV campuses.	1108 W. Broad St.	828-SAFE (7233)	https://tapride-ramsafe.herokuapp.com/ride/#/	I need a safe ride in the evening
UCS (University Counseling Services	The mission of University Counseling Services (UCS) is to create an environment that fosters student growth, development, and psychological well being through direct clinical service, education, and prevention.	907 Floyd Ave.	(804) 828-6200 (804) 828-3964	https://counseling.vcu.edu//	I need counseling
The Wellness Resource Center	we provide education and services on a variety of topics that affect health. Basically, we do a lot to help keep VCU students healthy	815 S. Cathedral Place	(804) 828-Well (9355)	https://thewell.vcu.edu/	I need help staying healthy
Financial Aid	Connecting VCU students and their families with programs and resources that help make college affordable.	1015 Floyd Avenue, First Floor	(804) 828-1550	https://finaid.vcu.edu/	I need financial aid
Career Services	and achieving your career and professional goals starting your first semester at VCU. We offer individual advising appointment to students and alumni during their first year after graduation.	University Student Commons, first floor	(804) 828-1645	https://careers.vcu.edu/	I need help with CV, job search, career advice
RamRide	RamRide is a free shuttle service for faculty, staff and students that helps you travel safely and conveniently to, from and around VCU's campuses.	1108 W. Broad St.	(804) 828-7275 (PARK)	https://parking.vcu.edu/transportation/ramride/	I need transportation between campuses
Writing Center	We serve both undergraduate and graduate students, providing in-person appointments, online consultations and workshops. We do not edit or proofread papers. Rather, we discuss big-picture issues such as structure, organization and how to best articulate your ideas.	1000 Floyd Avenue	(804) 828-4851	https://writing.vcu.edu/	I need help writing my paper
Campus Learning Center	Professional staff members provide one-on-one coaching sessions for students who wish to make improvements to reach their academic goals.	900 Park Avenue	(804) 827-8108	https://clc.vcu.edu/	I need tutoring and academic coaching
Recreational Sports	Gym membership/ free fitness classes	101 S. Linden St.	(804) 827-1100	https://recsports.vcu.edu/	I need to work out :)
GRTC	Free bus service for all VCU students, including new Pulse	City wide	(804) 358-4782	http://ridegrtc.com/planning-your-trip/find-a-route/	I need to catch a bus
Off-campus Student Services	For students in need of housing, landlord issues and budgeting. Provides budget workshops, workshops, consultations and possible funding.	University Student Commons, 907 Flo	(804) 828-4514	https://offcampus.usca.vcu.edu/	University Student Commons, A1:F15 first floor

RAM ESSENTIALS PROTOTYPE

	I am hungry	RamPantry
	I need financial aid	Financial Aid
	I need transportation	GRTC Pulse
	I need counseling	University Counseling Services
	I need a safe ride in the evening	RamSafe
	I need help staying healthy	The Wellness Resource Center
	I need transportation between ca...	RamRide
	I need a bike	RamBikes - Bike Loan Program
	I need tutoring and academic coac...	Campus Learning Center
	I need help writing my paper	Writing Center
	I need financial coaching	The Money Spot@VCU
	I need help with my job search	VCU Career Services

Ram Essentials

presented by
Game Changers
Virginia Commonwealth University
The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

1

Game Changers Team

Sompop Bencharit, Director of Digital Dentistry and Associate Professor, School of Dentistry

Cait Burns, Assistant Director of Student and Corporate Engagement, School of Business

Kristen Caldwell, Associate Director of Development and Alumni Marketing and Communications, Office of Development and Alumni Relations

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Bert Waters, Assistant Professor, Virginia Center on Aging, Assistant Director, Virginia Geriatric Education Center, College of Health Professions

2

Our Journey

SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY,
NOT A DESTINATION.

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Pocket Gardens

Transforming already existing green spaces around VCU campus into small "pocket" produce gardens to feed students and community.

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Pocket Gardens

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Pocket Gardens - Lessons Learned

- Liability, liability, liability

- Maintenance

- Need

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Food Recovery

A campuswide food recovery program, that would reduce food waste and feed the hungry.

Food Recovery - Lessons Learned

- Not much food waste at VCU
- Some strategies already in place
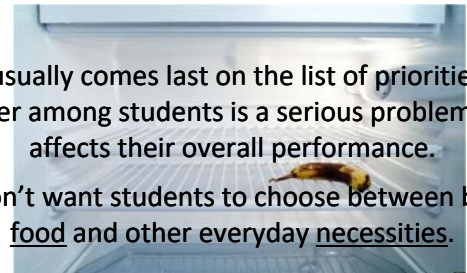- Obstacles

Food Security

Changing food insecurity to food security among students goes beyond providing just food.

Ram Essentials

Food usually comes last on the list of priorities, and hunger among students is a serious problem that affects their overall performance.

We don't want students to choose between buying food and other everyday necessities.

Ram Essentials

Team effort to locate, evaluate and compile resources already available for VCU students and to supplement those efforts by recommending other practices the university should implement to alleviate student hunger and help students meet their basic needs.

Strategic Plan

Theme I

Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment

– **Quest for Distinction**

Strategic Plan

Theme I: Student Success

Our goal is to create a university culture that transforms the lives of our distinctive and diverse student population; one that supports students through inquiry, discovery, innovation, and creative expression.

– **Quest 2025: Together We Transform**

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Project Goals

1. Raise <u>awareness</u> of all existing VCU resources available to students.

1. Provide <u>recommendations</u> on best practices on meeting students' basic needs and alleviating student hunger.
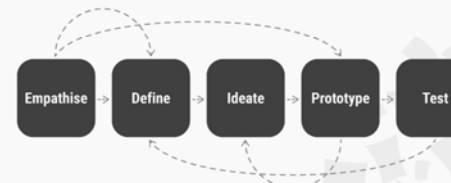
14

Research Questions

- How big is the problem at VCU?
- What resources at VCU attempt to address the problem?
- What are peer institutions doing to address similar problems?
- Who can help address the problem at VCU?
- How can we do better address the problem at VCU?

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Our Framework

Design Thinking: A 5 Stage Process

Empathise → Define → Ideate → Prototype → Test

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1/ Empathize

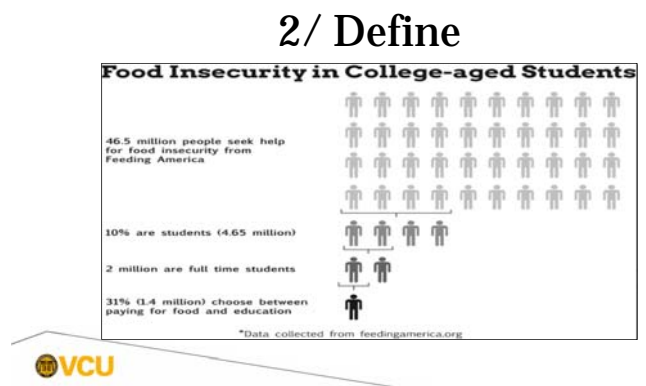- We acknowledged that the problem we are trying to solve resonates most deeply with VCU students.
- We first sought to learn their values by observing, engaging and immersing with those at VCU who have their feet on the ground with this issue.
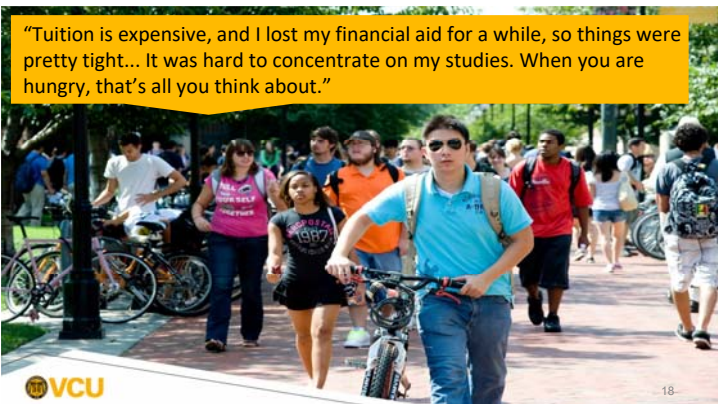
"Tuition is expensive, and I lost my financial aid for a while, so things were pretty tight... It was hard to concentrate on my studies. When you are hungry, that's all you think about."

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Slide 19

"Before I started my journey in the United States, I thought a degree was worthless. I was convinced that working at a restaurant will help me pay off my bills; I was wrong. It was hard enough to get a good paying job without a college degree, but even harder when I had to pay rent and food for a family of four."

VCU

Slide 20

"I know my family would help if they could… But everything is just so expensive. I work retail, but I don't make enough to pay for tuition, books and three square meals a day. For me, RamPantry makes a huge difference."

VCU

Slide 21

"Passionate determination to finish my undergraduate degree is what got me to where I am today. I am the first person in my family to go to college, so it was really challenging for me to do everything necessary to even enroll in to college. At times it seems like continuing my education is impossible, but I persist. Whether the road bumps are financial or personal, I am determined to get an education in order to make my life better for myself and be in a position to help others."

VCU

Slide 22

2/ Define

Food Insecurity in College-aged Students

46.5 million people seek help for food insecurity from Feeding America

10% are students (4.65 million)

2 million are full time students

31% (1.4 million) choose between paying for food and education

*Data collected from feedingamerica.org

VCU

Slide 23

WISCONSIN HOPE LAB

- **20,000 students, 35 universities, 14 states**
  - 36% food insecure
  - 36% housing insecure
  - 9% homeless

- **33,000 students, 70 community colleges, 24 states**
  - 56% food insecure
  - 51% housing insecure
  - 14% homeless

VCU

Slide 24

Flyer

Game Changers is a group of VCU faculty and staff participating in The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute who are researching **food insecurity among VCU students**

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied with physiological sensations of hunger.

Have you ever been hungry and unable to afford nutritionally adequate and safe foods while a student at VCU?

Are you aware of any programs and/or organizations at VCU that help with students' hunger? Did you ever use any of these services?

Have you ever experienced homelessness while a student at VCU?

If so, we want to hear about your experiences. Contact us at GameChangers@vcu.edu. Responses will be kept anonymous and confidential.

VCU

2018 VCU Food Insecurity Survey

- 119 VCU students surveyed
- 39.5% rate of food insecurity
- Consistent with recent national studies
- More likely to be:
  - African-American
  - Graduate student

Smith, B. & Herbig, B. (2018). Food Insecurity Among Students at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Our Follow-up Surveys

*my*VCU

Two polls conducted

Early summer/early fall semester

- 817 Summer semester
- 4,831 Fall semester

Hunger Vital Sign

poll suggested by: Game Changers, a group part of the 2018 VCU Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

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More Than Half of Students Are Unaware of Resources

6/6/18 to 6/20/18

I am aware of RamPantry at VCU

Yes	48%
No	52%

8/20/18 to 9/3/18

I am aware of RamPantry at VCU

Yes	40%
No	60%

Students Reporting Concerns About Food Insecurity

Within the past 12 months I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.

Often true	16%
Sometimes true	35%
Never true	49%

Within the past 12 months I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.

Often true	17%
Sometimes true	34%
Never true	49%

Students Reporting Experiencing Food Insecurity

Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

Often true	11%
Sometimes true	28%
Never true	61%

Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

Often true	11%
Sometimes true	27%
Never true	62%

Factors Influenced Food Insecurity at VCU
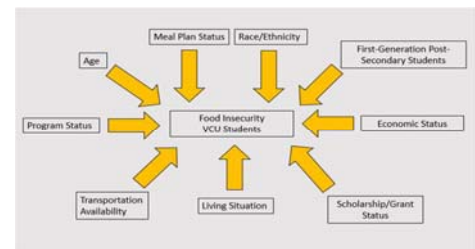
Smith, B. & Herbig, B. (2018) Food Insecurity Among Students at Virginia Commonwealth University.

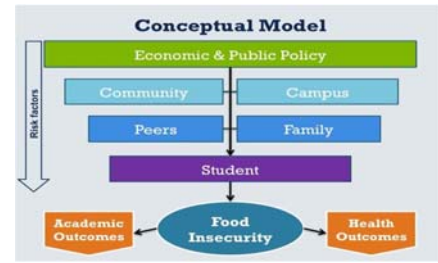# 3/ Ideate

- How do you ideate?
- Look at existing alternatives
- Generate radical design alternatives
- Be broad, flare out
- Diversity of ideas

3/ Ideate

4/ Prototype

Prototype: With our campus partners and project sponsor we developed prototypes of our main deliverable: Ram Essentials, to serve as a one-stop-shop for free resources for the VCU Community.

4/ Prototype

Name options:

- Ram Essentials
- Ram Basics
- Available Resources @ VCU
- The Fundamentals
- Ram Staples
- Just the Deets

4/ Prototype

Version 1:

Resources in alphabetical order by "I need…"

4/ Prototype

Version 2:

Resources in alphabetical order by department.

4/ Prototype

Version 3:
Resources in order by perceived need

Resources

5/ Test

To test this tool, we returned to our main user, VCU students and conducted focus groups to gather feedback on the user experience, design, functionality and ways the resources were presented.

Recommendations

- Created by students at UCLA
- Students donate unused money from their meal plan
- Served over 1.4 million meals since 2010

SWIPE OUT HUNGER

Recommendations

Ram Essentials as a delivery method for student success at VCU

Financing and Resources

Ram Essentials Marketing Campaign

BEHIND THE WORK THAT GETS YOU OUT FRONT

The Division of University Relations is your strategic partner in solving for today's — and tomorrow's — communications challenges.

Sustainability

What is needed for long-term success?

- Multiple solutions
- Coordinated efforts
- Administrative support

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Final Pitch

Ram Essentials

Empathise → Define → Ideate → Prototype → Test

Food insecurity is a major issue at colleges/university in the U.S.

Food insecurity is a broad multifaceted problem that can affect student's success.

To facilitate students to be successful at VCU by allowing access to resources

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