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Food for Thought: Recommendations to Create a Food Pantry at Merrimack College

Erin LaMonica

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Food for Thought: Recommendations to Create a Food Pantry at Merrimack College

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2023

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

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IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to explore food insecurity among college students. Research was conducted about the rate of food insecurity among college students and how higher education institutions have addressed the issue. Researchers have found that 33-40% of college students nationwide experience some level of food insecurity, and it disproportionately affects underrepresented populations of college students. With the rising cost of college education, campuses have enacted creative solutions to help improve the effects of food insecurity across this population. Upon analyzing this societal issue locally, a gap in food security resources was identified at Merrimack College. As a result, a proposal was created to advocate for a food pantry on campus. The proposal was presented to a panel of Merrimack College staff and administrators. The group provided constructive feedback in an interview-style discussion. Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on the importance of food insecurity on campus, identify potential barriers, assess the feasibility of creating a pantry, and provide their insights about strengthening the proposal. Most participants supported the idea of pursuing the initiative and expressed interest in continuing the conversation.

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Food for Thought: Recommendations to Create a Food Pantry at Merrimack College

“I don’t have energy to go out of my house, I want to be in my room sleeping. And sometimes, I even have like this pain in my stomach, which is also affecting my health, which I can’t even like lay down, because my stomach hurts so much,” states a college student reflecting on how their food situation affects their academics (Gamba et al., 2021, p. 2794). This is not the typical response we expect from a college student. We imagine a college student’s experience to include thoughtful discussions in class, sharing meals over lively conversation in the dining hall, and enjoying this brief time in life when students can explore new interests – not missing opportunities because they are coping with hunger pains. Unfortunately, the referenced student is not alone. Food insecurity negatively impacts college students’ ability to fully participate in advancing their academic careers, and students are frequently overlooked when examining food insecure populations.

Food insecurity and hunger are often used interchangeably, but there is an important distinction between each term. Food insecurity is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as, “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food” (Economic Research Service, 2022, para. 6). Hunger is defined as, “an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity” (Economic Research Service, 2022, para. 6). We can think of hunger as a symptom of food insecurity. Food insecurity affected 13.5 million (10.4%) households across the United States in 2021 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022).

Higher education is promoted as the desirable way to create the next generation of engaged citizens; however, there are barriers that prevent students from completing their degrees. Financial burdens, housing instability, reliable transportation, and mental health concerns are some of the most common reasons why student academic performance suffers. Another student

reflects, “There are people in my family who have diabetes and have had heart failure. And I do worry about that and it kinda gives me like a stress it’s like, ‘Okay well I kinda have to eat kinda like junk food just to get by.’ But then it’s like I’m kind of compensating my future health and I get anxious about it. It’s like how much longer until something happens to me” (Gamba et al., 2021, p. 2791). Distracted by hunger, having difficulty focusing, struggling to find the motivation to attend class and fully participate as a college student, compounded with the stress of worrying about one’s health, are all consequences college students face while dealing with food insecurity.

In our nation of abundance, we are failing to fulfill our students’ basic needs, hindering their ability to reach their highest potential. Abraham H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory in psychology maintains that an individuals’ needs must be met before they can advance (McLeod, 2018). Applying Maslow’s theory to the food insecure college student, it is reasonable to believe that if their physiological needs are not met, the student will struggle to reach higher tiers, such as sustaining high academic performance with the demands of a rigorous academic schedule.

There are institutions taking action to eliminate this stressor and provide accessible, high-quality, healthy food options on campus. One example is an in-school food pantry. Having a dedicated space on campus for a food pantry would allow convenient access for students to get food at no cost. Food pantries are frequently run by students, who take on roles to stock the shelves, assist visitors, and ensure the pantry is open during hours that are most convenient for visitors. Food pantry items are frequently acquired by hosting food drives to collect donations, partnering with external community partners, such as a food bank, and some food pantries even have financial resources to purchase food.

The purpose of this project will be to explore the ways that colleges have successfully organized food security programs on their campuses and create a proposal for adopting a food security program at Merrimack College.

Literature Review

Food security levels across the United States have been researched for decades. Data is largely captured from U. S. households regarding the number of adults and children that may experience insufficient access to food. Coleman-Jenson et al. (2022) reported that food insecurity affected 13.5 million (10.4%) households across the United States in 2021. Of that amount, 8.4 million (6.4%) of U.S. households had low food security in 2021 and 5.1 million (3.8%) of U.S. households had very low food security at some time during 2021 (Coleman-Jenson et al., 2022). In Massachusetts, approximately 8% of households experience food insecurity (Coleman-Jenson et al., 2022).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture identifies food security status using a range of levels. A food secure individual is identified as either having “high food security” or “marginal food security” (Economic Research Service, 2022, para. 1). Having high food security means the individual is with no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations, whereas those with marginal food security reported one or two indications of worrying about food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house, but with little or no changes in diet (Economic Research Service, 2022). Food insecurity is categorized as either having “low food security” or “very low food security” (Economic Research Service, 2022). Individuals with low food security would experience a reduced diet (both in quantity and quality), and those with very low food security report multiple indications of reduced food intake or going without food (Economic Research Service, 2022).

Some researchers assert that people experiencing marginal food security, those technically categorized as food secure, share more in common with individuals experiencing low and very low levels of food security. Since their commonalities are closer to food insecure than food secure marginal and high food security households should be recognized separately (Brescia & Cuite, 2022). Marginal food secure households often have different financial status and levels of education than high food secure households, but because they do not qualify for assistance programs, they are found in situations worrying about securing food. A group that could be potentially affected by this distinction is college students. Brescia and Cuite (2022, p. 4) found that “marginally food secure students were statistically different from highly food secure students in terms of age, race/ethnicity, employment status, and perceived health, among other characteristics.”

There is a gap in research for those experiencing marginal food security, and they are likely underrepresented in national studies of food security. This is evident from the USDA’s report on Household Food Security in the United States in 2021. The report identifies households experiencing low and very low levels of food security without mention of those categorized as having marginal food security.

Researchers support this claim by explaining that the USDA strategy of identifying individuals as food secure, even if they are experiencing some level of food insecurity, decreases the level of food insecurity being reported on. Based on the research by Brescia and Cuite (2022), it is reasonable to consider that a percentage of college students may fall into this gap, resulting in underrepresentation in food security research.

Disproportionate Effects on College Students

College students are perceived to be in a privileged environment with a plethora of available resources (Nazmi et al., 2018). This perception is false for more than one third of college students that are food insecure nationwide (Brescia & Cuite, 2022). Researchers across multiple regions of the United States have found that students who identified as Black, Hispanic, or other, had parents with lower levels of education, or those who received a Pell Grant had an increased chance of food insecurity (Brescia & Cuite, 2022).

A national survey was conducted in 1999-2003, with follow up through 2015-2017, of a representative panel of over 1,500 college students in the United States (Wolfson et al., 2021). Researchers found the overall prevalence of food insecurity during college was 14.9%. Students experiencing food insecurity were more likely to be of older age, non-White, and first-generation college students, compared to adults with food security (Wolfson et al., 2021).

A study at Rutgers University found that for students who indicated they have low or very low food security, “there is an overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities, former foster youth, and first-generation college students” (Brescia & Cuite, 2022, p. 3). Students who grew up in low-income communities likely had fewer resources in their K-12 public school system, and exposure to food insecurity through adolescence, automatically putting them at a disadvantage compared to peers that came from affluent backgrounds (Camelo & Elliot, 2019).

The demographics of college campuses are changing. When federal regulations for food assistance were created, the perception of a college student illustrated a recent high school graduate that had support from parents or guardians at home. With more students entering college that do not fit that criterion, policies need to adapt (Landry et al., 2021). More first-generation students and students from low-income households are entering college. The current

financial assistance programs that support college entrance do not extend to support other needs, such as food assistance. The policies in place have not yet changed to meet the growing demand (Landry et al., 2021). Consequently, when looking at the intersectionality of changing student demographics and their food insecurity status, a larger percentage of students of color identified as food insecure also had lower grade point averages (Wolfson et al., 2021). This puts a population of college students at risk of not qualifying to graduate.

Impeding Academic Success and Graduation Rates

It is widely accepted that food insecurity affects cognitive development. Particularly in early childhood, “food insecurity consistently predicts lower general cognitive skills and mental proficiency” (Hines et al., 2021, p. 129). The hindrance to a learner’s educational advancement can be related to Abraham H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory.

Maslow maintains that an individuals’ needs must be met before they can reach a higher level of human experience (McLeod, 2018). The theory is commonly illustrated as a pyramid with five levels. From base to point, the five levels of need are: physiological (food, water, warmth, rest); safety (security); belongingness and love (intimate relationships, friends); esteem (prestige and feeling of accomplishment); and self-actualization (achieving one’s full potential, including creative activities) (McLeod, 2018). It is reasonable to believe that when a student’s basic needs are unmet, they will struggle to advance in other areas of life. For example, if the student has not met their physiological needs to satiate hunger, they may lack energy to attend class, socialize, or maintain a healthy lifestyle. The failure to meet a basic need negatively impacts physical, social, and emotional abilities. Therefore, we cannot presume that a student’s food insecurity status can be compartmentalized; it has the potential to affect all areas of life.

Higher education professionals have a responsibility to be attentive to a student's holistic well-being and foster a supportive environment.

Holistic student development theory supports the notion that higher education professionals, "should be concerned about the whole student including physical, psychological, and intellectual health" (Stebleton et al., 2020, p. 731). Historically, these beliefs have been upheld by student affairs organizations, and are specifically outlined in the Student Personnel Point of View of 1937, stating the holistic student includes, "his/her intellectual capacity, and achievement, his/her emotional make-up, his/her physical condition, his/her social relationship, his/her vocational aptitudes and skills, his/her moral and religious values, his/her economic resources" (Stebleton et al., 2020, p. 732). This point of view strongly aligns with the core values outlined within the mission and vision of most colleges and universities.

When a student is using energy worrying about their next meal, one of the many areas they can become distracted from is their academic responsibilities. If a student fails to meet expectations within the classroom, not only is their grade point average (GPA) at risk, but it can also affect their eligibility to graduate. Wolfson et al. (2021, p. 391) found that "among food-insecure college students, 43.8 % completed their college degree compared with 68.1 % of food-secure college students; those who experienced food insecurity were more likely to get an associate degree (13.9 % v. 10.9 %) and were less likely to receive a bachelor (21.1 % v. 35.8 %) or graduate/professional degrees (7.6 % v. 21.2 %) than their food-secure counterparts." Researchers recognize the importance of a college degree for economic mobility, future employment, and income (Wolfson et al., 2021).

There are mental health implications of worrying about food as well. Students fear that if they admit to their food insecurity, they will be stigmatized and othered (Wolfson et al., 2021).

The barriers to assistance will prevent students from asking for help, assuming they know help is available. Often, students are not aware of the support services available. Additionally, students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to be working a higher number of hours to support themselves (and possibly their families). This adds to the stress of time management and balancing competing priorities. If a student is contributing to the household income, it is unlikely they will be able to dedicate enough time to academics (Wolfson et al., 2021). This particularly impacts first-generation college students, who were found to be the least likely to graduate at all (Wolfson et al., 2021).

Institutions dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion must recognize the discrepancies between outdated systems that no longer serve the changing demographics of their student body. By allowing accessible ways for students to regularly secure food, they will foster excellence and achievement for a greater number of graduating students (Nazmi et al., 2018).

Supporting Student Success

Researchers agree there is a significant number of students who struggle to secure enough food, and it is adversely affecting their academic performance. Multiple studies performed regionally and at individual institutions have reported that food insecurity, on average, affects between 33-41% of college students nationwide (Wolfson et al., 2022). At more than twice the national rate, college students are at high risk of food insecurity. Consistently struggling to secure enough food hinders a student's ability to succeed in school and impacts retention and graduation rates across higher education. To this end, it is strongly recommended that institutions, state, and federal agencies take action to provide higher levels of support for students.

At the federal level, food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are available to college students, however, a large portion of available funding remains unused. A study in 2016 found that nearly two million students who were potentially eligible to receive SNAP benefits did not receive them (Wolfson et al., 2022). This may be attributed to a lack of awareness about the program or the strict requirements that a student is asked to meet to receive the benefits; for example, benefit recipients must work a minimum number of hours per week (Wolfson et al., 2022). Competing demands from a challenging work schedule versus rigorous course load could divert a student from their studies. It is recommended that increasing awareness about SNAP availability, capturing data about food assistance needs on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and a less arduous process of applying for assistance would help students receive benefits they are eligible for (Hines et al., 2021).

In Massachusetts, there are certain criteria that college students need to meet to be eligible for SNAP. Students ages 18-49 must be enrolled half-time or full-time in a course that requires a GED or high school diploma (Project Bread, n.d.). Further, college students need to meet at least one requirement that refers to current financial assistance from the state (such as Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children [TAFDC]); or currently maintain a work-study job; or work a minimum of 20 hours per week; or have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0 (Project Bread, n.d.). These requirements are in place for students currently pursuing an associate degree or certificate program, and they change based on living arrangements, enrollment status, and participation in a meal plan.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers believe college students faced greater financial hardships, which might increase the likelihood of needing food assistance (Brito, 2022).

In response to financial hardships, SNAP eligibility requirements were temporarily adjusted to help the disproportionate number of students who were unable to afford food. The adjustment removed the requirement for students receiving work-study financial aid to fulfill their work hours (Wolfson et al., 2022). As a result, approximately three million students became newly eligible for SNAP, though they may not be aware of this status (Wolfson et al., 2022). Increased communication about these benefits and advocacy for policy change to expand the eligibility requirements of SNAP recipients would help more students access funding opportunities. Additionally, institutions should consider ways that they can help students who may need emergency assistance, sustained assistance, or cannot qualify for government funding based on income guidelines.

Campus-Based Solutions

At the college level, community engagement practices could help promote food security for students. Wolfson et al. (2022) recommend building partnerships with local community organizations, providing transportation to grocery stores, and maintaining easily accessible resources at no-cost through programs such as a food pantry. Food pantries can provide emergency resources like non-perishable grocery items, fresh food (with proper storage), and non-food items such as personal hygiene products. Landry et al., (2021, p. 520) note that food pantries are prominent on college campuses because of their “ease of starting, inexpensive nature, and high visibility.” Though students may be reluctant to visit a food pantry, greater awareness around campus could help destigmatize the service. Part of raising awareness might include communicating the message that food insecurity is not a reflection of the individual, it results from the availability of resources within a community (Camelo & Elliot, 2019). Another option, which may be more discreet, is to incorporate apps where students can donate unused

meals on their meal plans (Camelo & Elliot, 2019). The Share Meals Organization founded by Jonathan Chin, a graduate student at New York University, allows college students to connect digitally to share extra meal swipes. This collaborative effort lets students know they aren't alone and that resources are available.

As colleges bring together students from diverse backgrounds and communities, it is best to create an environment where students feel a sense of belonging to foster academic success. College students are in “relatively fixed and controllable environments” and administrators have the power and authority to make changes that help more students at a faster rate than state or federal programming (Nazmi et al., 2018, p. 735). Ultimately, food assistance programs should focus on alleviating student stress and supporting their academic success (Hines et al., 2021).

Food Pantries on Campus

A food pantry is defined as, “a public or private nonprofit organization that distributes food to low-income and unemployed households, including food from sources other than the Department of Agriculture, to relieve situations of emergency and distress” (Brito-Silva et al., 2022, p. 1). The number of food pantries across college campuses has been steadily increasing. It is reported that over 800 colleges now have food pantries on their campuses, compared to only 88 colleges in 2012 (Cornett, 2022). The increase could be attributed to rising costs of attending college, failing to qualify for federal benefits, the experience of learning to manage finances, and because of the stigma associated with seeking assistance (Twill et al., 2016).

Schools might consider hosting food drives and accepting food donations. As seen at the Texas Woman's University (TWU)'s food pantries, although nonperishable donations are widely accepted, “they are encouraged to provide fresh produce and to ensure whole grains, dairy, spices, and condiments are available” (Brito-Silva et al., 2022, p. 2). The types of donations

collected at Merrimack College (perishable and/or non-perishable) would be contingent upon storage availability, resource allocation, and student feedback.

Merrimack College

Stebelton et al. (2020, p. 730) report that, “students with household incomes less than \$20,000 were two times more likely to report food insecurity versus students with household incomes of \$50,000 or more, and students who worked more than 20 hours a week were experiencing higher rates of food insecurity compared to students who were not working.” Factors like family income cannot be controlled by the student, and yet students who want to pursue higher education must face the challenges that result from this status (Stebelton et al., 2020). When we consider the student body at Merrimack College, most students receive some form of financial assistance.

Merrimack College is a private, faith-based four-year institution that serves approximately 5,500 students (4,120 undergraduates) (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d.), the average total cost of attendance for a student living on-campus in 2021-2022 was approximately \$65,000. It was reported that 61% of students are receiving federal student loans; however, the average amount of aid received is \$23,427 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). This results in approximately \$41,000 of debt per year. Additionally, in 2020-2021, 16% of students at Merrimack College receive Pell grants (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). According to Merrimack College, the maximum amount of aid a student can receive from a Pell grant is \$6,895, yet in 2020-2021, the average amount given in a Pell grant is \$4,667 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Pell grant recipients receive far less aid than the cost of

tuition of the institution. This forces us to consider how students are paying the difference, and what is sacrificed for the high cost of higher education.

Current Project

The purpose of this project is to work with staff and administrators at Merrimack College to develop a proposal for a food pantry on campus. In addition, key strategies for presenting and advocating for a food pantry will be co-created among the project group.

Curriculum Plan

The purpose of this project is to create a proposal for starting a food pantry at Merrimack College. Research shows the prevalence of food insecurity among college students and how it negatively affects their academic performance, contributing to reduced retention and graduation rates across institutions of higher education. 16% of Merrimack College students are receiving Pell grants, which means these students' households have an exceptional financial need. A food pantry on-campus would allow them to access food at no-cost, easing some stress related to cost-of-living expenses.

Situation Statement

Food insecurity is a critical issue across the United States. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, food insecurity affected more than 10% of households across the United States in 2021 (Coleman-Jenson et al., 2022). Multiple studies performed regionally and at individual institutions have reported that food insecurity, on average, affects between 33-41% of college students nationwide (Wolfson et al., 2022). At more than twice the national rate, college students are at high risk of food insecurity. Consistently struggling to secure enough food hinders a student's ability to succeed in school and impacts retention and graduation rates across higher education.

Define Your Goals

The goals for this project are:

- Goal 1: Raise awareness about the prevalence of food insecurity among college students, especially those at Merrimack College.
- Goal 2: Formalize the Merrimack College food security system by mapping current food access points.
- Goal 3: Evaluate the feasibility of starting a food pantry on-campus.

Target Audience

My target audience includes Merrimack College faculty, staff, and community partners that are currently engaged in food security initiatives, including the Food Recovery Network (FRN); campus ministries; Stevens Service-Learning Center; the school of Nursing and Health Sciences; and the athletics department. Together, these groups are dedicated to the holistic student. From food waste recovery to building strong partnerships in the community, collaborative efforts across these departments support an engaged student body within an environment of success toward career development. These participants would be strong advocates to support an on-campus food pantry.

Crafting a Clear Message

Food insecurity leads to insecure futures! According to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, more than 10% of households in the United States were food insecure in 2021, and 8% of households in Massachusetts experience food insecurity. As Merrimack College serves a growing number of students that receive Pell grants, the institution must consider expanding resources to support an increased need. Merrimack College students will benefit from having an on-campus food pantry to ensure healthy, reliable food options are available at no cost.

Eliminating this uncertainty will help students focus on their academic success and career development.

Identify Key Elements of the Curriculum

My presentation will begin by educating the audience about food insecurity among college students, focusing on the number of low-income students at Merrimack College. Following, I will lead an activity in mapping current food access points at Merrimack College, present the food pantry proposal, and finish with a question-and-answer session.

- Topic 1: Icebreaker: Empty Plate Activity
- Topic 2: Lecture: A deeper look at Merrimack College's student population.
- Topic 3: Interactive Assignment: Mapping Food Access Points
- Topic 4: Lecture: Introduce Food Pantry Proposal
- Topic 5: Lecture and Activity: Potential Pitfalls and Barriers
- Topic 6: Interview the Audience

Responsibilities Chart

| NAME | ORGANIZATION OR AFFILIATION | RESPONSIBILITIES | CONTACT INFORMATION |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Erin LaMonica | Merrimack College | Will invite participants to be on panel of evaluators. | |
| Dr. Elaine Ward | Merrimack College | Will make introductions to stakeholders that could participate on panel. Provide direction to get information about income levels of current students' families. | warde@merrimack.edu |

Curriculum Review Plan

My target audience will be the evaluators that provide feedback about the proposal. There will be dedicated time during the presentation for feedback. I will interview the panel to capture questions they have about the proposal, recommended changes, opportunities for improvement, and ask who they believe the essential stakeholders are at Merrimack College to move the proposal forward. I will provide worksheets for the evaluators to write notes during the presentation and create a Google Form to survey the audience about feasibility using a numeric rating scale and short answer questions.

Implementation Timeline

| | |
|---------------|--|
| January 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research operating costs to create a budget. -Research income levels of students, Pell grant awards, and food insecurity data. -Identify potential locations on-campus. -Recruit panel participants. |
| February 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Finish pantry proposal. -Finalize interactive assignments/activities. -Confirm participant availability. |
| March 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Meet with panel to review pantry proposal. -Review feedback and evaluation. |
| April 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4/11: Full capstone draft due 5/1: Submit final capstone paper for publication |

Logical Framework

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>PROGRAM GOAL</p> | <p>To propose opening a student-run food pantry at Merrimack College (MC). The proposal will be evaluated by a panel of MC faculty, staff, and community partners. Opening the pantry will allow students to access a variety of grocery items at no-cost; provide experiential learning to the students managing operations; and positively impact student retention and graduation rates.</p> | |
| <p>SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 1</p> | <p>SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 2</p> | <p>SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 3</p> |
| <p>Increase knowledge / awareness of food insecurity among college student population.</p> | <p>Increase access to a resource that guides the institution on providing no-cost, high-quality foods for students while supporting student development.</p> | <p>Increase networks, skills and attitudes about students who struggle to secure three healthy meals per day.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants will identify levels within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. - Participants will estimate the number of students receiving financial assistance and/or Pell Grants at Merrimack College. - Participants will examine income levels and food insecurity data from Merrimack College. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instruct participants on how to set up a food pantry on-campus. - Participants will identify potential “pitfalls” or “barriers to success”. - Participants will be able to determine a schedule and staffing plan for the food pantry. - Participants will assess the types of grocery items offered at the pantry. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants will be able to describe food distribution networks. - Participants will collaborate about creating a space to reduce stigma for pantry visitors. - Participants will identify food security resources needed for the “holistic student” to be successful. |

Methodology

This assessment was conducted with four participants from Merrimack College. The workshop was hosted online and included a lecture about food insecurity affecting college students, identifying current food access at Merrimack College and in the surrounding community, and reviewing a proposal to start an on-campus food pantry. Participants were interviewed to collect qualitative data about the feasibility of the pantry proposal.

Participants

The participants in this project were Merrimack College staff members. Participant one is a member of campus ministry. Participant two is a member of the Food Recovery Network. Participant three is a member of the Stevens Service-Learning Center. Participant four is a member of McQuade Library. These participants' roles are directly related to community engagement efforts among the student body at the college. Additionally, participant two has a special interest in food security issues. As community engagement professionals, they have longstanding relationships with internal stakeholders and external partners that could promote advancing an on-campus food pantry.

Materials

The presentation was conducted virtually using a video conferencing tool and multiple productivity apps within Google Workspace. The virtual video conference tool was Zoom. The Google Workspace apps included Slides, Maps, Docs, and Forms. An additional online tool, Jamboard, was used for the introductory activity. Jamboard is a collaborative tool where participants post responses to a shared board. This was used to collect responses for the Empty Plate activity. In this activity, participants were asked to personally reflect and complete the prompt, "On an empty stomach, I can't _____." Next, I presented my research about food

insecurity using Google Slides. The mapping activity was conducted using Google Maps to identify food access points on-campus, as well as within one mile of Merrimack College. I presented the food pantry proposal using Google Docs. I created a copy of the proposal in a separate Google Doc and shared this link with participants. As we reviewed the proposal they were encouraged to write notes, questions, or thoughts directly into their copy of the document. All notes were recorded on the same document. We continued the presentation with an interview-style feedback session. I received permission from all participants to record their responses in this conversational interview. Responses were later transcribed using Google Docs for my review. Finally, I used Google Forms for an online survey to evaluate the presentation. The form collected quantitative and qualitative data from participants.

Procedure

Reviewers were identified based on their roles within the college relative to food insecurity and community engagement efforts. Individual emails were sent to each reviewer to introduce myself, the topic, explain why they would be a valuable addition to the project, and ask about their interest in participating. Expectations were clearly communicated regarding their role in the project, my intention to record a segment of our discussion, and the total time commitment. Once participation and availability were confirmed, a date and time was identified.

A reminder email was sent thanking each person for agreeing to participate in the project. Following this message, each person received a calendar invitation with a link to the virtual meeting room.

I signed-in to Zoom thirty minutes prior to our meeting to confirm that my devices and presentation tools were properly functioning. Once participants logged on, we confirmed that audio and visual tools were functional, and each participant was asked to introduce themselves

and their roles at Merrimack College. I read through the interview protocol and shared the reminder that a portion of the workshop would be recorded, allowing for participants to decline being recorded.

During the project, I facilitated each activity as outlined in the full agenda (Appendix A). This included an overview of food insecurity among college students using Google Slides to illustrate the data. Next, participants were given 10 minutes to identify as many food access points as possible, and then compare their list against a map of food access points that I prepared ahead of time for visual purposes. Following this, I presented the proposal of an on-campus food pantry and asked each participant to write notes on their copy of the document as we completed the review.

Finally, the interview portion of the workshop was conducted to gather the group's feedback. This portion of the workshop was recorded so I could later transcribe their feedback for my research. Once this was complete, I allotted time for participants to answer and submit the evaluation survey. Finally, I thanked the participants for their time and thoughtful consideration about this topic.

Results

Initial Thoughts and Reactions

All four participants were staff and/or administrators at Merrimack College. Three of the interviewees supported the idea to create a food pantry on campus. One interviewee expressed they did not think there was a significant need for a food pantry. Interviewees that supported the food pantry provided creative insights about partnerships across campus that would support the initiative. They also gave thoughtful feedback about alternative locations, leaders across campus

that could help positively influence the decision-making process, and external community partnerships.

Potential Barriers and Challenges

The primary barrier was the lack of information about the rate of food insecurity on Merrimack College's campus. Missing this information made it challenging to convince all participants that there was a need and instill a sense of urgency to create the food pantry. Interviewees shared that this information would be critical to move the proposal forward and get buy-in from senior administrators. Interviewees also shared that it would be challenging to sustain the food pantry if it was led by students; therefore, a staff member would be integral to oversee the program.

Recommendations to Enhance the Proposal

To strengthen the proposal, interviewees expressed that more information about the rate of food insecurity on Merrimack College's campus would contribute to a stronger proposal. They also advised including examples of food pantries on college campuses that share similar demographics to those at Merrimack College. Interviewees recommended adding a section about partnering with First-Year Experience (FYE) courses and FYE Director at Merrimack to engage undergraduate students and raise awareness about this issue and how it affects Merrimack College.

Another recommendation offered related to potential locations. Respondents shared that we might consider operating the pantry at the Unity House or Graduate Center in McQuade Library (once its expansion is complete).

For external partnerships, one interviewee recommended pursuing a corporate sponsorship, such as a grocery retailer, for food and financial donations. Another interviewee

recommended partnering with a local YMCA and Memorial Hall Library, both located in North Andover. Each organization has support systems in place that would help organize food drives to support the food pantry.

Finally, in the section about “hours of operation,” two interviewees recommended having an available shift open from 5:00-7:00pm. These were identified as the busy dinner hours. One interviewee shared her experience witnessing students separating from their friends during those hours. If friends were going to the dining hall for a meal, but one did not have a meal swipe or money to purchase something, instead of sitting with their friends and watching them eat, they would go to McQuade Library. Food pantry services available during this time could be a reprieve for students that need help accessing food at no-cost.

Effectiveness of the Workshop

To rate the effectiveness of the workshop, each of the four participants completed a survey using Google Forms. Interviewees were asked to rate the workshop on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). Three of the four interviewees rated the workshop a 5 and one interviewee rated the workshop as a 4. When asked if the goals of the workshop were clear, three interviewees selected “strongly agree” and one interviewee selected “disagree.” When asked if the content was relevant to them, two interviewees selected “strongly agree” and two interviewees selected “agree.” When asked if the topic was interesting, two interviewees selected “strongly agree” and two interviewees selected “agree.” When asked if the presentation was impactful, three interviewees selected “strongly agree” and one interviewee selected “agree.” Two participants indicated the activity, “mapping food access” helped them most effectively understand this topic. One participant selected the “food pantry proposal review” as the most effective way to understand this topic. One participant selected the lecture as the most effective

way to understand this topic. When asked to select the activity that felt most engaging, three interviewees selected “food pantry proposal review,” and one participant selected the lecture. Finally, when asked if the event made them think about food insecurity, all interviewees selected “strongly agree.”

Importance of Food Insecurity on Campus

Interviewees were asked how important they felt food insecurity was as a campus-wide issue. One interviewee selected “somewhat not important.” One interviewee selected “somewhat important.” Two interviewees selected “very important.” Following this question, interviewees were asked if they would be interested in participating in a continued conversation about this issue on campus. Three interviewees responded “yes,” and one interviewee responded “no.” One interviewee indicated they would like to connect again soon to continue the conversation, and that they, “look[ed] forward to what’s coming next from this project.”

Discussion

Based on our discussion during the workshop, and from the evaluation survey, feedback was generally positive. Most interviewees supported the idea of creating a food pantry on-campus. The proposal was a useful tool to generate a thoughtful discussion about food insecurity, analyze the need at Merrimack College, identify food accessibility on campus and in the surrounding community, and discuss the feasibility of creating a campus-based pantry.

One piece of feedback I found surprising came from an interviewee expressing their belief that there is not a significant need for an on-campus food pantry. Their justification was that undergraduate students are residential and living on campus includes a meal plan. As stated on the college’s website, all resident students are enrolled in a meal plan ranging from 7 to 19 meals per week. This caught my attention because a 19 meal per week plan does not provide

enough swipes for three meals per day, seven days per week. I am curious how the institution decided on the quantity of meals per week.

Although undergraduate students have access to meal plans, many students choose to reduce the number of swipes on their meal plan to reduce this overall expense. While researching the cost of room and board on Merrimack College's website, I found it challenging to get an itemized list of expenses. I was able to find the total cost of room and board, but not a detailed breakdown of the price of a meal plan and what is included in the fees for room and board. The lack of information prompted additional questions, which implies the need for further research.

Finally, this justification does not account for commuter students. As many students choose to live at home or off-campus for cost-saving purposes, being an enrolled student does not automatically provide access to dining services. Commuter students can elect to pay for a meal plan for an additional cost. Alternatively, these students could be purchasing food elsewhere or going without food due to competing costs of living. Having a reliable, free resource to access food would alleviate this stressor for students.

A comparable view was expressed from an interviewee questioning the usefulness of the pantry. They were concerned that if the pantry was benefiting a small group of students, it would be perceived as an inefficient resource. Based on the case studies I reviewed from college students who are hungry, I find it difficult to accept this reasoning because it implies a dismissive attitude toward students that may experience personal need. As a community engaged practitioner, I am inclined to connect people in need to supportive resources. If the resource does not exist, we create a solution, even if it is a temporary reprieve. I found it extremely challenging to accept the implication that we should define a minimum number of students as a prerequisite

for support. In this instance, I assert that one person justifies the action. If one student on campus is struggling to get food, the institution has a responsibility to help them.

During the discussion, we looked at the number of Merrimack College students that receive Pell grants. As previously stated, 16% of Merrimack College students in 2020-2021 received Pell grants and the average amount awarded is just under \$5,000. We know that Pell grant recipients are awarded to undergraduate students that display exceptional financial need, and this amount covers a fraction of the total cost of tuition. As students take out loans to cover the remaining cost of tuition, supplies, room and board, and unforeseen expenses, there is not a system currently in place to provide funds for basic needs like food.

Another interesting and somewhat surprising concern expressed was the possibility of students misusing the resource, suggesting theft from the food pantry. This raised a larger ethical question for me – can something that is offered for free be “stolen”? Regardless, this concern could be addressed when deciding on the pantry’s location and operating procedures.

As our discussion continued, we looked at the current food access points on Merrimack College’s campus and surrounding area. Participants were surprised at the scarcity of free resources within the community. There was unanimous agreement that using this visualization tool helped them understand how far a student would need to travel to access a food pantry or alternate community resource. We identified that there was not a community resource within walking distance of campus. “Walking distance” in an urban area is defined by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council as $\frac{1}{4}$ mile (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2022). The closest resource to Merrimack’s Campus is over one mile away and open limited hours, only one morning per week for two hours. The distance and limited availability of this organization is insufficient to fulfill a college student’s needs. This pantry’s hours of operation conflict with a

popular time that classes are offered, Tuesdays from 8:30-10:30am. A pantry for a college student would, ideally, be open multiple days per week with varying times for equitable access. An interviewee expressed their feeling that seeing the data in this holistic view made them feel bad, as if the institution should be doing more to fill the gap in this area of need.

When discussing the feasibility of starting the pantry on campus, most participants felt there was an appetite for the resource. I presented the steps that I believed would help us create a comprehensive plan, which included involving students, faculty, facilities, dining services, and conducting further research across campus. Support from a steering committee would be essential to keep the initiative moving forward and gain support from administrators at senior levels. Eventually, the process would include a presentation to the college's President. Participants expressed that the initiative should be led by faculty or staff for sustainability, and that having student voices in the conversation was essential. They shared that administrators are keen to listen to a student group that raises a shared concern. One interviewee felt the outlined process was too bureaucratic, and suggested starting a small-scale initiative, with "less red tape." I agree with the initial effort to take a grassroots approach, but I also found from research that the longevity and sustainability of such an initiative requires approval from senior leaders.

Given Merrimack College's presence in the community, and the institution's access to a wealth of resources, there is strong potential to engage external community partners for support. This support enhances the feasibility of the pantry. A key partnership would be with Merrimack Valley Food Bank. This partnership allows regular, scheduled access to nonperishable food and non-food items. Food from the food bank is free, so the associated costs would be for transportation, storage, and time. One interviewee expressed that partnering with the food bank could cannibalize other food-security efforts from neighboring organizations. I responded to this

thought by asking the group to think of mutually beneficial relationships among community partners that foster collaboration over competition. This initiated others to express their belief that there is enough food available for all. Additionally, when we quantify the use of a resource it helps validate the justification for the resource to exist and possibly expand.

Most participants were motivated by the prospect of continuing the conversation. They imagined how the pantry could become a reality on campus and provided helpful insights about who else to engage in the conversation. These suggestions are reviewed in the implications for further research.

This project was helpful to understand the teaching process and learn how to effectively convey a societal issue in a space where others maintain different opinions. I appreciated the differing opinions because they will help strengthen the proposal for future iterations. By understanding the opposing view more fully, I can anticipate oppositional comments and potential challenges. The process also helped identify which current employees would like to be involved and identify others in the network that may be interested in engaging.

Limitations of the Project

This workshop had a low number of participants, which made it difficult to collect a variety of responses in two of the activities. In the “empty plate” activity, participants were asked to provide as many responses as they could think of, yet each participant provided one response. This resulted in a brief discussion. With a larger group of participants, it would have been interesting to discuss the different ways hunger affects each person and allow for open dialogue; and the open dialogue would have been beneficial for the group to engage with each other.

During the “mapping food access activity,” it was useful to have the virtual maps available so all participants could see the proximity of community food resources to Merrimack

College; however, when asked to list where students could get food locally, a small number of responses were given. A larger number of participants may have helped spark creative ideas and provide different perspectives with more opportunity to engage.

Another limitation of the project was the lack of data from the financial aid office of Merrimack College. Despite multiple attempts to collect this data from the institution, our understanding of the current need based on the percentage of students' families at or below the poverty line is limited. Having this data would have contributed to a more thorough understanding of the need on Merrimack College's campus and helped advocate for a pantry.

Implications for Future Projects

There is significant potential to move this project forward. Three out of four interviewees were interested in continuing the conversation about a food pantry. With the current group's support, bringing additional faculty into the conversation would expand support across campus and provide different perspectives relative to students experiencing food insecurity. Future students or staff should consider engaging with the Director of the FYE program, Father Ray Dlugos from Campus Ministry, the Director of the Nutrition Masters program, as well as the Clinical Professor of Nutrition and Public Health. One interviewee shared that there was a small food pantry on campus at one time, but it closed. Fr. Ray Dlugos was involved with the pantry at that time and could provide helpful insight to understand why the service ended.

For this project to continue successfully, it would also be helpful to have a discussion with the Institutional Advancement team at Merrimack College. As they oversee donors and financial gifts to the institution, they could provide support for fundraising initiatives and the grant-seeking process.

As previously stated, having a proposal draft was helpful so interviewees could spend time providing constructive feedback, and I could gather their reactions. I would recommend future researchers build off an existing proposal and customize it for the institution. A significant portion of my time was spent researching what colleges and universities included in their food pantry proposals and how their pantries were organized. A future researcher may be able to use an existing proposal as a guide and spend more time exploring the systems and stakeholders at Merrimack College.

Future research would also benefit from having a more diversified audience in the workshop. I was optimistic about getting feedback from students, staff from the Merrimack Athletics Department, Hamel Health Center, and a Registered Dietician; however, they were unable to participate at the time. I would recommend engaging 10-12 participants. This would allow for a variety of perspectives in the room while having a manageable group size so everyone could provide feedback.

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Appendix A: Agenda & Overview

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE A FOOD PANTRY AT MERRIMACK COLLEGE

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In this session, we will review my proposal for starting a food pantry at Merrimack College. We will define food insecurity, understand how food insecurity affects college students, examine the number of students that may be at-risk of food insecurity at Merrimack College, and assess the logistics of operating a food pantry on-campus. Participants will discuss the benefits, challenges, and feasibility of the food pantry proposal. | |
| <p>Lecture and Activity: Understanding Food Insecurity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define food insecurity and college hunger, establishing a baseline understanding of the societal issue. Empty plate campaign activity: This exercise has been used for self-reflection and raising awareness about hunger and food insecurity. On an empty paper plate, participants will write, “On an empty stomach I cannot _____” or “I can _____ to help end hunger.” Lecture about the prevalence of food insecurity among college students, particularly at Merrimack College. Assessing the activity: Ask the group what stands out about this data? Record their responses. | <p>Materials List: Laptop Zoom Google Doc of all presentation links</p> |
| <p>Interactive Assignment: Mapping Food Access Points</p> <p>By illustrating existing food access points at Merrimack College, participants will have an active role in identifying available dining options on campus and in the surrounding area. The map will create a holistic view of locations where students can purchase food or access free food. The goal of the activity is to illustrate the lack of access to free food on campus and within walking distance to campus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group will formalize the Merrimack College food security system by mapping current food access points. Identify where students need to pay for food and ways they can access food at no-cost on campus. By using a digital visualization tool which incorporates a Merrimack College campus map, we will identify on-campus food options, 24-hour services, meal delivery options, and nearby community resources. | <p>Materials List: Laptop Digital campus map Google Maps Google Doc template</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing the activity: How many resources are available at no-cost on campus? Within walking distance to campus? On the Warrior Shuttle route? Only available by car? | |
| <p>Lecture: Introduce Food Pantry Proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will present the proposal I have created for the group to review. During the review, I will ask participants to note their initial questions, concerns, and strengths. In a lecture-style, I will explain the logistics and reasons for my decisions outlined within the proposal. During the review, I will confirm permission to record participants’ feedback for my research and reporting. | <p>Materials List: Laptop Digital copies of proposal Google Doc template</p> |
| <p>Lecture and Activity: Potential Pitfalls and Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will ask questions about the proposal, express their concerns, and identify potential challenges that might prevent the success of the food pantry. Assessing the activity: with permission from participants, I will record this portion of the session to record participants’ feedback for my research and reporting. | <p>Materials List: Laptop Google Doc template with short answer forms to capture feedback</p> |
| <p>Interview the Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will survey participants using a Google Form with a numeric rating scale and short answer questions to capture their recommended next steps, opportunities for improvement, and who they believe the essential stakeholders are at Merrimack College to move the proposal forward. Using another numeric rating scale, I will ask about the effectiveness of this session in presenting food insecurity among college students, and the likelihood that they would support an on-campus pantry. I will also ask if the group would like to continue meeting on the topic of food insecurity. | <p>Materials List: Laptop Google Form</p> |

Appendix B: Presentation

The slide is divided into two main sections. The top section has a dark blue background. On the left is a photograph of three students walking on a paved path in front of a brick building with large glass windows. To the right of the photo, the title "Food for Thought" is written in large white font, followed by the subtitle "Recommendations to establish a food pantry at Merrimack College" in a smaller white font. Below this, a light blue horizontal bar contains the text "Presented by Erin LaMonica". At the bottom right of this section is the Merrimack College logo, which consists of a shield with a cross and a book, followed by the text "MERRIMACK COLLEGE".

The bottom section has a dark blue background. On the left, the text "Empty Plate Activity" is written in large white font. On the right is a photograph of a white plate. The plate has the text "ON AN EMPTY STOMACH, I CAN'T" written in orange, with a horizontal orange line below it. At the bottom of the plate is the "FEEDING AMERICA" logo, which features a stylized orange flame above the words "FEEDING AMERICA".

Source: Food Bank of Delaware, <https://www.fbd.org/september-is-hunger-action-month/>

Food Insecurity Among College Students

Food insecurity is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as, "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."

- Levels of food insecurity
- Disproportionate effects on college students
- Impeding academic success and graduation rates
- Supporting student success
- Campus-based solutions



"I don't have energy to go out of my house, I want to be in my room sleeping. And sometimes, I even have like this pain in my stomach, which is also affecting my health, which I can't even like lay down, because my stomach hurts so much."

Source: Gamba et al., 2021, p. 2794



Food Insecurity is a Critical Issue

- According to the United States Department of Agriculture, food insecurity affected more than 10% of households across the United States in 2021 (Coleman-Jenson et al., 2022).
- Multiple studies performed regionally and at individual institutions have reported that food insecurity, on average, affects between 33-41% of college students nationwide (Wolfson et al., 2022).
- College students are at high risk of food insecurity

Consistently struggling to secure enough food hinders a student's ability to succeed in school, and impacts retention and graduation rates across higher education.



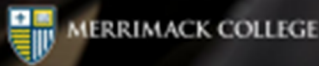
Identifying the need at Merrimack College

1. 16% of students receive Pell grants (2020-2021)
2. The maximum amount you can get from a Pell grant is \$6,895
3. The average amount given in a Pell grant is \$4,667 (2020-2021)
4. Resident meal plans are included with cost of room & board: \$10,113.50
5. Commuter students can purchase "best value" plan: \$310.75 for 40 meals

Additional research:

1. The percentage of students that are at the federal poverty income level and 200% of federal poverty level
2. The percentage of students who work more than 20 hours a week
3. Do Pell grants cover a percentage or total cost of meal plans?





Activity: Mapping Food Access

Part 1: As a group, spend 2-3 minutes brainstorming where students can get food on campus.

[Campus Dining Options](#)





Activity: Mapping Food Access

Part 2: As a group, spend 5-7 minutes brainstorming where students can get food in the surrounding community.

Try to think about locations within one mile of campus.

Identify food pantries/community resources if you can.

Food Pantries Surrounding Merrimack College

| Site | Distance from Merrimack College (miles) | Travel Time by Car | Travel Time Walking |
|---|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| People's Pantry - North Andover Unitarian Universalist Church 190 Academy Road North Andover, MA Hours: TUE, 8:30-10:30 am | 1.3 | 3 minutes | 25 minutes |
| You Forward 15 Union Street Lawrence, MA | 3.3 | 10 minutes | 1 hour 5 minutes |
| Water Source Food Pantry 93 Essex Street Lawrence, MA | 3.4 | 10 minutes | 1 hour 7 minutes |
| Food For The World, Inc. (closest location) 35 Common Street Lawrence, MA | 3.4 | 12 minutes | 1 hour 7 minutes |

Food Pantries in Lawrence, MA

| Site | Distance from Merrimack College (miles) | Travel Time by Car | Travel Time Walking |
|--|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| Neighbors in Need 60 Island Street | 3.5 | 9 minutes | 1 hour 3 minutes |
| House of Mercy 85 Baystate Road | 3.5 | 13 minutes | 1 hour 21 minutes |
| Northern Essex Community College Pantry 45 Franklin Street | 3.7 | 13 minutes | 1 hour 19 minutes |
| Bread & Roses 58 Newbury Street | 3.8 | 11 minutes | 1 hour 10 minutes |
| New Beginnings 487 Lawrence Street | 3.8 | 12 minutes | 1 hour 15 minutes |
| Salvation Army 87 Summer Street | 3.9 | 11 minutes | 1 hour 12 minutes |

Source: MVFB Pantries List



Food Pantries in Lawrence, MA (continued)

| Site | Distance from Merrimack College (miles) | Travel Time by Car | Travel Time Walking |
|--|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| St. George Orthodox Church 8 Lowell Street | 3.9 | 12 minutes | 1 hour 17 minutes |
| Straight Ahead Ministry 14 Vine Street | 4.0 | 10 minutes | 1 hour 19 minutes |
| Greater Lawrence Community Action Council 305 Essex Street | 4.0 | 12 minutes | 1 hour 13 minutes |
| Lawrence YMCA Food Pantry 40 Lawrence Street | 4.1 | 12 minutes | 1 hour 15 minutes |
| Daybreak Shelter 19 Winter Street | 4.2 | 13 minutes | 1 hour 22 minutes |
| Point After Club 43 Jackson Street | 4.3 | 10 minutes | 1 hour 5 minutes |

Source: MVFB Pantries List



Food Pantries in Lawrence, MA (continued)

| Site | Distance from Merrimack College (miles) | Travel Time by Car | Travel Time Walking |
|---|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| Women's View 582 Haverhill Street | 4.4 | 16 minutes | 1 hour 40 minutes |
| Lazarus House 412 Hampshire Street | 4.5 | 14 minutes | 1 hour 29 minutes |
| Pegasus House 482 Lowell Street | 4.6 | 14 minutes | 1 hour 33 minutes |
| Tower Hill Recovery 611 Lowell Street | 4.9 | 16 minutes | 1 hour 41 minutes |

Source: MVFB Pantries List



Mapping Food Access



**Food Pantry
Proposal Review**

Please take notes on this shared [Google Doc](#). Questions, comments, ideas are all welcome!

[Link to Proposal](#)



MERRIMACK COLLEGE

Thank You!

[Capstone Evaluation Survey](#)

Appendix C: Evaluation Tool

Target audience: Merrimack College faculty, staff, and community partners that are currently engaged in food security initiatives, including the Food Recovery Network (FRN); campus ministries; Stevens Service-Learning Center; the school of Nursing and Health Sciences; and the athletics department.

Interview

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this evaluation. Your feedback is important to strengthen this proposal about creating a food pantry on Merrimack College's campus. Together, we will assess the feasibility of opening and sustaining a food pantry. Doing so will increase food availability and access to students struggling with food insecurity.

As a Community Engagement graduate student at Merrimack College, I am using this experience as part of my capstone project. I will be using some of your feedback to guide my recommendations in my capstone. Please know that your feedback will be used solely for research purposes, and all responses will be kept confidential.

Questions and Prompts:



1. What are your initial thoughts or reactions to the proposal?
 - a. Are there pieces that should be strengthened?
 - b. Are there pieces that need more definition or clarification?
2. There is often a stigma associated with food insecurity. Students often feel ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help and, as a result, skip meals.
 - a. Have you encountered Merrimack College students facing food insecurity? If so, have you directed them to food assistance programs? Can you share what those resources were?
 - b. Can you think of ways to make the proposed pantry a communal, social atmosphere where students feel welcome?
3. If you could visualize an ideal pantry on Merrimack's campus, what would it look like? Are there elements to your pantry that you see reflected in this proposal?
4. What is one part of the proposed food pantry you would change? What is one part of the proposed food pantry you would keep?
5. When considering the process to get the pantry approved, what are some of the barriers we would need to overcome?
 - a. Can you think of "challenge questions" that might be raised to oppose the pantry?
 - b. Which administrators at Merrimack College could help positively impact the process?
 - c. Are you familiar with funding opportunities?
6. Wrap up – any final thoughts or concerns about a food pantry on campus?

Closing: Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. Would it be okay if I followed up with you to clarify any additional information?

Appendix D: Evaluation Survey

Merrimack College Food Pantry Proposal

Thank you for participating in this evaluation. Your feedback is important to strengthen the feasibility of creating a food pantry on Merrimack College's campus. Your time is greatly appreciated as we work toward raising awareness about college students struggling with food insecurity.

 lamonicae@merrimack.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

* Required

Overall, how would you rate this workshop? *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Excellent

Please rate the following aspects of the workshop *

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The goals of the workshop were clear | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The content was relevant to me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The topic was interesting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The presentation was impactful | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The event made me think about college food insecurity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

How important do you feel food security is as a campus-wide issue? *

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Somewhat not important
- Not important

Please select the activity that most effectively helped you understand this topic *

- Empty Plate
- Lecture
- Mapping Food Access
- Food Pantry Proposal Review
- Other: _____

Please select the activity that you felt was most engaging *

- Empty Plate
- Lecture
- Mapping Food Access
- Food Pantry Proposal Review
- Other: _____

Would you be interested in participating in a continued conversation about this issue on campus? *

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Your Age *

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

Please select your position relative to Merrimack College. Check all that apply: *

- Student
- Faculty
- Staff
- Administrator
- Community Partner
- Other: _____

Submit Clear form