AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Andrea Wells-Edwards for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education presented on April 30, 2020.

Title: Food insecurity in the community college, a phenomenological inquiry: The lived experience of students using a campus food pantry.

Abstract approved: ____

Gloria Crisp

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of students to discern the impact of their interaction with the food pantry. This knowledge may, in turn, influence future food pantry methods and wider policy, both at PNW College and more broadly. Not only does student hunger have the potential to impact negatively student persistence and completion, but it represents an important equity issue on our higher ed campuses. By using phenomenological inquiry to explore the impact on student users of the campus food pantry, the following is the research question that was addressed: What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College? This study was grounded in an interpretivist philosophical approach, which fits especially well with a phenomenological inquiry that asks students about their lived experiences with a food pantry on a community college campus. Ten interviews were analyzed using “in vivo” coding, and themes were determined using the students’ own words.

Themes that emerged from the study included challenges (food pantry barriers, educational obstacles, and stigma), survival attributes (strategy, resource, and findings),

personal characteristics (resilience, caring, feelings, worry/apprehension, and self-sufficiency), and food pantry impacts (education/increased focus, validation, improved health). The results affirm the notion that non-academic barriers represent a significant concern among community college students. Additionally, findings indicate that the food pantry plays an important role on campus in supporting student health and focus on studies. Participants were found to be resilient and self-sufficient, and exhibited altruism toward other students. Contrary to popular thought, stigma emerged as almost a non-challenge; despite the prevailing idea that students using campus supports will feel ashamed, participants universally expressed a lack of concern with stigma. This study, which put students at the center of their own stories, offered several implications for future practice, policy, and research.

The practical significance of this study is potentially large. The study filled gaps in the literature where community colleges are not generally a focus, where qualitative research is rare, and where the voices of students themselves have been unheard. The role of the food pantry on college campuses in supporting student success is now widely recognized. This study is important, since it is vital for educators, administrators, and policy makers to understand student perceptions of food pantry use and its role as a support in their educational success. Particularly as we in higher education witness a push towards completion rather than mere enrollment, we must consider what populations are at risk. Optimistically, a focus on completion will mean a new push to remove non-academic barriers to student achievement that have long gone unaddressed. Food insecurity on higher ed campuses is a critical problem that undermines student success, but it is an issue that is within our collective power to overcome.

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Food Insecurity in the Community College, a Phenomenological Inquiry: The Lived Experience of Students Using a Campus Food Pantry

by
Andrea Wells-Edwards

A DISSERTATION

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

Presented April 30, 2020
Commencement June 2020

Doctor of Education dissertation of Andrea Wells-Edwards presented on April 30, 2020

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Adult and Higher Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Andrea Wells-Edwards, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation first and most importantly to the ten community college students who were brave enough to participate in this study with a total stranger. Without their openness and willingness to share their stories, this work would have been completely impossible. It is my hope that I have represented them fairly and wholly, and that their candidness leads to progress.

Without the ASB at PNW College and the Associate Dean who heads Student LIFE, I would not have had access to the food pantry or the students who use it, so I am deeply indebted to those individuals as well. I also wish to recognize ASB for seeing a need and addressing it, with the implementation of the food pantry in October 2017.

I am thankful for my fabulous committee: Drs. Gloria Crisp, Tenisha Tevis, Sam Chan, William Butler-Paisley, and Sean Gehrke. In addition to being supportive and generous with your time, I appreciate your true curiosity about this subject, your belief in its significance, and your intellect.

I will be forever grateful for the support of my cohort, the best part of this OSU experience. I appreciate CCL 25 and our #iloveus camaraderie. As Joe said on the very first day of class, “It’s like the Marines…leave no man behind.”

I am also indebted to Sadie Marie, the cat who whispered “Food Pantry” in my ear very early one morning in November 2017, when I was stuck without a decent dissertation topic. Whether it was you speaking to me or just a vivid Thanksgiving dream, I will always believe you helped me.

In every way, I am thankful to my incomparable family. My children, Bryn, Rowan, Rhys, and Silas have cheered me, believed in me, and shared the “Table of Success” with me. As much as I may have modeled for you, you have always modeled for me. For my dad, who made a PhD seem normal and who is forever my role model in leadership and in life, I am grateful. My mom, my biggest fan and the smartest woman I ever knew, would be so proud if she were fully able to appreciate this. My stepparents, the best ever, have always supported me, and I am thankful for them.

Finally, my husband Paul, who brought upstairs to my desk countless glasses of late-night wine over four years, who started cooking family dinners, and who has since we met in 1992 believed in me unfailingly: I love and appreciate you, and I couldn’t have done this without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Chapter 1 – Introduction……………………………………………………………..1
  Significance of This Study………………………………………………...6
  Food Banks and Food Pantries…………………………………………...10
    Food Insecurity Definitions………………………………………11
  Study Purpose……………………………………………………………13
  Research Question………………………………………………………..15
    Study Implications………………………………………………..16
Chapter 2 – Literature Review……………………………………………………18
  Purpose of the Literature Review………………………………………...18
  Theoretical Approaches to the Educational Impacts of Food Insecurity………………………………………………………...19
    Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs……………………………………20
    Critiques of Maslow's Theory……………………………………22
    Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty……………………23
    Critiques of Payne's Theory………………………………………...24
  Literature Regarding Food Insecurity and Campus Food Pantries…………25
    Early Food Pantry Studies – Identifying a Need……………………25
    Food Insecurity as an Emerging Issue for Colleges – Studies Focused on Higher Education………………………………27
    Studies Highlighting the Unique Community College Context within Higher Education…………………………………...28
    Studies Linking Food Insecurity and Student Performance………...31
    Studies Exploring Food Insecurity and Sociodemographics………..36
    Campus Food Pantries – Need for Additional Research 38
  Limitations of Existing Literature………………………………………..40
  Summary…………………………………………………………………45
Chapter 3 – Methods……………………………………………………………...48
  Philosophical Approach…………………………………………………..48
    Personal Disclosure and Researcher Positionality…………………50
    Insider/Outsider Status……………………………………………...51

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Methodology…………………………………………………………….. 52
- Setting……………………………………………………………….55
- Sample and Sampling……………………………………………….56
- Data Collection……………………………………………………...59
- Ethical Considerations……………………………………………… 61
- Informed Consent…………………………………………………...63

Data Analysis…………………………………………………………….64
- Epoché……………………………………………………………… 64
- Horizontalization…………………………………………………… 65
- Transcription Process……………………………………………… 66
- Coding Process……………………………………………………...66
- Establishing Trustworthiness………………………………………..68
- Validity……………………………………………………………...70
- Data Saturation……………………………………………………...70

Study Limitations………………………………………………………...71
- Delimitations………………………………………………………..71
- Limitations…………………………………………………………. 72

Campus Food Pantry……………………………………………………..75

Interviews………………………………………………………………...76
- Participants…………………………………………………………77

Summary…………………………………………………………………85

Chapter 4 – Study Findings……………………………………………… 88

Findings…………………………………………………………………..88
- Theme 1: Challenges………………………………………………..89
- Theme 2: Survival Attributes……………………………………… 93
- Theme 3: Personal Characteristics………………………………… 95
- Theme 4: Food Pantry Impacts……………………………………..100

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Notes on Themes……………………..…………………………105
Suggested Improvements……………………………………………105

Summary……………………………………………………………….107

Chapter 5 – Conclusions……………………………………………………………….109

Discussion of Key Findings…………………………………………....109

Essence of the Data – the Student Experience………………………………113

Findings Related to the Literature………………………………...116

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research…………………….….118

Implications for Practice…………………………………………….118
Implications for Policy………………………………………………123
Implications for Research…………………………………………...126
A Caution for the Future…………………………………………….128

Summary……………………………………………………………….129

Final Thoughts…………………………………………………………131

Epilogue……………………………………………………………………………..134

Bibliography………….……………………………………………………………...136

Appendices……………….…………………………………………………………151

Appendix A IRB Paperwork……………………………………….. 151
Appendix B Recruitment Flyer…………………………………….. 153
Appendix C Interview Protocol……………………………………..154
Appendix D Research Consent Form……………………………….157
Appendix E Campus and Community Resources…………………..160

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Maslow’s Triangle……………………………………………………………21
2. Themes and Subthemes…………………………………………………………104

DEDICATION

This dissertation, my doctorate, and my career in higher education are inspired by the memory of my great uncle, Dr. John B. Holden (September 18, 1910 – August 28, 2005), who was always a grandfather to me. His *Washington Post* obituary called him “a lifelong advocate for adult education,” and that is what I always believed him to be. He inspired me more than he will ever know.

“I was an incurious student that semester. Curiosity is a luxury reserved for the financially secure: my mind was absorbed with more immediate concerns, such as the exact balance of my bank account, who I owed how much, and whether there was anything in my room I could sell for ten or twenty dollars. I submitted my homework and studied for my exams, but I did so out of terror – of losing my scholarship should my GPA fall a single decimal – not from real interest in my classes.”

- Tara Westover, *Educated: A Memoir*, p. 300.

Food Insecurity in the Community College, a Phenomenological Inquiry: The Lived Experience of Students using a Campus Food Pantry

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A cold concrete room in the building that houses both fine arts and lab sciences on campus contains some basic metal shelving, a round table with two metal chairs, and a single desk. This room is also home to PNW College's food pantry, established in October 2017. Most students who study on campus now don't remember a time before the food pantry came to inhabit this space, previously an art supplies annex of the campus bookstore. Students now take for granted the ability to drop in during a couple hours on four days of the week during term time and leave with five items each day.

Prior to October 2017, faculty and staff kept snacks in drawers across campus in an ad hoc effort to help students wrestling with hunger. There were never enough instructors with granola bars to help all the hungry students. Seeing this need, Associated Student Body (ASB) officers at PNW College instituted an official food pantry that now receives donations from the college foundation, individual donors, and the local food bank. This researcher was fortunate enough to gain access via Student Leadership, Inclusion, Fun and Engagement (Student LIFE) on campus to talk to students utilizing the food pantry about their experiences. Because community college students are uniquely placed to experience food insecurity, this ASB initiative and subsequent study are vital to supporting the student experience.

There are, naturally, a variety of ways to approach the implementation of a college food pantry. Food pantries may be managed by college staff, collaborative, or student led. Food pantries may be hidden in the back of a closet or found in a prominent location at the center of campus. They might be easy to enter or sit behind a locked door. Students may be able to access pantries with no identification or may need to show documentation to prove financial status. Items may be limited, unlimited, or chosen for the students and pre-bagged. There may be supports like wraparound services and links to community social services, or the food pantry may stand alone. Education, cooking classes, and food literacy resources may be provided, or the facility may be "grab and go." Fresh food, frozen food, or chilled food may be offered or not. What follows is essentially the story of student hunger, its larger implications for the students themselves and our society, and the experience of students interacting with a food pantry on an urban campus of approximately 19,000 students.

This chapter details the study problem and purpose, identifies the research question of the study, and provides relevant context about food insecurity in higher education. The significance of the study in terms of understanding the student experience is outlined. Key terms are also defined.

Fundamentally, most college educators, staff, and administrators understand that personal economic instability has the potential to impact a student's success in higher education. According to Sutton (2016), "Students who come from an economically secure background are up to six times more likely to complete their college studies…financial insecurity is consistently cited as a key factor in students dropping out of their undergraduate education without a degree" (p. 9). A chief issue that stems from economic disadvantage is food insecurity, which impacts student persistence and completion (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018; Broton, 2017).

Though awareness of hunger and homelessness in higher education has certainly increased, researchers have emphasized that little is known about the scope of the issue (Field, 2017). The universal severity of the problem, coupled with the lack of understanding about the practices that might help, highlight the need for increased scholarship regarding interventions to mitigate food insecurity. Specifically, there is a need for research about food pantries and their impact on student success on community college campuses. It is true that great foundational work has been done regarding hunger on four-year campuses (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Broton, Weaver, & Mai, 2018; Bruening, Brennhofer, van Woerden, Todd, & Laska, 2016; Chaparro, Zaghloul, Holck, & Dobbs, 2009: Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, & Poppendieck, 2019; Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2014) However, it is only recently that studies have begun to look seriously at the issues of food insecurity on two-year campuses (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019; Illevia, Ahmed, & Yan, 2018).

Community colleges have always tried to attract students and break down academic and economic barriers; however, there are consequences to this open access (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Our nation’s two-year colleges serve the most diverse populations of students represented in American higher education; this includes students from low-income families, underrepresented populations, those with remedial educational needs, nonnative English speakers, veterans, and students of nontraditional age (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Hirt & Frank, 2013; Jurgens, 2010; Thelin, 2011; Williams, 2013). According to the Community College Research Center (2018), 44% of low-income students (those with a family income of less than $25,000 per year) attend a community college after high school, as opposed to 15 percent of high-income students. Community college students face greater rates of housing instability and food insecurity, and over half of community college students report mental health problems (Fain, 2016). This is hardly surprising, when we consider the context of the open access institution and the lack of barriers to admission. When we look at the push toward completion rather than merely enrollment, however, the question becomes how to best support students, particularly at our community colleges (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Questions regarding obstacles to retention and completion are of pressing importance in higher education today, and it makes sense that economic hurdles have academic consequences for students. According to Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016), material challenges appear to prevent educational attainment. While there have not yet been studies measuring the impact of food and housing insecurity on college attainment, research from K-12 education and anecdotal evidence in higher education point to the presence of a significant effect (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Broton, Frank, and Goldrick-Rab (2014) noted that studies looking at the correlation between food insecurity and academic achievement find an inverse relationship, most recently in a study published at the end of 2019 by Whatnall, Hutchesson, and Patterson, who corroborated the link between food insecurity and a lack of academic success. A year prior, Woerden, Hruschka, and Bruening (2018) had also found that food-insecure students had a significantly lower GPA than food-secure students.

Since the “Great Recession” of 2008, poverty among higher education students has been on the rise (Sandoval, 2012). Sandoval (2007) wrote,

> Hunger on campus is part of a lingering national problem that grew after the financial crisis that began in late 2007. In an unforgiving economy, many students across the

> country struggle not only to pay tuition but also to buy food. Colleges and nonprofit groups have noticed, and more are reacting (p. 2).

When students are forced to prioritize living expenses and educational costs over food, they are at risk of malnutrition and certainly find it hard to engage in learning (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Meaningful discussions about social mobility and higher education are incomplete without a consideration of the impacts of poverty – and specifically, food insecurity - on student success. Examining the reality of student hunger and what may be done about it is a logical place to start a conversation about facilitating educational success.

Poverty, and specifically hunger, ranks among the most critical obstacles that prevent student success in higher education (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Broton, Weaver, & Mai, 2018; Bruening, Brennhofer, van Woerden, Todd, & Laska, 2016; Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, & Poppendieck, 2019; Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2014; Wood & Harris, 2018). To eradicate hunger as a concern for students, particularly community college students, deliberate measures must be taken. Among these measures will undoubtedly be the effective implementation of supplemental food sources on campus in the form of the food pantry. Understanding students' perceptions of their experiences with the food pantry is an important starting point in understanding their needs, as well as the intervention itself.

Ultimately, food insecurity is a social justice issue with all of the importance that term suggests. There is a responsibility in higher education to provide for students in poverty so that they have the same supports that students from families with more financial stability experience: this is the very illustration of equity. Illuminating possible supports in combating food insecurity at the community college constitutes a significant start at countering non-academic obstacles to persistence and completion faced by lower-income students.

Student hunger on college campuses is squarely an access and equity issue and plays a vital role in economic mobility in the United States. When students are denied a fair chance at a college education, they are also denied a fair chance at lifelong economic success. When students from lower income brackets suffer disproportionately and sit at extreme disadvantage, our entire society has a problem that must be addressed. The degree to which education is able to support economic advancement depends on individuals’ access to educational opportunities.

Spurred by a guiding idea of equity and the importance of supporting all higher education students from access to completion, this study highlights the need for effective campus interventions around student hunger, particularly in the context of the community college. In response, this phenomenological inquiry sought to understand the student experience with hunger and perceptions around the use of one community college campus food pantry.

Significance of this Study

The role of student poverty and related hunger in completion and retention in higher education simply cannot be ignored because of its key role in student success (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2018; Broton, 2017). Goldrick-Rab and Broton (2015) directly stated the seriousness of the situation:

> Such high rates of food and housing insecurity among hard-working college students indicate that the nation faces a serious crisis. Much of the conversation in Washington, D.C. concerning college costs…seems almost trivial in comparison with the problems these students face (A35).

In the face of continually rising college costs, the question is how to support at-risk students who need most desperately to succeed in college in order to advance in their socioeconomic status. While income inequality continues to grow in our society, these most vulnerable students are the exact people who need a college education to get ahead financially and to have any chance at upward mobility. This is happening at “a critical time in which families are being forced to focus on their children’s education” (Wages, 2018, p. 50). For many lower-income students, the obstacles are obvious: in facing hunger and prioritizing educational and other expenses over food, they sacrifice a basic human right to sustenance (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). To ensure students’ progress from access to completion, their basic needs must be met so that concentrating on their studies is a possibility (Maslow, 1943).

In the current context of economic hardship and astronomical tuition bills, it is more vital than ever to consider how to remove tangible obstacles that prohibit students’ movement from access to completion. Especially among the community college population, poverty is a significant contributor to an undermining of student success; college is a route out of poverty, but students must move beyond poverty to be able to complete their studies (Goldrick-Rab, 2017). Further, food insecurity represents a significant equity issue: the challenge of college completion presents a huge obstacle to achieving economic, political, and social equality. Though as a nation we spend great amounts on financial aid, students who do without food and housing may not be noticed (Broton, Frank, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). Because college students experience food insecurity at higher rates than the general population and food insecurity is linked with poorer mental health, diet, and academic achievement, it is vital that this issue be addressed widely (Whatnall, Hutchesson, & Patterson, 2019).

Poverty on campus is nothing new; the stereotypical starving student surviving on ramen noodles (or in the UK, a tin of beans) is a pervasive image worldwide, and in some cases is even seen as a rite of passage. The idea of student hunger has become so common that addressing the issue necessitates calling out its normalization. In a global culture where “everyone’s eating Kraft Dinner and Mr. Noodles, and so you kind of feel like it’s OK” (Maynard, Meyer, Perlman, & Kirkpatrick, 2018, p. 230), it is extremely difficult to challenge the dominant, accepted culture of being food insecure while in school. Crutchfield, Carpena, McCloyn, and Maguire (2020) wrote that the starving student narrative hides the reality of basic need insecurity for students and works to normalize food insecurity and homelessness, influencing student perceptions about themselves and interfering with help-seeking.

On top of the accepted narrative of the starving student, the bleak picture of student finances has become even bleaker, and hunger is now a significant concern for many students, especially at community colleges (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Recent estimates of food insecurity on campus show that over half of college students are at least marginally food insecure (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Further emphasizing the problem of hunger on campus as a social justice issue, the American Council on Education (ACE), along with other advocacy groups, has spoken out about the unacceptable rate of food insecurity on higher education campuses (“Higher Education Community Urges Support,” 2019).

College completion is dramatically impacted by student poverty, and the ability to finish a degree rests not only on a student's ability to afford tuition costs but also the costs of living during his/her/their time on campus (Sutton, 2016). Obviously, student tuition is merely a part of the entire cost of devoting oneself to one's schoolwork. There is, not surprisingly, a large divide between students who arrive at college from economically privileged backgrounds and those who come from poverty. In stark illustration of this dichotomy, a study completed by Wisconsin HOPE Lab in collaboration with the Healthy Minds Study, the Association of Community College Trustees and Single Stop (2016) found that students from economically secure backgrounds are roughly six times more likely to compete a degree than their counterparts from lower socioeconomic brackets. This striking figure represents a true equity concern for higher education and students' ability to persist and complete degrees. Financial insecurity is consistently named as a key reason for students to drop out of undergraduate studies without earning a degree (Sutton, 2016).

Beyond the costs of staying in college are the significant long-term monetary effects of earning a college degree or failing to do so. In their 2014 paper, Broton, Frank, and Goldrick-Rab found that those who hold a college degree report higher earnings and better benefits, as well as experiencing improved health and other positive outcomes. The authors also noted that when they experience financial challenges, the poorest students leave campus, often with debt. As such, this scenario presents a pivotal equity issue that touches on access, socioeconomic status, and income mobility. If students from lower socioeconomic circumstances cannot fund their educations, they lack access to mobility and opportunity for improvement. This becomes more than financial inconvenience but represents a real equity concern on college campuses across our nation: and even beyond the college campuses, as students may drop out while carrying debt, thus exacerbating the difficulty of leaving their lower socioeconomic bracket.

Driven by the idea of equity and the importance of supporting all higher education students from access to completion, this paper outlines the need for effective campus interventions around student hunger, particularly in the context of the two-year college. This paper seeks to understand the student experience of hunger and the effectiveness of a food pantry in supporting their success.

Specifically, the PNW College food pantry website addresses its role on campus:

> Many college students experience food insecurity. Studies have shown that students with food insecurities have lower completion rates in obtaining academic certificates and degrees. Additionally, students who are unable to access nutritional food tend to not do as well academically (2018).

Food Banks and Food Pantries

Often, the terms “food pantry” and “food bank” are used interchangeably. However, there is a distinction, described by Wyoming Food Bank of the Rockies. A food bank is a “non-profit organization that collects and distributes food to hunger relief charities/organizations” (Wyoming Food Bank, 2018). By contrast, “a food pantry provides food directly to those in need” (Wyoming Food Bank, 2018). Food banks obtain food from “various sources in the food industry; grocery stores and wholesalers that have thousands of pounds of food that need to be given away” (Wyoming Food Bank, 2018). Once the food is collected, it is “sorted and distributed to non-profit organizations such as food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, senior care and emergency relief programs. All organizations must have a 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to be eligible to become a partnering agency and receive food from a local food bank" (Wyoming Food Bank, 2018). In comparison, food pantries "receive, buy, store, and distribute food to low-income individuals in their community" (Wyoming Food Bank, 2018). Typically, food pantries contribute a small amount to a shared maintenance fee in support of the food bank, if they use one to receive food. In the case of PNW College, the food pantry is presently sustained through donations from the campus community and operates independently of a food bank.

Food Insecurity Definitions

Food insecurity, the issue at the heart of this study, is identified as "a determinant of dietary quality, which can contribute paradoxically to overweight and obesity, and in severe forms, under nutrition" is named as a problem worldwide, even in developed economies (Hughes, Serebryanikova, Donaldson, & Leveritt, 2011, p. 27). As further defined by Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Hernandez (2017), 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" (p. 3). It is essential that food insecurity and student poverty be addressed, as these factors directly impact student engagement. Goldrick-Rab and Broton (2015) suggested that colleges provide a means to escape poverty, but students must be able to leave the actual circumstances of poverty for long enough to finish a degree, otherwise higher education is a waste of their time.

Below are listed definitions for other key terms used in this study or that appear in literature from other fields such as agriculture and nutrition and aid in contextualization of the problem:

Food apartheid – conditions under which whole communities are geographically and economically isolated from healthy food options; this affects White people but disproportionately impacts Black and Brown people.

Food bank – a non-profit organization that collects and distributes food to hunger relief organizations and other charities.

Food desert – an area devoid of healthy food options, due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets, or establishments that sell healthy food.

Food insecurity – the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Also, limited access or uncertain ability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways.

Food justice – the belief that healthy food is a human right, that everyone has a right to access healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food. Also *food equity*.

Food pantry – an entity that receives, buys, stores, or distributes food to individuals in their community.

Food sovereignty – the idea that the people who produce, distribute, and consume food should control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution, rather than corporations and market institutions that have come to dominate the global food system. This includes the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. First used by the group Via Campesina in 1996.

Food swamp – a term first appearing in late 2017, like a *food desert* but in addition to a lack of establishments providing healthy food, *food swamps* are oversaturated with unhealthy dining options such as fast food restaurants.

Housing instability – having difficulty paying rent, spending more than 50 percent of income on housing, having frequent moves, doubling up with friends or relatives, or living in overcrowded conditions.

Hunger – not getting enough to eat for an extended period of time that may result in discomfort, illness or a painful sensation.

Malnutrition – broad term encompassing both overconsumption and under-consumption of calories and nutrients. Eating an unbalanced diet that lacks many key nutrients.

Non-academic barriers – obstacles to classroom success that do not have to do with a student's scholarship or learning potential. Examples of non-academic barriers include food insecurity, housing instability, transportation issues, and childcare concerns.

Performance-based funding – a system based on the allocation of a portion of a state's higher education budget according to measures such as course completion, credit attainment, and degree completion rather than strictly on enrollment.

Study Purpose

A study regarding hunger in higher education, specifically in a community college context, is timely and necessary. The particular vulnerability of the community college population further highlights the need for research (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). While students in the K-12 system have access to free and reduced lunch via the National School Lunch Program, students in higher education currently enjoy no such universal support.

Similarly, college graduates may access unemployment benefits if they are seeking work, but full-time students are often ineligible for unemployment benefits

(USDA, 2016). According to a Congressional Research Service report, states generally disqualify students from Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefits while they are in school, or disqualify individuals from these UC benefits if they depart from employment to attend school (Whittaker & Eder, 2012). Goldrick-Rab noted that the social safety net has always been weaker at the college level than in schools because people perceive education as a privilege rather than a right. Additionally, there is a tendency to hold adults responsible for their own poverty (Field, 2017).

Along with a lack of access to unemployment benefits comes a restriction on food stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). According to the US Department of Agriculture (2016), “Most able-bodied students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled in college or other institutions of higher education at least half time are not eligible for SNAP benefits” (para. 1). Exceptions are made for students who work at least 20 hours per week or who are taking care of a dependent household member, but this has no impact on the food insecurity experienced by an unemployed or underemployed full-time community college student without dependents.

Beyond a lack of access to public support programs, community college students are even more vulnerable to the effects of poverty than typical four-year college students, due to the two-year students’ economic circumstances. Ma and Baum (2016) found that although low-income students were disproportionately enrolled in public two-year institutions, students in community colleges in 2011-12 were least likely to apply for aid, with 61 percent having applied for federal aid and 70 percent for any aid; this is in contrast to other sectors, in which more than 80 percent applied for any aid. Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, and Cady (2018) also found that surveys of community college students reveal higher estimates of basic needs insecurity than those among students at four-year institutions. A 2015 survey of 4,000 students at 10 community colleges found 39 percent of students reported low or very low food security (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018, p. 5).

Given the critical state of hungry students on community college campuses, the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore student perceptions around the recent implementation of a food pantry program at PNW College and to consider how this intervention is experienced by students.

Research Question

By using a phenomenological approach to explore how users of the PNW College food pantry experience this intervention as a support to their success, the following research question was addressed: What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College?

Until recently, very little research had been conducted about the impact of food insecurity on students in higher education. A growing body of literature addresses programs that have been instituted since 2008; indeed, new scholarship on this topic is added regularly. For example, studies on student food pantry use and understanding of food insecurity, perceptions of a campus food pantry, and challenges faced by a campus food pantry all emerged in 2019 (Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019; McArthur, Ferris, Fasczewski, & Petrone, 2019; Price, Watters, Reppond, Sampson, & Thomas-Brown, 2019). However, each of the aforementioned studies looked at food insecurity on four-year university campuses.

With the exception of recent work by Sara Goldrick-Rab and her team looking at California community colleges (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019), little has been done specifically at the two-year college level to illuminate meaningfully student food insecurity or food pantry use. A study that highlights community college student perceptions of a food pantry as an intervention has the potential to inform not only practice but wider public policy.

Student hunger is an increasing issue on college campuses nationwide, as membership in the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA) illustrates: in 2012, there were 13 member colleges. By 2019, there were over 700 member institutions; clearly food pantries in higher education have been initiated widely to help mitigate the rapidly growing problem of food insecurity on campus. As part of this trend in addressing student hunger, PNW College started its food pantry in Fall Quarter 2017 as "a student led and organized free service available to students and employees experiencing food insecurity" (2018). Because of its diverse population and strong equity work, PNW College was chosen as the study site. A phenomenological inquiry helped to determine how the food pantry is functioning in its attempt to help those on campus to overcome food insecurity. Interviewing student users of the PNW College food pantry also provided valuable feedback on perceived efficacy in supporting academic engagement and success.

Study Implications

The role of the food pantry on college campuses in supporting student success is now widely recognized. This study is important, since it is vital for educators, administrators, and policy makers to understand student perceptions of food pantry use and its role as a support in their educational success. Particularly as we in higher education witness a push towards completion rather than mere enrollment, we must consider what populations are at risk. Optimistically, a focus on completion will mean a new push to remove non-academic barriers to student achievement that have long gone unaddressed. Homelessness, the circumstances of at-risk youth, hunger, stereotype threat and performance are all scenarios that regularly undermine student success in community colleges. That we are now considering these factors and working towards interventions is progress that is very much aligned with our collective mission.

There is, however, a risk that an emphasis on high standards across the board will also perpetuate systemic inequalities (Baldwin, 2017). The achievement gap – which may more accurately be defined as a resource gap – will likely be intensified as lower-achieving students are left behind (Wages, 2018). Social justice does find a strong link to the community college mission and is an important priority for our institutions, begging the question of how to support students broadly as they deal with non-academic barriers like hunger, homelessness, transportation, childcare, and poverty that stand in the way of their scholastic success. This phenomenological inquiry fills a gap in the research where most previous studies have been quantitative, have served simply (but of course importantly) to identify the initial need to establish food pantries on college campuses, and have not yet focused on the student telling of the lived experience or generally given students a role in the research except as data points.

Chapter 2 will discuss a review of the literature on the subject of food insecurity and campus food pantries, as well as theoretical approaches and limitations of existing literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with an overview of the theoretical frameworks that guide this study on community college food pantries and their impact, with a specific focus on understanding students’ lived experience and perceptions of the impact of the food pantry at PNW College on their own outcomes. This chapter then reviews existing literature and research on food insecurity in the community college population, concentrating on the link between food insecurity and student success. Finally, this chapter describes the limitations of existing literature and explains how this study will attempt to address these limitations.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to collect, evaluate, and consider current research regarding student hunger in higher education and measures being taken on campuses. The goal was to determine the history of food pantries in higher education and examine any potential best practices, as well as to situate the phenomenon of student hunger in the community college context.

Articles were located using a variety of databases, including ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Wiley Online Library, and Taylor & Francis Journals Complete. Dissertations were identified through the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database, Oregon State University’s Scholars Abstracts, and Google Scholar. Reports and other journals were retrieved from websites including the Community College Research Center (CCRC), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and U.S. Department of Education (DOE).

Search terms and phrases included combinations of food insecurity, education, higher education, student hunger, poverty, achievement gap. It should be noted that the phrase "food insecurity college students" returned the bulk of relevant research and was set up as a Google Scholar alert term, initially yielding many articles per week. In addition to keyword searches, subject terms in query results were also used to find relevant articles. Article references were also carefully searched for additional resources. Finally, non-electronic articles and books on the subject were obtained through Oregon State University's library system.

Research that focused mainly on hunger in the K-12 system, looked at students outside of the U.S., or that focused solely on housing instability was excluded, beyond what was useful for a general introduction to the topic. Since food pantries on campus were unknown prior to 2007, any research collected from prior to that date involved theory only, rather than studies focused on student hunger.

Theoretical Approaches to the Educational Impacts of Food Insecurity

Research on the impacts of food insecurity on student achievement has long been conducted in the K-12 sector. Far more recent is research on the impact of food insecurity on students in higher education, particularly in the community college. Clearly, the idea of success being dependent upon one's basic needs being met calls to mind Maslow's Theory of *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943).

Beyond that framework, Payne's *Framework for Poverty* (2005) provides a helpful lens for understanding the educational impacts of food insecurity among college students, particularly among students who are first-generation students and/or come from lower socioeconomic brackets. Students who are distracted by hunger and are unable to focus on their studies may also have difficulty in navigating college and support systems in higher education and therefore inhabit an area that represents a natural intersection of these two theories.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1943) introduced the concept of basic human needs and the way in which meeting these needs is fundamental, taking precedence over any other behavior. Many people are familiar with the work of Maslow generally but may not be aware of his exact statements regarding the serious distractions of hunger. Significantly for at-risk students, hunger dominates consciousness, and all energies are summoned for the goal of hunger-satisfaction. The entire psychological focus is on one purpose: relieving hunger. This is a damning indictment of the impact of food insecurity on student success: hungry students are only able to focus on satisfying this need. Specifically, according to Maslow (1943), "For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food" (pp. 373-374).

In the years since 1943, many researchers have worked with Maslow's theory, and some have applied his hierarchy of needs to student populations. Two studies, one by Lester (1990) and another by Strong and Fiebert (1987), looked at college students in an attempt to measure hierarchy of needs; both studies found a lack of correlation between the five needs and scores on corresponding scales, with the notable exception of measures of physiological needs. (Lester, 2013). Both studies, then, alluded to the fundamental link between the meeting of basic physiological needs and student success (in these studies, satisfaction).

Figure 2.1 Illustration

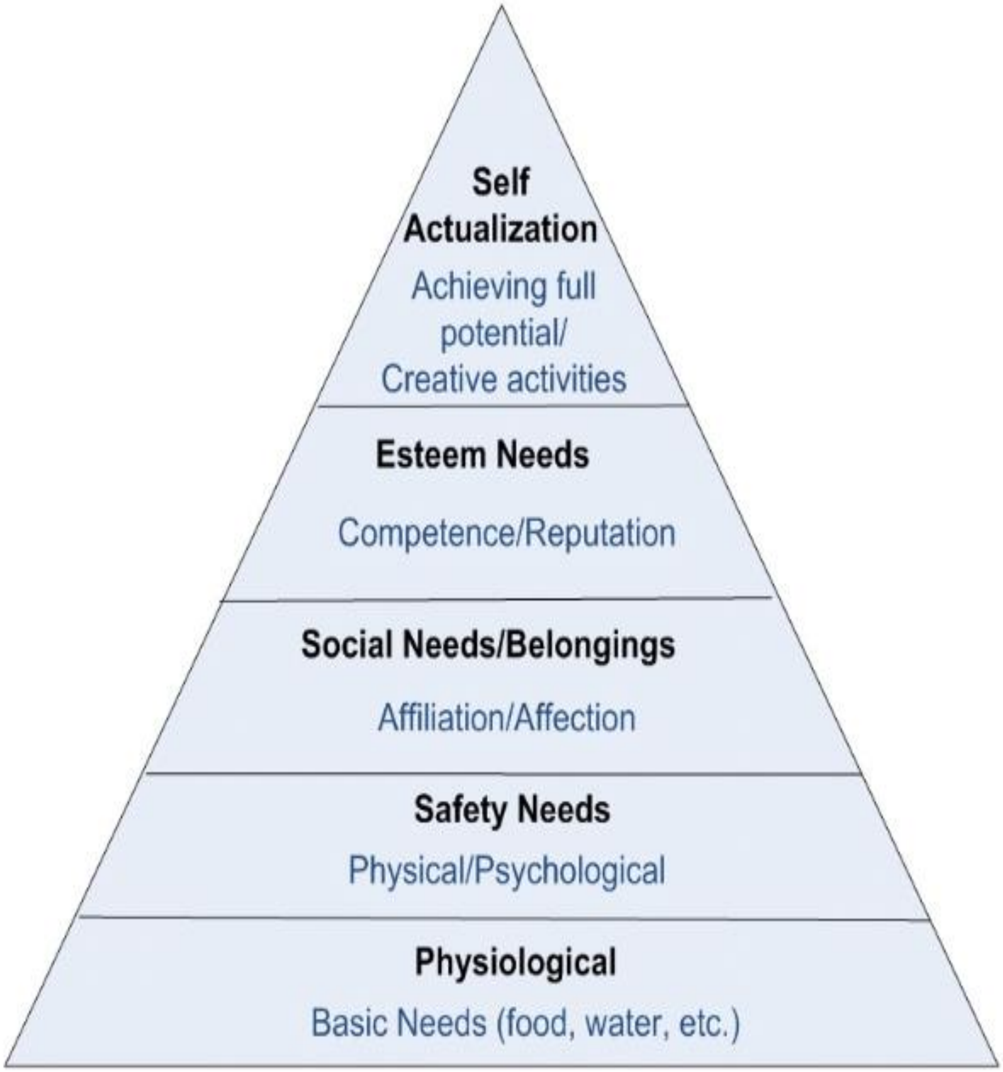
Self
Actualization
Achieving full
potential/
Creative activities
Esteem Needs
Competence/Reputation
Social Needs/Belongings
Affiliation/Affection
Safety Needs
Physical/Psychological
Physiological
Basic Needs (food, water, etc.)

Figure 2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), showing the progression from basic needs through self-actualization. From www.researchgate.net.

In another application of Maslow’s theory to higher education students, physicist Wu (2012) proposed an alternative to Maslow’s pyramid that was shaped more like a diamond, with the social needs layer as the widest in the center. However, Wu’s assumption that college students who enter university likely exceed the first two categories of needs (typically, the base of Maslow’s pyramid) is possibly based in a Chinese context. In the U.S., many higher education students, and community college students in particular, live in poverty. To say that this population of students can focus on social needs is to disregard the fact that, for example, in California, 70 percent of community college students experience housing instability or homelessness (Jaschik, 2016). More recently, 60% of community college students reported housing insecurity in the previous year, and 50% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019). These students, along with the significant numbers of community college students elsewhere in the U.S. experiencing hunger, must focus on basic needs before they are able to concern themselves with the social aspects of college or, perhaps more critically in terms of long-range prospects, the academic.

Critiques of Maslow’s Theory

As a theory of long standing and universal popularity, Maslow is not only widely accepted and cited but also critically viewed. Numerous writings since the 1940s have sought to undermine the accepted tenets of Maslow’s theory.

Some critiques, such as Wahba and Bridwell (1976), have addressed the uncritical acceptance of Maslow’s need hierarchy without real empirical evidence. Others question what it means to be self-actualized in different cultures, or indeed, at all (Cianci &

Gambrel, 2003; Kenrick, Schaller, Neuberg, & Griskevicius, 2010; Tay & Diener, 2011). Overall, however, the concept of higher-level human functions only being attainable after basic biological needs are met seems a solid basis for reasoning in common sense, regardless of how one views the apex of the pyramid. Certainly in the context of students experiencing hunger on campus, Maslow's theory is a useful framework in which to view their path to engagement and success.

Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty

An additional viable construct for viewing student success and food insecurity comes through Payne's framework for understanding poverty (2005). The premise of this theory is that individuals carry with them the rules of the class in which they were raised. Significantly, most schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and values. This means that individuals from lower income backgrounds begin school culturally dislocated, uncomfortable, challenged in navigating the system, and at a distinct disadvantage.

According to Payne (2005), those in poverty are the only individuals concerned with food procurement (as opposed to the middle or wealthy classes). While the middle and wealthy classes are concerned with economic security and making social, political, and financial connections, those in poverty are focused on survival. Clearly, students whose priority is survival are at a significant disadvantage compared to students whose finances (and housing and food supply) are more secure. According to Payne's model, the three factors that move one out of poverty are relationships, employment, and education. While it makes sense that students in poverty pursue education in an effort at upward mobility and security, these same students are at the most disadvantage in terms of being expected to operate outside of their native culture.

In summary, Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* offers a ready context for understanding why student hunger is a true detriment to academic success, while Payne's *Framework of Poverty* explains the significance of the challenges faced by students of lower socioeconomic levels as they attempt to navigate middle class institutions such as higher education, which is then exacerbated by non-academic hurdles like hunger.

Critiques of Payne's Theory

At least one team of researchers has leveled criticism at Payne's theory of poverty, calling it a classic example of deficit thinking (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). The allegation is that educators who are misinformed by Payne's claims hold reduced expectations for students. As a result, lower income students find themselves in lower tracks or groups, where academic practice is more likely to consist of drills and practice rather than broader thinking.

Further, the authors of the study argued that Payne's study possessed a lack of actual evidence and classed all individuals living in poverty as a homogeneous group. Ultimately, however, Payne's work is beneficial in asking that we consider our structures in higher education and how students arrive on campus prepared – or not – to navigate them. It is a worthy challenge to find ways to reach students whose home cultures may not have equipped them with the tools to approach college immediately ready to learn, or even to understand our jargon.

Literature Regarding Food Insecurity and Campus Food Pantries

While hungry students have been an accepted part of higher education for many years, the idea of providing campus food pantries to feed such students is a relatively new one. There are no mentions of food pantries on campus until 2007, around the time of the second recession of the early 2000's, also known as the Great Recession. According to Sandoval (2012), "Hunger on campus is part of a lingering national problem that grew after the financial crisis that began in late 2007. In an unforgiving economy, many students across the country struggle not only to pay tuition but also to buy food" (para. 7). The recent nature of this phenomenon means that literature on the subject is sporadic and contemporary, truly evolving weekly.

Only two studies were conducted before 2011 in the U.S. that examined either food or housing insecurity; these were in Hawaii and in New York City (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). That this is such a new field is evidenced in recent articles: the lack of reliable data on hunger in higher education has made it difficult for many administrators to develop a response (Kelly, 2017). Developing scholarship on this topic will be crucial for administrators and policymakers alike, as food insecurity represents a significant non-academic barrier for U.S. students in higher education, particularly at the community college level (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2018).

Early Food Pantries – Studies Identifying a Need

Food insecurity, though long experienced on higher education campuses, was first illuminated as a concern during the second economic recession of the early 2000's. The study that sparked the current higher education food pantry movement is widely seen as the 2007 City University of New York campus health survey. In that year, the country's largest urban, public university, City University of New York (CUNY), initiated *Healthy CUNY*. This program was conceived to educate about health, combat chronic diseases, and address health-related barriers to educational attainment (Freudenberg, Manzo, Mongiello, Jones, Boeri, & Lamberson, 2013). In a follow-up study, researchers noted that university policies regarding tobacco and campus food, enrollment of eligible students in public housing assistance and food programs, and a conversation about the relationship between health and academic achievement are key points in a movement toward improved health in higher education (Freudenberg, et al., 2013).

That original 2007 CUNY survey found that nearly 40 percent of CUNY students had experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months (Freudenberg, et al., 2013). In this particular survey, food insecurity was defined as experiencing two or more of the following conditions often or sometimes in the past year: “worrying that you would not have enough money for food; cutting or skipping a meal because you did not have enough money to buy food; (inability) to eat balanced or nutritious meals because of a lack of money; or going hungry because of a lack of money” (Freudenberg, et al., 2013, p. 425). Further, an analysis of Healthy CUNY’s first five years revealed several themes that may guide other universities to expand their health focus, such as prioritizing health goals in order to improve educational achievement (Freudenberg, et al., 2013).

A second early study on campus food insecurity was conducted at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in September 2009. Findings indicated that food insecurity was a significant problem for one of every five students (Chaparro, Zaghloul, Holck, & Dobbs, 2009). According to researchers, this pointed to a need for more food availability and accessibility on campus and led to a recommendation for establishing food banks and student gardens on campus. Notably, the authors cited a need for future studies that would consider the effect of food insecurity on college students' academic achievement, as well as how these students deal with this food insecurity.

Food Insecurity as an Emerging Issue for Colleges – Studies Focused on Higher Education

The food insecurity problem first identified and publicized in 2007 has become more pronounced today. Feeding America, a national nonprofit network of food banks serving 46.5 million individuals and 15.5 million households, reported that roughly half of its college-student clients must choose between educational expenses and food each year (Nellum, 2015). While data are still lacking as to the national scope of the issue, it can be said that a significant number of college students experiencing food insecurity fail to persist or complete a degree or certificate and require extra support to advance in their studies (Nellum, 2015). Indeed, Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Hernandez (2017) found that 67 percent of community college students were food insecure, with 33 percent of students surveyed indicating the lowest levels of food security.

A review of literature aimed at understanding the scope of food insecurity on college campuses noted that it seems to be extremely pervasive at institutions of higher education, and that the limited evidence thus far indicates that it impacts roughly one-third to one-half of institutions surveyed (Bruening, Argo, Payne-Sturges, & Laska, 2017). These researchers also noted that, in comparison with food insecurity data among the U.S. population in general, US-based studies indicate a rate of food insecurity among postsecondary education students that is double that of the U.S. population on the whole (Bruening, Argo, Payne-Sturges, & Laska, 2017).

In 2012, the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA) was founded, and the organization at the time of the initial draft of this literature review identified over 570 campuses where a food bank existed or was being started (CUFBA, 2018). As of April 20, 2018, there were 626 member campuses, a significant increase in a span of roughly three months. By May 18, 2018, this number had grown to 640. As of November 2019, CUFBA recognized over 700 member campuses. This is definitely a movement to watch, as more campuses, including PNW College, are adding food pantries each year.

From the original CUNY study of 2007 and the work at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2009 to today's work being done by HOPELab and by Goldrick-Rab, research about hunger in higher education has a short history in terms of documentation but a robust present and future. With some studies reporting food insecurity in the range of two-thirds of community college students, this is clearly an area in need of further study and attention.

Studies Highlighting the Unique Community College Context Within Higher Education

If higher education finds itself in a unique and troubling niche in terms of students with food insecurity, then community college is the epicenter of the phenomenon. Students in the K-12 system can access free and reduced lunches, provided by the federal government. Once students graduate from the K-12 system, they are no longer eligible for this service. Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016) explained that while many young students rely on the National Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program during elementary and secondary school years, upon arrival at college they find themselves without such support. Meanwhile, their personal economic circumstances have not improved. The financial issues that they and their families grappled with while they attended school in the K-12 system did not suddenly end with the students' high school graduation. For students without families, for example, those in foster care, the picture is even more bleak: former foster youth face greater challenges and graduate at even lower rates than typical first-generation students (Wiltz, 2017)

After completing (or leaving) higher education, individuals have access to social services, provided they are actively seeking work. The problem for higher education students is that they are neither supported by food programs nor actively seeking full-time work, since their studies would clearly prohibit this. Twill, Bergdahl, and Fensler (2016) wrote of the challenges for students already facing obstacles related to poverty, in that it is very difficult for students without children to qualify for support by way of federal food programs.

Students at four-year institutions, while still potentially at risk for food insecurity, tend to be somewhat more financially stable than those attending two-year institutions. Among dependent students in 2014, 31 percent of community college students were from the lowest family-income quartile, as opposed to 22 percent of public four-year students and just 18 percent in the private four-year sector (Ma & Baum, 2016). While 20 percent of four-year university students qualified as having very low food security, the number of community college students in that category was 25 percent (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016). By 2019, the number of survey respondents attending two-year institutions who reported some degree of food insecurity was 42% (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020). It is important for community college administrators to understand that a significant population of those educated in the two-year college, first generation students, is heavily impacted by food insecurity: over half of first-generation students (56%) qualified as having very low food security. All of this means that community college students are at considerably greater risk than the rest of the country’s student population, university and K-12, for food insecurity, and that this precise demographic warrants further specific study. Indeed, Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, and Williams (2020) noted that basic needs insecurity continues to be more common among students attending a two-year college than among those attending four-year colleges.

Community college students are uniquely placed to suffer from food insecurity. Not only are students in the K-12 program supported by USDA programs, but four-year university students tend to come from families with more financial resources. Given the emphasis on retention and completion in community college funding, as well as the achievement gap in graduation rates among minorities v. non-minority students, research that works to remove non-academic obstacles to student success, particularly in two-year institutions, is of paramount importance. Because more students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds study at community colleges, and more of them experience food and housing insecurities, mitigating the hunger problem at our two-year institutions becomes a critical equity issue (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019; Wood, Harris III, & Delgado, 2017). In addition, students traditionally marginalized in higher education, including Black and Indigenous students, students who identify as nonbinary or transgender, students who are enrolled part-time, and students who are former foster youth are all at greater risk of basic needs insecurity, and are more commonly represented in our nation’s two-year colleges than among four-year institutions (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020).

Studies Linking Food Insecurity and Student Performance

Logically, hungry community college students may struggle more to find academic success. Cady (2014) focused on the possible links between the effects of hunger and food insecurity and educational outcomes, though she noted that she herself has found no studies documenting such impacts: a distinct gap in the literature. Cady (2014) wrote, “Looking at how hunger and food insecurity affect students in K-12 settings could provide insight into potential impacts as students move along the educational pipeline” (p. 267). She further noted that studies on food insecurity in elementary and secondary schools have revealed that K-12 students experiencing food insecurity do not achieve at the same levels as their food-secure peers. She cited academic outcomes at lower levels, behavioral issues, lower scores in math, decreased memory, and lower reading scores as consequences of food insecurity (Cady, 2014).

While many studies concentrate on elementary and high school students rather than those in higher education, we can make inferences about the impact of food insecurity on college students by using a pipeline approach, which assumes that issues occurring in elementary school continue through high school and into college (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Both food insecurity and insufficiency are linked to health and developmental issues for children in the U.S. (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Among elementary-aged children, food insecurity is associated with lower math scores, grade repetition, absenteeism, tardiness, visits to a psychologist, anxiety, aggression, and difficulty getting along with other children. In adolescents, food insufficiency has been associated with depressive disorders and suicide symptoms, even after controlling for income. A report by the University of California found that food-insecure students self-reported more financial difficulty and a lower grade-point average than their food-secure peers (Martinez, Maynard, & Ritchie, 2016).

When a student leaves the K-12 system, the impact of persistent food insecurity on his, her, or their experience does not just disappear; students who depend upon access to meals in the K-12 system progress to college and subsequently experience hunger (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). The higher education system inherits these hunger issues, with community colleges feeling a particular impact. Goldrick-Rab (2016) offered the following advice regarding the National School Lunch Program: “The students who were hungry in high school are hungry in college. We need to start a serious policy discussion about extending that program to public colleges and universities” (p. 247).

It is not a leap to infer that food insecurity leads to less concrete success in the classroom. Hungry students cannot be attentive students, as Maslow would attest. Wisconsin HOPELab researcher Hernandez conducted interviews and created student profiles: “Danny” reported suffering from hunger and relying on the local pantry. He found himself exhausted by these circumstances and often fell asleep in class (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). His experience is not atypical.

In a different example, another student, Brooke Evans (who later became involved in researching food insecurity herself), described how she slept in libraries, her car, and public restrooms, selling plasma and going without food. Because she was unable to focus and participate in class due to fatigue, her grades fell. She lost financial aid, left school, and slept on the street, riddled with debt (Goldrick-Rab & Broton, 2015). It makes sense that material hardships impact learning and the amount of energy that can be directed towards academic pursuits. Such obstacles undermine students’ chances for completion and subsequently affect the colleges or universities where these students ultimately study (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

According to Broton, Frank, and Goldrick-Rab (2014), without a safe and secure living situation, food, or reliable transportation to class, higher education students cannot perform to their academic potential. The authors continued: if these issues are not addressed, they constitute serious obstacles to the education process. The educational mission is at the heart of this work to combat student hunger (Broton, et al., 2014).

In a recent study by Farahbakhsh, Hanbazaza, Ball, Farmer, Maximova, and Willows (2017), these researchers examined the notion that university and college students in wealthy countries may be vulnerable to financial food insecurity, which could then compromise their ability to achieve academically. In this study, the majority of students had negative academic experiences as a result of food insecurity, which included not being able to concentrate in class or in an exam setting or failing/withdrawing from a course (Farahbakhsh, et al., 2017). If these experiences are viewed as related to student persistence and success, then food insecurity may logically reduce graduation rates. This possibility then positions food insecurity as a main concern for community college administrators across this country, struggling to increase retention and completion rates. This issue is an even larger concern in a time of Performance-Based Funding, whereby colleges receive funding on the basis of student completion and not simply enrollment numbers.

In terms of the relationships between food insecurity and academic achievement, student researchers at Dominican University of California found that the strongest correlate of food insecurity was an income less than $1500 per month (Ramos, Magbanua, Flores, de Dios, Bugtong, & Almonia, 2017, p. 64). Significantly, students with a grade point average of 3.1 or higher were 60 percent less likely to be food insecure (Ramos, et al., 2017, p. 64). Logically, food insecurity is often an outcome of wider socioeconomic disadvantage, which can increase a student's vulnerability and decrease his/her chances of completing higher education. Typically, food insecurity in college students is associated with poor health, decreased psychosocial function, and lower academic performance (Ramos, et al., 2017).

Recent findings by the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (Wood, Harris III, & Delgado, 2017) showed a lower percentage of students with food insecurity being on track to achieve their goals in college and these same students experiencing food insecurity being more likely to indicate their intention to drop out of college. Students with food insecurity were significantly less likely to feel confident in their academic abilities, to see college as worthwhile, to feel a sense of control in academic concerns, to be focused in school, and to be interested in class (Wood, Harris III, & Delgado, 2017). Notably, this study also found that students experiencing food insecurity were largely concentrated in developmental writing, reading, and math: 62.4%, 58.7%, and 71%, respectively (Wood, Harris III, & Delgado, 2017).

To date, the most compelling, strongest evidence linking food insecurity to distinct academic consequences in the community college environment was provided by Maroto, Snelling, and Linck (2014). Their study found that food insecure students were more likely than food secure students to earn a lower GPA (2.0-2.49) instead of a higher GPA (3.5-4.0) (p. 515). Their data suggest that food insecurity is an issue for a large percentage of the community college student population (56% food insecure in their sample), and their research rests on the knowledge that food insecurity may negatively impact a student's academic achievement and therefore is a significant national issue for students, faculty, and college administrators (Maroto, et al., 2014). These authors stated the issue's vital impact clearly: "The possible relationship between food insecurity and academic performance could have far-reaching consequences if this is a factor that ultimately affects student retention and graduation rates" (Maroto, et al., 2014, p. 524).

Current research substantiates the conclusions drawn by Maroto, Snelling, and Linck (2014) regarding the link between food insecurity and poorer academic outcomes. Van Woerden, Hruschka, and Bruening (2018) found that food-insecure students had a significantly lower GPA than food-secure students. Further, food-insecure students were less likely to be enrolled in subsequent terms than their food-secure counterparts, leading the researchers to conclude that food insecurity negatively impacts academic performance among university students (Van Woerden, Hruschka, & Bruening, 2018). Additionally, lower income students are more likely to work in college to cover costs, and students who work more than 20 hours per week have lower GPAs than students working fewer hours (Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008). These studies represent a solid start at understanding the link between food insecurity and academic success, but more work needs to be done on this critical issue.

Clearly, food insecurity on campus has the potential to impact individual student performance and, on a larger scale, overall college completion rates. Students without secure access to food have been shown to be unable to perform to their potential; indeed, lower GPAs offer some evidence of this struggle. Following the educational pipeline K-

20 would indicate that some governmental food supports are indicated; in any case, student need does not simply disappear after Grade 12.

Studies Exploring Food Insecurity and Sociodemographics

Those experiencing food insecurity are disproportionately representative of at-risk groups including those households with children, households headed by Black/non-Hispanic and Hispanic people, and households with incomes at or below 185 percent of the poverty line (Morris, Smith, Davis, & Null, 2016). Specifically, food insecurity disproportionately impacts ethnic minorities, low-income households, people of low levels of educational attainment, and individuals lacking health insurance (Forman, Mangini, Dong, Hernandez, & Fingerman, 2018). In view of the achievement gap that persists on campuses in the United States, food insecurity represents a true social justice issue in American higher education, not just in a current context but with future implications for employability and wage potential.

Higher education today remains one of the only true paths to upward mobility for those wanting to break from the cycle of poverty (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, & Turner, 2014; Haskins & Sawhill, 2009). However, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education (2015), degree completion gaps between rich and poor are more extreme than ever. For students who come from backgrounds of poverty, this is a significant fact; for educators, administrators, and policy-makers, this achievement gap represents a critical equity issue that must be addressed. The idea that the achievement gap might actually instead be a poverty gap is paradigm shifting and novel (Wages, 2018). The concept of a poverty gap that interferes with student success compels those of us in the community college to address the problem for the sake of equity, and also, at a financial level, funding for our institutions.

Key to this equity equation is the underlying truism that students from middle and upper-middle class families, while potentially facing brief periods of food insecurity, are likely to benefit from reliable sources of support like parents or extended family; there is generally a safety net into which they may fall if necessary (Patton-Lopez, Lopez-Cevallos, Cancel-Tirado, & Vaszquez, 2014). Food insecurity among college students may indicate a history of disadvantage and may also shape their futures well into adulthood (Patton-Lopez, et al., 2014). In addition to facing food insecurity in their present lives, these vulnerable students may also be at risk for limited academic success and reduced future earnings (Patton-Lopez, et al., 2014). Along with working, students also rely on loans and stretch their budgets; these financial choices have consequences for any student, but more significantly for those without the middle class safety net (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Because students connect food insecurity to their relative ability to focus on academic tasks, the accessibility of food on campus appears to impact their perception of their college and has implications for their emotional and academic development; this calls upon colleges to adapt food policies as a response, particularly as a support for lower-income students (Ilieva, Ahmed, & Yan, 2018).

Effects of poverty disproportionately affect community college students; these institutions enroll more low-income students due to the lower costs of attendance (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Gates, 2013; Ma & Baum, 2016). Community college students may face non-academic barriers like food insecurity, transportation issues, or lack of childcare (Cady, 2014; Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Gates, 2013; Ma & Baum, 2016;

Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2015). To date, no studies have been located that ask students about their own experiences with non-academic barriers and their resulting impact on student success, nor has anyone asked students about the effectiveness of food pantries as supports and interventions.

Campus Food Pantries – Need for Additional Research

Student food insecurity and campus food pantries represent an evolving area of study, and much work clearly remains to be done. In 2015, the California State University system awarded a $100,000 grant to Cal State Long Beach to research housing and food instabilities in the student populations across all 23 Cal State University campuses. The study, called “Best Practices Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU,” was tasked with providing a clearer picture of the number of students in that university system dealing with housing and/or food instabilities and represented the first comprehensive system-wide study about non-academic student barriers (CSU, 2015). Following the release of the initial findings in 2016, the California State University system began its Basic Needs Initiative (CSU, 2018). Since the release of the findings from Phase 1 of the study in 2016, CSU found that all 23 campuses have taken actions to address food and housing insecurity: specifically, designating a point of contact for basic needs services, operating a food pantry/food distribution program, and offering students assistance for public support applications (CSU, 2018). Additionally, there has been some work regarding food insecurity among college students using research regarding educational outcomes in the K-12 system with a view to the impacts of hunger, demonstrating negative outcomes along this pipeline from Kindergarten to college (Cady, 2014).

In 2016, the University of California at Berkeley established a Basic Needs Security Workgroup to assess needs and develop support strategies on campus. Most recent estimates are that 42 percent of UC students are food insecure, with 19 percent classified as hungry (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). The problem is not restricted to California or even the United States; a recent study found that 48 percent of students at the University of Newcastle in Australia were food insecure (Whatnall, Hutchesson, & Patterson, 2019).

Many campuses across the U.S. are working actively to establish food pantries. One benefit, aside from the obvious reduction in hunger, is that working to fight student food insecurity may help to increase student retention and encourage service and philanthropy on campus. Indeed, some campuses enlist student helpers in service learning opportunities in aid of the food pantry or anti-hunger efforts (Twill, Bergdahl, & Fensler, 2016).

Notably, programs at the University of California, Berkeley, Oregon State University, and Humboldt State University have drawn acclaim. Berkeley identified an institutional leader charged with assessing and addressing students' basic needs security. In addition, UC Berkeley partners with the Alameda Community County Food Bank and social services agencies, along with offering cooking classes for students and community members (T. Davila, personal communication, May 1, 2019).

At Oregon State University, the Human Services Resource Center provides a shower, a food pantry, laundry facilities, help with completing SNAP applications, and emergency short-term housing (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). Humboldt State University has a promising benefits program called "Oh SNAP!"

(Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2017). Currently, only 18% of food insecure students enrolled in two and four-year colleges receive SNAP benefits, so these programs represent important bridges for students to access benefits they may not be aware of (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020).

Finally, many colleges have established campus gardens alongside their food pantries to fill the gap in providing nutrition to students. The need for collaboration and strong faculty and staff commitment in sustaining such initiatives is apparent. Significantly, establishing a campus garden required stronger faculty and staff commitment, while a food pantry required a stronger student voice (Ullevig, Vasquez, Ratcliffe, Oswalt, Lee, & Lobitz, 2020).

Limitations of Existing Literature

Existing scholarship on food insecurity and students in higher education comes from several fields, including nutrition, higher education, K-12 education, economics, health sciences, agriculture, and behavioral sciences. The wide array of literature indicates that this study, particularly focused on a community college campus, is needed. Further, there appears to exist no study centered around student perceptions of the impact of such campus interventions on their academic success. Little qualitative evidence, aside from scant interviewing that appears outside of academic research, has been gathered on food pantry use, so my study fills that void as well. Finally, there are significant gaps in such quantitative data as do exist, so a different approach may further help to address some of the shortcomings in the current body of literature.

Surveys of campus systems and hunger found within the student body seem to be the main line of inquiry to date. Notably, too, most major studies thus far have involved four-year campuses rather than community colleges. As an illustration, the seemingly comprehensive survey of 34 college campuses by Dubick, Mathews, and Cady (2016) included only eight community colleges. While a focused study by Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, and Looker (2019) centered on California community colleges, there is more to be done. Clearly, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the impacts of hunger among students at the community college level.

Despite the promise of successful food pantry programs, there are still significant limitations to current research and existing literature. According to Farahbakhsh, Hanbazaza, Ball, Farmer, Maximova, and Willows, (2017), “There has been limited examination of how the health, academic experience and nutrition of postsecondary students is affected by food insecurity, or of campus food banks as a response to student food insecurity” (p. 71). Davis, Sisson, and Clifton (2020) remarked on the focus in previous studies on student nutrition and health but noted a glaring absence in an emphasis on food access and food security. Nutritionists concur, noting that food insecurity is a complicated issue that is desperately in need of further study among students in higher education (Bruening, Argo, Payne-Sturges, & Laska, 2017).

A study by Morris, Smith, Davis, and Null (2017) reported that although characteristics found to have a high association with food insecurity are common among higher education students, a limited number of studies have actually examined the prevalence of food insecurity within this population. Forman, Mangini, Dong, Hernandez, and Fingerman (2018) noted that even though food security has been examined as a factor in children’s school performance, research looking at this association has mostly been restricted to students in elementary or middle school.

Research regarding food insecurity in higher education is a growing field due to a need for understanding of its impact on student performance.

This lack of specific research around food insecurity in higher education brings consequences. Failure to draw an evidence-based link between food insecurity and performance/persistence has costly outcomes, not only in terms of students' experiences but also in terms of raw economics, when students do not complete college and face debt, regardless. There are also institutional costs when students do not persist or complete programs, and this is especially tragic when the cause is a preventable, non-academic equity issue like food insecurity.

Beyond the economic and social impacts of student hunger, Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016) noted,

> College leaders argue that helping students meet their basic needs is not only the right thing to do morally but also has instrumental purposes by helping colleges retain and graduate more students. Moreover, those who earn a college credential improve their economic prospects, which is good for the community and society (p. 23).

Further research regarding community college food insecurity and the role of campus food banks is vital. A phenomenological inquiry regarding the student experience of the newly instituted (October 2017) campus food pantry will provide insight into the link between mitigation of student hunger on a community college campus and resulting student perceptions of how the intervention may or may not have supported their own success and educational journey, specifically by asking students about their own lived experiences.

Currently, there is only a very general understanding of the impacts of food insecurity on post-secondary students, and aside from a few surveys, little has been done thus far to examine the national prevalence of student hunger. Specifically, El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt (2018) pointed to the limited information available to describe the impact of food pantries on U.S. college campuses, particularly the relationship between food insecurity and food pantry awareness, use, and perceived barriers to use.

Further, most research has been conducted on university campuses, which only partly resemble their community college counterparts. Even the leading researcher on basic needs and college students, Goldrick-Rab, has faced criticism over aspects of her research, including sample size. Goldrick-Rab (2018) herself addressed this research weakness: “The low response rates (often south of 10%) trouble us, but the estimates are likely conservative – our surveys do not explicitly recruit hungry or homeless students, and we expect that they have far less time or energy to give up for surveys” (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018, p. 4).

Rather than focusing on criticisms over study sample size or low response rates, however, the larger picture for this researcher points to the overall impact of Goldrick-Rab’s (and other early scholars’) body of work in illuminating the critical issue of college students whose basic needs are not being met and the resulting implications of such a system failure. As something of a de facto repudiation to Goldrick-Rab’s critics, a recent survey of studies found that roughly 44% of college and university students in the U.S reported food insecurity, as opposed to 13% of U.S. national households (Nazmi, Martinez, Byrd, Robinson, Bianco, & Maguire, 2018).

Student hunger is a costly issue to ignore, particularly when students fail to complete a degree yet still find themselves in debt. In addition, there is a greater societal cost, when whole swathes of students from lower socioeconomic brackets fail to achieve their potential and advance financially in life. My community college study that solicits student input about the role of a food pantry in supporting their success will provide needed qualitative evidence to fill in significant gaps in knowledge. In addition, qualitative inquiry is a particularly appropriate approach in terms of addressing equity and social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

An important foundation rather than a deficiency, is how we might view the literature on food insecurity in higher education to date. Early research on student hunger served mainly to highlight the need for the establishment of campus food pantries. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with any foundational research to date, and we should not dismiss its powerful impact by dissecting individual research; its collective goal was largely to establish that a problem actually exists regarding students in higher education, as well as highlighting the prevalence of food insecurity and raising awareness about a serious equity concern. In fact, previous research provides a solid legacy on which to build future scholarship, and I am grateful for it.

A decade since the first basic needs assessments and campus food pantries, most of higher education has come to understand the presence of hungry students and the potential implications of food insecurity on student success. Now that there is a growing number of food pantries on our campuses, it is time for a new generation of research regarding the utility of such measures in terms of student experiences. In the context of this social justice and equity issue, it is also imperative that the student voice finally be heard and the student experience conveyed rather than being presented as survey statistics, which is why this phenomenological inquiry at a community college is so important and timely. After years of quantitative data establishing the need for food pantries on campus, it is time to ask students themselves to describe in their own words whether the interventions campuses have implemented are aiding in their success to determine how we might better help them. Using the theoretical frameworks of Maslow and Payne also provides a novel and relevant approach regarding students' basic needs and their approach to college campuses as middle class institutions that are often unfamiliar and difficult to navigate.

Summary

Both Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* and Ruby Payne's *Framework of Poverty* offer useful frameworks for understanding the issues around hunger on higher education campuses. Maslow's theory explains that when a person's basic needs (including food and shelter) are not met, he/she cannot work through belonging and self-esteem to more advanced goals, including education and self-actualization. Ruby Payne explains that institutions such as higher education establishments operate in a middle class context, which means that individuals from lower socioeconomic brackets may be unfamiliar with their norms and therefore have difficulty in navigating their systems.

Employing these frameworks for this phenomenological inquiry represents a novel and appropriate approach, considering how students' basic needs are met and whether they have difficulty in navigating the middle-class institution that is higher education. It is the case that many students who are struggling with meeting basic needs are unable to succeed academically (Maslow) and are often the same students from a different socioeconomic context than our middle-class institutions of higher education operate within (Payne), ie, first-generation students (J. Cain, personal communication, December 10, 2019).

Understanding the phenomenon of hunger on higher education campuses means learning its history. Prior to the Great Recession of 2007, there are no mentions of food pantries on campuses. Before 2011, only two studies were conducted about hunger on U.S. campuses, these in Hawaii (2009) and New York City (2007). Key within this context of student hunger on college campuses in the United States is the fact that community colleges disproportionately serve students of lower socioeconomic statuses than other institutions of higher education.

The unique situation of the community college in the landscape of American education is a significant consideration; indeed, the two-year college is at the epicenter of the food insecurity phenomenon. While K-12 students are covered by the National School Lunch Program, college students still have no such safety net. However, the need that existed while in high school does not simply disappear when a student arrives at college or university. Significantly, community college students are more likely to come from lower-income families than their four-year counterparts, which means that two-year students are uniquely unsupported and at risk.

Studies consistently link hunger to lower academic performance, at all ages and around the globe. Food insecurity disproportionately affects at-risk populations, including ethnic minorities, low-income households, people of low educational status, and those lacking health insurance.

Food insecurity largely affects at-risk groups of students, which then represents a significant equity issue. Considering the importance of higher education as a route to upward mobility and its role in breaking the cycle of poverty, it is of critical importance to address obstacles to student success. Lower income students do not have access to the familial support that middle class students often have, which represents serious inequity on campus. Students who are working are also susceptible to lower GPAs; if these students are also in poverty and experiencing a variety of non-academic barriers, we as a nation have a social justice issue.

Some research has been conducted on campus food pantries, particularly in the last four years. Despite the increase in studies, there is still much work to be done, particularly among students in higher education, and especially on community college campuses. Best practices have yet to be established, and asking students about their own hunger, measures to mitigate their food insecurity, and resulting success (or not) at college will help to close the gaps in the literature, while at the same time giving voice to the student experience on this social justice issue.

Section 3 will describe the phenomenological inquiry to be used for this study and the rationale behind this choice of method.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design of the conducted phenomenological inquiry, which considered the following research question: What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College? This chapter provides an overview of the research design, data collection, and data analysis used in this study, which examines student reflections on the effectiveness of the PNW College food pantry in terms of supporting their success. This section begins with a description of the chosen philosophical approach, researcher positionality, qualitative research method, and site selection. Finally, a discussion of limitations, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study completes the chapter.

Philosophical Approach

This study was grounded in an interpretivist philosophical approach. The interpretive worldview recognizes the value of subjective experience: that everyone has his, her, or their own truth and voice to be heard and experiences that deserve to be shared (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). This approach fits especially well with a phenomenological inquiry that asks students about their lived experiences with a food pantry on a community college campus.

According to Myers (2008), interpretive research assumes that access to reality is solely through social constructs such as language or shared meanings. Carr and Kemmis (2002) noted that the interpretive tradition works to replace the concepts of prediction, explanation and control with a wider notion of broad understanding and action. Significant in interpretivism is the naturalistic approach by which researchers study subjects in their native settings while working to interpret phenomena through the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The development of interpretivist philosophy was as a response to and as a critique of positivism (Myers, 2008). Proponents of interpretivism have criticized positivism for an approach that denies common meanings while also lacking a complete theory of knowledge (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982). Interpretivism groups together different approaches such as social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, and is associated with the philosophical position of idealism. It also rejects the objectivist view that meaning exists in the world independent of consciousness (Collins, 2017). Essentially, interpretivists understand that individuals socially construct meaning during interactions with the world.

Strengths of the interpretive approach include the notion that qualitative research areas like cross-cultural organizational differences can be studied in depth. Additionally, data generated by interpretive studies may be associated with high levels of validity because data from such studies tends to be trustworthy (Klein & Myers, 1999). While a positivistic approach concentrates on the relationship between research and external reality, interpretivism acknowledges the social context that makes meaning, including the researcher’s own preconceptions (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982). This acknowledgement of researcher bias echoes a similar emphasis in phenomenological inquiry and helps in conscientiously approaching the interview process.

Disadvantages associated with interpretivism concern the subjective nature of the approach and the potential for bias on behalf of the researcher. Primary data cannot be generalized since data is affected by personal viewpoint and worldview. As such, reliability and representativeness of data is compromised to some extent (Klein & Myers, 1999). Other objections to the interpretive approach concern the constructs of social reality that fail to consider questions around the relationships between researcher interpretations and actions and external factors. Similarly, the interpretive approach does not consider the unintended consequences of social actions (Carr & Kemmis, 2002).

Personal Disclosure and Researcher Positionality

As an active member of the campus community, I have attempted to minimize the impact of my involvement via my instructional (and more recently, administrative) role by choosing a phenomenological approach. This method gives voice to the student experience, more than an action inquiry or case study model might. Additionally, an interpretivist approach specifically recognizes the subjective nature of researcher interpretation and accounts for this. Clearly, I bring a social justice lens and a vested, personal interest in student success to any work that I approach, and I acknowledge that specific perspective here. My campus connections and experiences may have also influenced my interactions and the ways that I made sense of the data. My bracketing comprised a deliberate and conscientious ongoing practice to minimize coloring my interpretation of the student experience.

A community college faculty member for two decades, and an interim administrator for a year, I have seen the impact of non-academic obstacles on student success, and I have a personal investment – as well as an institutional one – in promoting improved retention and completion rates on my home campus.

In addition, I have established relationships with those in charge of the food pantry I propose to study. However, students involved in my research were not those I have taught, nor were they current students of mine. In order to maintain my personal distance and maximize my objectivity, this criterion was crucial.

As well as being employed as a faculty member and interim associate dean on campus, I am also heavily involved in equity work, both on campus and in the community more generally. I served as a member of the City Diversity Advisory Board from 2004-2017 and am a current board member of the School District Equity Advisory Committee. As such, I have a demonstrated interest in social justice and local equity work.

Insider/Outsider Status

As part of the campus community where I have conducted my research, I am an insider. However, to the students taking part in my study, I am very much an outsider relative to their particular experiences, in terms of educational status, occupation, role on campus, and often, socioeconomic status. Essentially, I occupy an emic, or insider, role as a member of the campus being studied. However, I still carry an etic role as an outsider to this particular group being invited to share their experiences on the basis of using the campus food pantry (Naaeke, Kurylo, Grabowski, Linton, & Radford, 2012). My status as a faculty member and, currently, administrator make it highly unlikely that students see me as part of the same community they occupy despite our mutual affiliation with the same campus.

The perspective the researcher takes impacts the knowledge produced about the group; thus, it is essential to acknowledge insider/outsider status and work to understand its impact on the study. Certainly, the phenomenological process of bracketing helps the researcher to reflect on her relationship to the study on an ongoing basis.

Methodology

In seeking to understand the perceived effectiveness of the newly established food pantry on campus, I was led to a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2014), a concept or phenomenon that needs to be explored or understood because little research has been conducted warrants a qualitative approach. While a growing body of research certainly addresses food instability and campus food pantries, phenomenological inquiries on the subject are thus far non-existent, and research on my specific campus has not been undertaken.

My decision to pursue a qualitative approach was further solidified by Creswell's (2014) broad description of qualitative research, whereby the research process dictates following emerging questions and procedures, data are often collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively builds from particulars to wider themes, and the researcher interprets the data. Further, the researchers who employ this type of inquiry support a way of looking at research that centers on an inductive style, individual meaning, and the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2014). As befitting my study gathering information on a campus program's perceived impact, qualitative research is inductive, whereby the researcher finds meaning from the data collected at the site (Creswell, 2014).

Sapsford and Jupp (2006) wrote that methodology is a philosophical stance or worldview that indicates a particular style of research. Thus, using an interpretivist paradigm and observational methodology, our understanding of food pantry interventions is collectively deepened.

In weighing the best method for evaluating the food pantry program on campus, phenomenological inquiry emerged as a particularly appropriate choice of technique in soliciting feedback from participants regarding their own experience with food pantries. The question for the study focuses on the experience of the participants rather than the mechanics of the food pantry, so the most fitting research approach was determined to be phenomenology.

Phenomenology, broadly, includes the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl, the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, and the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger (Schwandt, 2015). In general, phenomenologists oppose scientific realism and the notion that the empirical sciences occupy a unique and privileged position in understanding the world. As befitting my own context, current use of the term "phenomenology" in North America generally indicates a subjectivist and non-critical approach, unlike the traditions represented by Husserl and Heidegger (Schwandt, 2015).

At its essence, phenomenology seeks to identify and describe the experiences of participants in studying everyday events from the subjective viewpoint of those involved. Indeed, there is a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is conveyed into consciousness: in the words of Van Manen (1997), our "lived experience." Merriam (2009) wrote, "A phenomenological approach is well-suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (p. 26). In considering how to evaluate the experience of individuals interacting with the campus food pantry, this seemed a fitting approach.

According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological research employs the analysis of “significant” statements, the construction of meaning units, and the development of an essence description. Phenomenology is a particularly suitable choice for this study, as it considers the lived experiences of individuals and the way that those experiences combine to form a worldview, and it relies upon the assumption that these shared experiences can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Further, using phenomenology, we may describe the meaning of an experience shared by several individuals: in this case, the use of a campus food pantry.

Phenomenology involves interview questions that provide direction and focus, the determination of themes that direct an inquiry, and accounting for an individual’s involvement with what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). According to Van Mannen (1997), phenomenology attempts to find meaning in the everyday by asking about what a particular experience is like for an individual. These everyday experiences lead to what Husserl called intentionality, whereby we give our experiences meaning (Solokowski, 2007). In phenomenology, the researcher considers experiences from the perspective of the individual, and in doing so discovers their meaning; the essence of the research is derived through interaction with participants and in effectively conveying their stories. Ideally, the reader should come away from a phenomenological study with a real sense of another’s experience (Creswell, 2014).

A particular strength of a phenomenological approach for me as a researcher, in view of my equity bias, is the use of bracketing. Through bracketing, also called epoché, the researcher accounts for his/her own experiences prior to interviewing participants (Moustakas, 1994). This self-examination allows the researcher to gain clarity from his/her own preconceptions and is part of the “ongoing process rather than a single fixed event” (Patton, 1990, p. 408).

Moustakas (1994) further explained epoché: “judgments and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited” (p. 33). Essentially, suspending knowledge is not the focus. Rather, the goal is refraining from judging or drawing premature conclusions so that the researcher can understand the authentic voices of the participants. It is important that the researcher is self-conscious, critical, and participatory, engaged but separate from participants (Fine, 1992; Morrow, 2005).

The practice of bracketing allows for a deliberate, self-aware separation while still permitting a researcher’s involvement in the interview process. In setting aside one’s beliefs about the phenomenon being studied, the goal is to avoid influencing the collection and interpretation of data (Oiler, 1982; Knaack, 1984; Cohen, 1987; Jasper, 1994; Walker, 2007). Bracketing may also be used to create an atmosphere and establish rapport at the start of an interview session (Moustakas, 1994).

Setting

Research for this study was conducted onsite at an urban two-year college located in a city of over 100,000 people in the Pacific Northwest. The study site, PNW College, enrolls over 19,000 students a year (roughly 8,000 FTE) and is located adjacent to a branch campus of a major state university (2018).

According to the PNW College (2018) website, the institution enrolls 34 percent students of color and 29 percent first-generation students. Six percent of students report having a disability. The average age of a student is 28; however, 42 percent of students are aged 20 or younger. In Fall 2016, 16% of PNW College students received Pell Grants, and 21% of students received some sort of grant or scholarship (US News, n.d.). The college is notable for being extremely veteran friendly, and it maintains a special, deliberate focus on equity. A 2017 accreditation visit yielded commendations for campus equity work, specifically noting inclusion and social justice as areas of strength (NWCCU, 2018). This welcoming and supportive environment, by reputation, leads to strong enrollment in traditionally underserved populations.

Sample and Sampling

The population studied included students who were enrolled in PNW College during Spring Quarter 2019 and who had accessed its food pantry on more than one occasion previously. At its opening in Fall Quarter 2017, the food pantry was accessed by nearly 90 total individuals, though this study took care to exclude any staff or faculty users. Anecdotal accounts from food pantry staff indicated that the pantry had become more widely used over the past six months, so there was a significant population from which to sample.

Study participants comprised a purposive sample of student food pantry users who provided informed consent to engage in an extended interview, lasting up to 60 minutes (Morrow, 2005). Interviews were recorded using both Audacity software on a password-protected personal computer and using a Sony hand-held recording device. Those back-up recordings were downloaded to the password-protected computer. Recordings were secured by password protection on a private laptop used exclusively by the researcher until the dissertation process was completed, at which point the recordings were destroyed.

Using recruitment flyers in the food pantry and in campus student communications, students were asked to contact the researcher directly if they wished to participate in a study about student involvement with the food pantry and their perceived outcomes (see Appendix A). Ultimately, because of time pressures due to delayed IRB approval and the impending end of Spring Quarter, I also visited the food pantry to introduce myself and hand out recruitment flyers. Students who made contact via e-mail were provided further details about the study, including time required, the procedure for interviewing, and informed consent. Scheduling of interviews also occurred at this stage.

Snowball sampling was also used to recommend useful potential candidates for the study (Marshall, 1996). The recommended approximate sample size of 5-25 participants, as suggested by Creswell (1998), necessitated asking participants to identify others who might be interested in the study (snowball sampling). However, it is important to remember that meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the richness of data and analysis of the researcher than sample size alone (Patton, 1990; Morrow, 2005). In evaluating phenomenological analysis, Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) recommended studying fewer subjects in depth, remarking that the “sample size is contextual and must be considered on a study-by-study basis” (p. 757). This “less is more” sentiment was also echoed by Englander (2012) and Giorgi (2009).

The sampling frame (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) included students attending PNW College who accessed the campus food pantry on at least one prior occasion and were enrolled during Spring Quarter 2019. The sample did not include any college employees (except for student employees) who accessed the food pantry, since the study rests on research and existing literature focused on student hunger and its impact on success, and interventions specifically directed at students. This restricted sampling reflects Creswell’s (2014) assertion that underlying qualitative research is the deliberate selection of participants or sites that best help the researcher understand the research problem and question.

Further, according to Schwandt (2015), in selecting a sample based on theoretical strategy, samples are not chosen for representativeness but instead for relevance to the research question and analytical framework. The sample may be chosen because there is a compelling reason to believe that it is crucial to understanding a concept or process (Schwandt, 2015). Englander (2012) differentiated between representativeness in quantitative research as opposed to in a phenomenological inquiry; he suggested that because we cannot truly know the phenomenon until research has begun, our job as researchers is to select participants who have experience of the phenomenon and ask “Do you have the experience that I am looking for?” (Englander, 2012, p. 19).

Students who made up the sample crossed ethnic identities and age ranges but largely had in common food instability and a lower socioeconomic status. As background, addressing food instability and student hunger on this campus has long been an individual, ad hoc endeavor, with instructors and administrators keeping snacks in their offices ready to hand out to students. During Fall Quarter 2017, students, led by the Associated Student Body (ASB) President first opened the food pantry on campus. In its first month, the food pantry served over 80 students.

Students were incentivized to participate, to ensure broad interest and ample study size. To gain access to this population, I worked closely with ASB and Student LIFE (Leadership, Inclusion, Fun, and Engagement). Since presidents serve only one year, the

Associate Dean of Student LIFE has represented a more permanent contact. Additionally, I had contact with institutional IRB at PNW College to establish communication and develop study parameters.

A phenomenological inquiry was specifically selected, using personal interviews to understand the student experience and potentially illustrate how well the food pantry is perceived to support student outcomes. Phenomenology was deliberately chosen to examine the perceived impacts of the food pantry on student success; as described by Marshall and Rossman (2011), its purpose is to describe the meaning of a phenomenon that multiple individuals share. Further, phenomenology gives voice to the experiences of individuals, which in the context of this study has extra significance in that it offers empowerment to a group that may typically be “other” (Ross, 2017). As a society, we do not typically seek to give voice to those from marginalized populations or those of a lower socioeconomic status.

Data Collection

The focus of the PNW College study was on student use of the food pantry, student experience of this resource, and subsequent student perception of food pantry success, particularly as related to individual experience in meeting academic outcomes. The food pantry survey in place during the 2017-18 school year at PNW College asked simple logistical questions about the convenience of hours of operation, a patron’s frequency of use, and access to information about resource provision, so interview protocol moved beyond these basics to solicit the student’s own personal accounts (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 2009).

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the key instrument, utilizing a protocol but collecting data him/herself (Creswell, 2014). In this study, phenomenological interview was the primary method of data collection. After piloting interview questions with a sample cohort including PNW College students and the Associate Dean of Student Life, I conducted interviews in Spring Quarter 2019 (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

Questions used comprised standardized, open-ended prompts focused on the student experience and the individual's story, as is appropriate to phenomenology (Yin, 2016). Interviews for this current study were deliberately informal to elicit individual accounts about the students' interaction with the food pantry, with the goal of gaining deep understanding of the uniqueness of personal experience (Yin, 2016). Per Castillo-Montoya (2016), I employed a four-phase process to refine my interview protocol. These steps include ensuring that interview questions align with research questions, constructing an inquiry-based conversation, receiving feedback on interview protocols, and piloting the interview protocols (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

It was imperative that data be collected in fairly open-ended interviews to maintain a balance between guiding and being led, as is appropriate for phenomenological inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested that interviews begin with broad questions of a general nature that allow the participant to set the topics and themes, rather than the researcher. In this way, the researcher does not impose his, her, or their understanding of the phenomenon on the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Due to time constraints based on IRB approval with Oregon State's new process and limitations with the end of the term at PNW College, there was a six-week window for recruitment and scheduling of interviews. The entire process ultimately took about eight weeks, from early May through early July 2019. Multiple students expressed an interest in being interviewed, but ten eventually made it to their scheduled appointment (often this took two or three tries) and completed an interview.

In phenomenological inquiry, conversations and loosely structured interviews are identified as a preferred approach, particularly in collecting data about potentially sensitive topics (Fielding & Thomas, 2001; Walker, 2007). The goal is to direct the participant in the interview process, rather than leading the participant to conclusions that the researcher wishes to be drawn (Giorgi, 2009: Englander, 2012; Vagle, 2018). With the exception of follow-up questioning regarding the role of the food pantry in supporting students' education, this researcher was able to direct the participants rather than lead them to conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring confidentiality is a significant task. With face-to-face interviews, it is essential that every effort is made to ensure the principle of confidentiality, meaning that data are used and reported in such a way that no one is able to identify the source (Behi & Nolan, 2014). Where anonymity is not possible (i.e., in face-to-face interviews), it is important to uphold principles of confidentiality (Strebert & Carpenter, 1999; Walker, 2007).

Measures to ensure confidentiality of personal information included the secure storage of data, such as personal details and interview notes, in locked files and as password protected digital information (Kaiser, 2009). Additionally, the use of a system of coding protected individual identity during data analysis and in the publication of results (Walker, 2007). Each participant was able to choose a pseudonym for the study as part of the protocol, used in all notes and on recordings (Lahman, Rodriguez, Moses, Griffin, Mendoza, & Yacoub, 2015). Conducting interviews on campus in a secure location helped to safeguard participant privacy (Kaiser, 2009).

Since many food pantry users come from more vulnerable populations, it was important to empower participants at every possible opportunity (Ross, 2017). This included the ability to change their minds about taking part in the study prior to beginning interviews. Indeed, one student arranged to come to campus in early July but, once there, changed his mind about participating upon reading the consent form. He was fully compensated as if he had decided to take part in the study, in any case.

Resnick (2009) specifically recommended re-consenting as part of the research process. Re-consenting is defined as “an action in which a subject makes the decision to participate in research once again” (Resnick, 2009, p. 1). Resnick’s (2009) recommendations have to do with large studies and significant findings that may impact a subject’s desire to participate or clinically useful test results, and may not apply to a small sample size and my phenomenological inquiry. Certainly, documents clearly outlined participant ability to cease participation at any time without recourse. In addition to informed consent, participants were provided with information about the benefits and risks of the research (Walker, 2007). In view of the wider issues potentially associated with food insecurity, it was considered prudent to practice consensual decision making, continually informing and asking permission to allow the interview to proceed in an ethical manner (Munhall, 1988).

In phenomenological inquiry, it is particularly important to focus on participant welfare, given the possibility of distress in discussing sensitive issues. Kavanagh and Ayres (1998) advised assessing participants for signs of distress during research and working to minimize discomfort. Further, participant welfare took priority over the research (Kavanagh & Ayres, 1998; Walker, 2007). Ethical standards are of the utmost importance when researching the lived experience, especially (Walker, 2007). Specifically, each research participant was provided with a detailed list of local resources, including mental health supports and public food banks, as suggested by IRB at Oregon State. While some copies were later found in the recycle bin, a number of students expressed gratitude for such a list and seemed to indicate that it would be a helpful resource.

Informed Consent

In the words of Polit and Hungler (1999), "Informed consent means that participants have adequate information regarding the research, are capable of comprehending the information, and have the power of free choice, enabling them to consent to or decline participation in the research voluntarily" (Walker, 2007, p. 41). It was important to continue to check in with participants, particularly in phenomenological research and particularly with potentially vulnerable populations (Polit & Hungler, 1999; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; Walker, 2007). The idea that participants shared their lived experience also potentially made them more vulnerable and less able to act autonomously (Walker, 2007). During the member checking process, participants were given the opportunity to edit their interview transcripts or to at that time cease participation. This additional opportunity to quit the study served as re-consent, or the decision to participate in research again (Resnik, 2009). Technically, it is worth noting that Resnik (2009) would consider this a reaffirmation rather than a full re-consent, since additional paperwork was not signed. Reaffirmation of willingness to participate is still considered a method for ensuring that informed consent is ethically and legal valid (Resnik, 2009).

Data Analysis

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis includes making sense out of the data, which involves summarizing and analyzing what people have said and what the researcher has experienced. Essentially, data analysis is the complete process used to answer the research questions. In using a phenomenological approach, extensive coding was required. The process as dictated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) involves category construction derived from data. The first transcript evokes groupings. Then, a second set of notes, comments, and terms is compared to the list developed from the first transcript. The resulting master list indicates an initial outline and classification system showing patterns in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “Qualitative data analysis is all about identifying themes, categories, patterns, or answers to your research questions,” wrote Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 215).

Epoché

Phenomenological inquiry offers prescribed steps for data analysis, beginning with bracketing or epoché, which allow the researcher to address his/her bias. Beyond epoché and the treatment of researcher bias, phenomenological reduction refers to the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to find meaning (Merriam, 2009). In this phase, the researcher identifies the essence of the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). I engaged in a bracketing process in May of 2019 prior to my student interviews as well throughout the entire interview process, at the completion of each interview, as a means of setting aside my biases and assumptions.

Horizontalization

Horizontalization is the process of treating initial data as if it all has the same weight; all data have equal value at the outset. The data are then organized into themes or clusters. Moustakas (1994) explained horizontalization: “In the process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value…and a full description is derived” (p. 96). From this process, a phenomenological study produces a composite description that illustrates the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This final stage of structural synthesis ends with a description of the essence of the phenomenon and its structure after an exploration of all possible meanings and differing perspectives. According to Moustakas (1994), analysis of the interview data includes the development of individual textural or structural descriptions, composite textual and structural descriptions, and a synthesis of textual and structural meanings and essences of the experience.

It is preferred in phenomenological inquiry that the researcher herself transcribe the interviews to allow for further distillation of themes during this process (Giorgi, 2009; Englander, 2012). At this time, it was also recommended that the researcher shift the text from first to third person to provide a better focus on themes (Englander, 2012). Describing the experiences of others in the most precise way possible is the chief obligation of the qualitative researcher (Munhall, 1988; Walker, 2007).

Transcription Process

As is appropriate for prioritizing the student voice and to maximize reflection opportunities for the researcher, all transcription was completed by the researcher herself, as soon as possible after each interview. Often transcription happened immediately on completion of the interview; certainly each was completed within 12 hours of concluding the interview. This personal process further enhanced opportunities for reflection and ongoing bracketing, and ensured that the interview was captured as accurately as possible prior to sending content to participants for member checking.

As discussed by Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000), qualitative studies are under specific demands regarding trustworthiness and must do all they can to minimize potential errors such as equipment failure, environmental hazards, and transcription errors. Self-transcription as soon as possible after the completion of the interview minimizes the risk of error and allows for deeper engagement with the interview content as the researcher relives the actual interview while listening and typing.

Coding Process

As a first pass through the interview data, the researcher applied Layder's (1998) concept of pre-coding, highlighting significant quotes or passages that appeared interesting. This process of circling/highlighting/noting rich or significant quotes or passages that became codable moments worthy of attention represented a first engagement with the interview text. In selecting a formal coding method, the concept of "in vivo" coding emerged as the most fitting type. In this method, short words or phrases from the participant's own language in the data are recorded as initial themes. According to Saldaña (2013), in vivo coding is particularly appropriate for studies that "prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 264). Rather than attempting to perceive and interpret what is happening in the data, in vivo coding keeps that data rooted in the participant’s own language (Saldaña, 2013), which is particularly important in a phenomenological inquiry.

The appropriateness of in vivo coding for this particular study was further highlighted by Manning (2017), who wrote, “In vivo coding is championed by many for its usefulness in highlighting the voices of participants and for its reliance on the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data” (para. 1). Because it places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants, it is often used as an initial form of analysis to lead to more sophisticated techniques; a further strength is that in vivo coding does not rely on researcher-generated codes for data (Manning, 2017).

Student quotes as themes were then moved into broader conceptual themes: for example, an original quote that stated, “being hungry makes it hard to do pretty much anything, you know?” was originally coded “hunger,” that ultimately fell under the broad research theme of “challenges.” Not only were codes revisited and evaluated – sometimes producing edited codes - at least two weeks after initial coding in July 2019, per Guba and Lincoln (1989), but meanings were grouped into clusters that ultimately yielded the themes for the study, as suggested by Van Manen (2007). A final critical inspection of the transcriptions yielded four additional new subthemes in January 2020. At this same time, the four final themes were determined. This deliberate and time-consuming approach to data interpretation over the course of seven months was conducted with the intent of maximizing the accuracy of portraying the student experience.

Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Guba (1981), four components may comprise trustworthiness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As an essential part of the research process, this study involved member checking to help establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were given the opportunity to review data collected by the researcher. In phenomenological inquiry, it is especially important that any unclear passages are clarified by the participant, rather than the researcher's filling in later with theoretical interpretations (Giorgi, 2009; Englander, 2012). These member checking steps were accounted for in my research timeline and represent a vital aspect of the project.

While the study may lack overall generalizability, due to its setting on a single campus, findings may be transferable, whereby the meaning of the study may be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2009). In truth, phenomenological inquiry is focused more on the possible transferability of findings between groups rather than the generalizability of a study as a whole (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Transferability considers the similarity of research sites as judged by the reader, which is the rationale behind this study's description of context, place, and timeframe of data, while acknowledging the unique culture of each institution (Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Issues of transferability may be addressed through the use of purposive sampling, as was utilized in this study; specific information is maximized in the context in which data collection occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, thick description of participants, interview content, and interview location helps to promote transferability

(Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019). Ultimately, though, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide the "data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of the appliers" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). In providing such a solid base of data, this researcher assumes that transferability may be applied.

In the interest of applying further critique to this study to add to its rigorous assessment, another, more modern, framework may be used. A relatively recent list of criteria with which to consider qualitative reliability is provided by Tracy (2013). Tracy outlined eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence.

Considering the eight criteria as outlined on the previous page, this study may broadly be seen to represent excellent qualitative research. Food insecurity on campus may certainly be considered a *worthy topic*: relevant, timely, significant, and interesting, particularly as it represents a non-academic barrier to student success. In using sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data, samples, contexts, and data collection and analysis processes, the research embodied *rich rigor*. As a specific example, the thematic analysis developed by revisiting interview transcripts over a period of many months represented an extremely rigorous process.

In its extensive use of bracketing and researcher reflection, the study evidenced *sincerity* and self-reflexivity, along with transparency. Thick description, triangulation, member checking, and inter-coder reliability all contributed to *credibility*. Through evocative representation, the goal was that readers would find *resonance*, along with a significant contribution to the body of research in terms of practical findings and implications. A great deal of deliberation was taken in terms of *ethical* consideration around procedure with human subjects, such as member checking and the ability to reconsent to the study. Finally, the study achieved *meaningful coherence* in that it used methods and procedures that fit stated goals and connected literature, research questions, and interpretations.

Validity

Using Yardley's framework for validity in qualitative research (2000, 2008), data analysis was also interpreted with attention to four main principles. These include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. In the framework of asking students about their lived experience, the researcher had an extreme duty to maintain their trust and tell their stories: it is critical that "the conclusions accurately reflect and represent the real world that was studied" (Yin, 2014, p. 88).

Data Saturation

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation happens when there is there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible. Essentially, when no new themes appear to be emerging, it may be considered that data saturation has been reached. As the last of ten students were interviewed in Spring Quarter 2019, it was soon apparent that no new ideas were emerging.

It is true that the condensed time frame available for contact with participants may be seen to have limited the subject pool, but the clear caution from Fusch and Ness (2015) is that we cannot assume that data saturation has been reached due to an exhaustion of resources. Data saturation is not about numbers but rather about the depth of the data (Burmeister & Aiken, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). With this in mind, the solid replication of ideas (later translated into themes) was established before the participant pool was exhausted.

Study Limitations

Delimitations

In terms of delimitations, or boundaries that I established for my own research, there are a few significant ones. In the literature on food insecurity, the topic is often addressed alongside housing instability. While I recognize the obvious association between hunger and homelessness, for my study, food insecurity will be examined on its own as a separate phenomenon, with housing instability described only generally for context and as a correlate to student hunger. Another key delimitation involves the population utilizing the food pantry: though PNW College faculty and staff are invited to use the campus food pantry, my research involved only students who accessed this resource. I was interested in student experiences and perceptions of how effectively the food pantry supports their academic success rather than the experiences of those employed on campus.

Occasionally, the topic of food deserts is looked at alongside campus food insecurity. As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a food desert is an area lacking in healthy food choices, like fresh fruit and vegetables, due to the lack of a grocery store, farmers’ markets, or healthy food providers (Gallagher, 2015). For the purposes of this study, food deserts were not a focus. Finally, rather than looking at a system or approaches to hunger on multiple campuses, I restricted my study to just one campus, PNW College.

Some limitations beyond my control included the number of students visiting the food pantry on campus during my allotted time for research, which was further restricted by IRB delays. I was also limited by access via ASB; since this is a student-run effort, I had relatively less direct availability to facilities and obviously had to negotiate access. Student turnover in food pantry management and possible resulting changes in how the facility is run have been other key considerations, since there are new ASB officers each fall. The number of students interested in participating in interviews was initially inadequate, so I spent time within the facility, introducing myself, explaining my research and handing out flyers. It was helpful to have some key involved students (pantry volunteers and users) and to rely on them to provide at least a few further leads. Overall, however, my study demonstrated feasibility, partly because of my delimitations. Looking at hunger and homelessness would be a vast proposition, so I narrowed my study to hunger, specifically on a single campus.

Limitations

Student willingness to talk to researcher/faculty member naturally varies greatly. Asking students to work with a researcher they have never met selects for a certain type of student, even if that researcher attempts to reach out to students personally, book their time in person, and initially meet them in the food pantry. Add to that the personal nature of the inquiry – student hunger – and many students would not agree to participate in a study.

Insider/outsider status is important because it impacts the research process, findings of the study, and the argument made by the research about the implications of the findings (Naaeke, Kurylo, Grabowski, Linton, & Radford, 2012). In an attempt to reduce the impact of insider status on students who may feel like outsiders, the study excluded any former or current students of the researcher; still, her role on campus as a faculty member and someone working on a doctorate would undoubtedly render her less approachable to many students. While we are all members of the same campus community, it would be foolish to assume that from the student perspective the faculty member conducting research is anything but an outsider who happens to inhabit the same campus.

The idea of insider/outsider status and its impact on a study goes hand in hand with the idea of stigma. Participants who are less apt to report perceived stigma about using a campus food pantry may logically be those more willing to talk to strange faculty member, especially about such a personal topic as hunger. Beyond this self-selection among study participants are the unknown many individuals who do not ever access the food pantry to begin with due to stigma, anxiety, limited availability, and scheduling issues as a few examples. In other words: how many hungry students do not even make it through the doors of our food pantry?

Another limitation of this study was time constraints. The study was conducted during the latter half of Spring Quarter 2019. With summer rapidly approaching, there was an inability to schedule additional interviews to re-question people. While the commentary did become consistent, indicating saturation, a broader time frame might have allowed for additional rounds of interviews to further explore themes. Realistically, though, considering the two-thirds participant-initiated reschedule rate of the study generally, additional interviews would have likely been problematic to execute.

Along these same lines, there was a limited response to member checking, particularly as this stage coincided many times with final exams and the end of the quarter. However, participants were informed in release forms that no reply was considered the same as approving the text. Each participant did receive an e-mailed transcription of the interview and had an opportunity to provide any edits, corrections, or amplifications, though few chose to do so. This researcher did revisit the full transcription and was compelled to reconsider and update themes as late as January 2020.

Those who came to interviews as originally scheduled were accommodated in a relatively neutral space: a private room in library or a vacant classroom. However, two-thirds of participants rescheduled at least once, so three who cancelled at least once were asked to come to the researcher’s empty office due to lack of availability of other options on campus. Clearly, a neutral space is preferable to faculty space, though the faculty office was never an originally scheduled location and was only made necessary by participant-initiated rescheduling.

In offering any sort of compensation for participation, it may be that students from lower socioeconomic statuses might be disproportionately drawn to the study, thereby affecting the sample. Essentially, if participants are in need of money, their consent is not truly freely given if payment is involved (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Therefore, it was my initial goal that students volunteer to participate simply so that their experience could be considered and their voices be heard, not to mention the opportunity to contribute to a growing body of work on student hunger in higher education. In reality, however, it was necessary to incentivize participation in the study involving busy community college students, particularly in view of timing during the latter half of Spring Quarter (not historically the most robust of terms for either enrollment or student tenacity), right up against summer break.

Campus Food Pantry

The food pantry at PNW College was founded in October 2017 in the arts and sciences building, in a space that once housed an art supplies annex of the campus bookstore. The space is rather stark, with concrete walls, metal shelving, and a single round table in the center of the room. It was definitely designed as a "grab-and-go" facility rather than an inviting place to linger and visit. One participant, Kay, described the pantry as "plain, like a jail cell" in the middle of a pretty building.

The food pantry is typically staffed by two volunteers at the entrance. They sit at a single slim classroom table and greet visitors as they enter. The volunteers describe the process for food pantry use to newcomers and point to the grocery bags available for use. Volunteers issue verbal reminders about the five-item limit, but do not necessarily enforce the rule.

Food that is typically available is all non-perishable and includes rice, dried beans, canned meat, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, tuna, and snack items. Additionally, feminine hygiene items and personal care products are often available. Responses to previous student surveys administered by student government requested more baby care items, snacks, school supplies, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Food pantry policy allows open access without any campus identification or proof of need required. There is a five-item limit per day. Each individual product counts as one item, so a small travel shampoo, a granola bar, a single wrapped chocolate, and a large bag of rice are all deemed equivalent in this system.

During the timeframe of the study, pantry hours were limited to three hours per day, Monday-Thursday, with the pantry closing at 1 pm on Mondays and Wednesdays and at 5 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Current hours had been extended to five hours per day, with late hours until 7 pm on Thursday prior to campus shutdown during COVID-19. During the pandemic, drive-up service was made available to students who made an appointment via email.

Food pantry users sometimes take classes in the building where the food pantry is housed and happen upon it by accident. Other users report learning about the food pantry from flyers in the campus dorms or in their College 101 classes. The PNW College website does contain detailed information about the food pantry.

Interviews

Ten interviews were conducted with participants in Spring 2019. Participants selected the time of day they wished to be interviewed, dependent on class obligations and off-campus demands. Most interviews took place during the late morning or early afternoon, all during the week and on campus at PNW College. Most interviews were initially scheduled to take place in the basement library at PNW College and subsequently held there, in private study rooms that were reserved for a maximum of four hours per week. Because the researcher had reached maximum library hours in the booking system and had to compete for space during final exams, two interviews were initially scheduled to take place in an empty classroom. One participant was interviewed and the other potential participant did not attend or communicate regarding his non-attendance.

Including potential participants, two-thirds of all students rescheduled/no-showed. Due to rescheduling and no-shows, three interviews ended up taking place in the researcher’s office on campus. Obviously, conducting an interview in a space that is not neutral is not ideal; however, each of these sessions represented a second or third attempt at scheduling and a student-initiated cancellation of previously booked neutral space. It is worth acknowledging, then, that discussions with three participants took place in a quiet office: still, in a space with different micro-geographies than the other students. It is logical that the space in which interviews are conducted impacts the relationship of the researcher with the interview participant, the participant with the site (library or classroom or office space), and that site within a broader sociocultural context that affects the research and the participant (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

Participants

The average age of participants was 31.5. In terms of racial/ethnic identity, three participants identified as white, five as traditionally underrepresented students of color, one as Asian American, and one participant chose not to disclose. Five participants identified as a female, four identified as male, and one participant identified as agender. Three participants lived in campus housing and three lived with their family. Eight participants identified financial vulnerability to some extent, while two replied that they were not vulnerable financially. The question about food insecurity elicited a variety of responses: four participants identified as strongly food insecure, while two identified as not food insecure and two as rarely food insecure. Two students said they did “not go hungry" as an answer; however, both made regular use of food support networks, both on campus and in the community. The following paragraphs provide a description of each of the 10 participants using their chosen pseudonym. A summary of the participants is also provided in Table 4.1.

Jay was a nursing student, aged 23. Our campus has a basement library, and we met in one of the small, reservable study rooms. He was the first student I spoke with, so we were probably both a bit nervous about the interview, which lasted approximately 20 minutes. Jay was eager to help with the study and to share his insights about the food pantry. By the end of the interview, it became clear that, in addition to using the food pantry, he was a student volunteer via his anthropology class, but he never directly stated this. Certainly, he began to use the food pantry once he was made aware of it through his coursework. Though he lived with his parents, he identified as food insecure and financially vulnerable. He emphasized his role in helping others, like his girlfriend and his parents, to obtain items from the food pantry. He identified as a Filipino Male.

Kay was a computer science student, aged 19, who identified as an African American Female. We spoke for about 20 minutes in the campus library, in one of the small study rooms in the basement. Kay was shy at the beginning of the interview but was soon laughing and sharing openly. Her honesty about her experiences offered valuable insight into real hunger and some strategies for mitigating it. Like many other students in this study, Kay lived in the dorms. She shared that she occasionally cared for family members and identified as both financially vulnerable and food insecure. When she shared her technique for drinking water to "subside that hunger," I first realized the deep impacts of hunger on our campus and was touched emotionally as well.

Akeem was an education student, aged 22, who identified as a Black Male. We met in a small study room in the basement library on campus, and the interview lasted roughly 20 minutes. He spoke openly and in a matter-of-fact way about his experiences with hunger and his challenging upbringing generally, sharing that he had been kicked out of his house at age 16 and had to commute from Tacoma to Seattle (roughly 35 high-traffic miles one way) for school each day.

In addition to working three jobs in town, Akeem also took three classes: a full load. Despite experiencing hunger on a daily basis, he remained incredibly upbeat and cheerful. Akeem worked with youth in a variety of programs and lodged with a local family. He described health problems that could potentially be related to his demanding lifestyle and variable nutrition.

JJ was a 20-year-old aviation student, who identified as an Asian Male, and specifically as an international student. Of all the participants, he gave the briefest interview, roughly ten minutes long. The conversation took place in an empty world languages classroom booked for this purpose. He seemed a bit distracted, and our differing native languages likely contributed to a less fluid, more choppy conversation. His insights about domestic students being more financially insecure and more likely to make excuses about their education were unique to the rest of the study.

Undoubtedly the biggest outcome from JJ’s interview was the question of whether one could abuse an open-access resource. JJ identified as both completely food secure and in fact wealthy, receiving full financial support from family in Asia. He spoke openly of using the food pantry out of convenience rather than need, which led to great philosophical ponderings later about whether this sort of use represented abuse of the food pantry's initial intent.

Lea, age 71, was pursuing her AA by taking computer classes at PNW College. We spoke in a small study room in the basement library of the college, where Lea gave the longest interview of all participants, lasting over 30 minutes. She identified as a White Female and financially vulnerable but adamantly not hungry. Like others in the study, she did not want to be labelled hungry, yet she regularly used many community resources to mitigate food insecurity, including multiple food banks. She also shared her worry about the lack of summer meal programs in her two young sons' school district.

Lea spoke extensively about self-sufficiency and making use of resources. In addition to her eagerness to be helpful to the study, a theme of hers was personal responsibility in finding and utilizing available supports. She was extremely direct and clear in her opinion that "there is no reason for anyone to go hungry, since there is food available and there are people willing to help."

Tree Young was a 23-year-old student, living in the campus dorm, whose goal was to transfer to a four-year university. We spoke for about 25 minutes in my empty office, since she initially failed to show for our library appointment, and there were no other options for booking space elsewhere on campus. She identified as African Disasporan Female and described herself as a well-connected, active member of campus life. She spoke without hesitation and with strength, outlining her experiences in school and at home and emphasizing a survival mindset. Her theme seemed to be fierce independence and the ability to do things on her own.

Tree Young identified as financially vulnerable but did not identify as hungry. After an initial bout of hunger on first moving into the dorms, she figured out how to budget more effectively and no longer experienced hunger. She reported using the food pantry for convenience and savings on different items.

Alex was a Caucasian agender student seeking their AAS. They reported living alone in an apartment in town. Alex, 51, had already earned a BA and described being a lifelong learner, studying subjects of interest simply for personal reward. We met in a study room in the basement library of PNW College and spoke for roughly 20 minutes.

Alex was somewhat nervous to talk with me initially but seemed to relax a bit over the course of the interview. They spoke positively about the supports on campus such as tutoring and TRiO and the resulting overall feeling that the campus cares about students. Alex identified as rarely food insecure and occasionally financially vulnerable. When they used the food pantry, it was with consideration for others; they tried not to access it unless completely necessary and took less food if supplies appeared to be low.

Mulema, at 18, was the youngest participant in the study. A biology student originally from Congo, she identified as African Female. We spent nearly 20 minutes speaking in a small study room in the library of PNW College. She lived at home with her family and was responsible for the care of younger sisters, a brother, and two young cousins.

She was open about her challenges but also her relative ease in attending school. The recipient of a scholarship (two years’ free tuition), Mulema did not identify as financially vulnerable and said she was rarely food insecure. Her accessing the food pantry was mostly a result of long days spent on campus without food. She did, however, point to a greater ability to focus in class and an improved GPA as a result of using the food pantry.

Eliot, 24, was another student who did not attend our originally scheduled meeting; as a result, the conversation took place in the researcher's empty office, due to a lack of other available space on campus. He spoke with me for just over 20 minutes. Initially seemingly comfortable and open, Eliot appeared to become more guarded over the course of the interview, as he shared more personal information. His responses became notably shorter and less chatty.

Eliot, previously homeless but now housed in the dorm, studied biomedical engineering and was planning to transfer to a four-year university. He identified as Male but did not wish to disclose his race. He emphasized the transitory nature of his circumstances, identifying as financially vulnerable and food insecure "for now."

Brooke, 44, identified as a White Female. She missed our originally scheduled meeting, so our conversation by necessity took place in my empty office, due to a lack of other space available to book on campus. She lived with her husband and identified as borderline financially vulnerable. Despite using food banks in the past, she did not identify as food insecure. Her current financial situation was stated to be the direct result of a job layoff in August 2018, in which her family income went from two earners to only her husband's earnings, just over the minimum amount to avoid being eligible for public benefits.

A graphic design student with a 4.0 GPA, Brooke was extremely expressive on a variety of topics; she did not hesitate to provide input and suggestions on many aspects of the campus food pantry, from flyers to planting food to service learning opportunities.

The interview lasted a full 30 minutes and covered a wide range of subjects. Brooke seemed a bit nervous, speaking quickly and flitting from topic to topic, but she was assured in her ability to give input and advice.

Table 4.1 Participants

Pseudonym	Program	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Living Situation
Jay	Nursing	23	Filipino	M	Home with parents
Kay	Computer Science	19	African American	F	Dorm
Akeem	Education	22	Black	M	Lodger
JJ	Aviation	20	Asian	M	Apartment with friends
Lea	Certificate	71	White	F	Home with young children
Tree Young	DTA	23	African Diasporan	F	Dorms
Alex	AAS	51	Caucasian	Agender	Apartment
Mulema	Biology	18	African	F	Home with parents
Eliot	Biomed Eng	24	Not disclosed	M	Dorms
Brooke	Graphic Design	44	White	F	With Husband

Food Pantry at PNW College

Summary

This study invited extended feedback from student users of a campus food pantry to solicit their input as to how the facility supports their needs and to understand their interactions with the pantry. As a byproduct of soliciting the student experience, effective elements for food pantry implementation were revealed that will ideally impact future practice and policy.

This study was grounded in an interpretivist philosophical approach. The interpretive worldview recognizes that everyone has his/her own truth and voice to be heard and experiences that deserve to be shared. This approach fits especially well with a phenomenological inquiry that asks students about their encounters with a food pantry in supporting their success.

As the researcher, I approached this study with some bias around community college students and the importance of equity. In addition, I have worked on the campus where the study is situated for over two decades and have a vested interest in improving our support for students. I am active in the community in equity work. Fortunately, an interpretivist approach recognizes the subjective nature of researcher interpretation and accounts for this through the reality of diminished generalizability. Of particular interest was discovering the degree to which students feel that their interaction with the food pantry supports their academic outcomes. This knowledge may, in turn, influence future food pantry methods and policy, both at PNW College and more broadly.

I selected a qualitative approach for this study and, in particular, a phenomenological inquiry. This type of study gives voice to food pantry users, which is significant not only in studying the collective phenomenon but also in the social justice aspect of this work, in that valuing student stories adds a layer of empowerment for participants. The strength of this approach is that phenomenology attempts to find meaning in the everyday by asking about what a particular experience is like for an individual. Ten research interviews were conducted among a sample of students utilizing the food pantry during Spring Quarter 2019 at PNW College. Phenomenological inquiry offers distinct steps for data analysis, from bracketing and the treatment of researcher bias, phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and the production of a composite description. Data analysis took place over the two quarters following data collection, with deeper analysis around emergent themes continuing beyond that period.

In order to protect participants and ensure confidentiality, personal information was stored securely in password protected electronic documents. Also, the use of pseudonyms protected individual identities. As participants may come from vulnerable populations, special care was taken to empower the students at every possible opportunity, including informed consent but also in the provision of clear information about the ability to quit the study without recourse. Indeed, one student chose to exit the study upon learning of time commitment but was fully compensated nonetheless.

Study delimitations included the omission of housing instability as a focus, restricting the study to student food pantry users only, avoiding a concentration on food deserts, and focusing on a single community college campus. Limitations included the number of students visiting the food pantry during the time allotted for research, restrictions on access, and the proportions of students wishing to engage in a follow-up interview beyond the basic, existing exit survey provided by the college. Furthermore, the participants represented students accessing the food pantry and not necessarily the full cohort of students experiencing food insecurity on campus.

Chapter 4 will discuss results of the study, presenting the themes that emerge as a result of this phenomenological inquiry.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the findings of the research, which considers the following research question: What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College?

Findings are presented here as four themes, each with multiple subthemes. The theme of challenges represented the subthemes of food pantry barriers, educational obstacles, and stigma. The theme of survival attributes covered strategy, resource, and priorities. A third theme of personal characteristics comprised subthemes of resilience, caring, feelings, worry/apprehension, and self-sufficiency. Finally, a theme of food pantry impacts contained education/increased focus, validation, and improved health.

The chapter closes with suggested improvements for the food pantry as outlined by participants.

Findings

Four themes were identified with subthemes within each. The first theme was challenges. Subthemes within that area included food pantry barriers, educational obstacles, and stigma. The second theme was survival attributes. The subthemes within survival attributes were strategy, resource, and priorities. A third theme was personal characteristics, with subthemes including resilience, caring, feelings, worry/apprehension, and self-sufficiency. Finally, a fourth theme outlined the results of having a campus food pantry. Subthemes within this area included education/improved focus, validation, and improved health.

Theme 1: Challenges

Within the theme of challenges, three subthemes emerged: food pantry barriers, educational obstacles, and stigma. Participants spoke of food pantry barriers, liking the convenience of open access but also wanting some sort of check that PNW College students only were using the facility. A full income/assessment of need check was not recommended. Some participants believed that there could be an abuse of the system. While participants appreciated their role in being able to choose items, they generally expressed a preference for a point system rather than five-item limit. Within the educational obstacles subtheme, participants shared their difficulties in studying while also juggling family demands, childcare, health considerations, work, hunger, money issues, exhaustion, disability, lack of insurance, and transportation problems. Many held multiple jobs or grappled with unemployment. Finally, within the stigma subtheme, participants generally expressed a lack of feeling stigmatized in using the campus food pantry. The study, in soliciting volunteers who would agree to sit with a faculty member and discuss hunger, admittedly self-selects for students who might be less likely to experience less stigma. Also, the no-barrier access at the food pantry at PNW College may help to alleviate stigma. Furthermore, any accessing of the food pantry may favor students who feel less stigma to begin with.

Subtheme 1: Food pantry barriers. There was some frustration among participants concerning access at the food pantry. While most appreciated the ability to enter freely, one participant was concerned about abuse: Jay said, “They don’t require ID here. I think they should still provide an ID here because what if students that are not attending here just went here because they heard about it?” For others like Mulema, the fact that ID was not required as it is at nearby schools was a positive attribute. About a neighboring campus, she noted, “You have to write your name and show your ID, and the stuff that you have to get is limited.”

Similarly, the limit of five items was seen as problematic by some students. Lea would prefer a point system that would allow greater choice, saying, “Pick out whatever you want and pay them with the points you have.” Brooke noted, “It’s frustrating that it’s a limit of five items.” Some participants observed that the items were not of equal value, explaining that a point system would be more equitable: for example, a granola bar and a bag of rice are each counted as one item. As Kay reflected: “Five items are OK, but I feel like the five-item thing should mainly be for bigger items compared to smaller items.”

Subtheme 2: Educational obstacles. Participants reported significant non-academic barriers to their educational success, including money, family obligations, health issues, disability, and homelessness. Many, including Jay, remarked on the price of education: “Classes are just too expensive. You can’t afford food because you also pay for housing, stuff like that.” Kay asked, “People in the dorms are well known to be so hungry because they’re paying for rent and they’re paying for classes, and how can they find any kind of money to feed themselves?” Akeem echoed this sentiment: “Costs is a big part. Cooking is a struggle cause you gotta make time for cooking and meal prep and usually you’re either tired, like with my three jobs, or I just don’t have time. Life of a college student is hard.” Even students without money troubles benefited from the food pantry. International student JJ said, “It helps my budget. If I don’t want to go to the supermarket for grocery shopping, it helps because it’s in the campus, so I don’t have to drive to take a bus to pick up things.”

Family obligations also weighed heavily on participants. Jay remarked, “I try my best to help my parents.” Kay expressed the stress of caregiver commitments: “Recently, I had to take care of my family because my mother was in the hospital for a week or two. So draining, but I’m glad that’s over. But every now and then I will take care of family.” Those in parental roles struggled too. Lea had to sit out a quarter, though she wished to keep studying: “I won’t be able to take those classes this summer. I won’t have enough hours, so it won’t cover my childcare.” She also reflected, “I wouldn’t be able to go to school without help with tuition and help with books. Sometimes the money isn’t there, so realizing that I need to raise two children, and I’m the responsible parent…” Even younger students without their own children sometimes took on parental duties. Mulema explained, “I am responsible for taking care of my sisters and my brother. Also my cousins, two of them are little, so every time I have school and I go to work, I have to go back and babysit them.”

Students remarked on their health challenges and even continued disability. Alex highlighted this issue, saying, “Some months, I’m also on disability and I only work part time, and some months, I have less money than other months.” Many participants spoke of hunger and the difficulty of food insecurity. Akeem said, “I experience hunger on a daily basis, and I’m just constantly working.” Eliot explained, “I was hungry. I didn’t have any money. I experience hunger all the time. For now.” Finally, students revealed a variety of housing situations. Most notably, Eliot moved straight from the streets to the dorm at PNW College. That he could enroll in college was a surprise, even to himself: “I was homeless for a while before this and didn’t really think I was gonna be able to get here.”

Subtheme 3: Stigma. Though stigma is commonly associated with food pantry or food bank use, when asked, students spoke openly about the relative lack of stigma around using the food pantry. Most seemed to have become comfortable with using the food pantry. Akeem, in a fairly representative statement, noted, “I used to feel like I don’t wanna go there, but recently, I’ve been like it’s free food, and food is food. You get nourishment from it, so why not eat it? Whatever’s gonna feed me at the end of the day, and so I don’t think it particularly matters to me anymore.” Lea agreed: “A lot of people feel there’s a stigma associated with the food pantry, but I don’t. I’m grateful that they’re here.” She further queried, “I’m wondering if those who would feel a stigma, it’s preventing them from going and getting the help.” Tree Young framed it differently for herself: “I feel like it’s a student grocery store. Honestly, I’m not too big headed to not go to a place just because it’s dubbed food pantry.”

Many students spoke about embarrassment and shame, or a lack thereof. Alex admitted to a small amount of self-consciousness, saying, “I probably wouldn’t volunteer that I go there, but I guess I wouldn’t feel too embarrassed (if people found out). Just a little embarrassed.” Mulema was more matter-of-fact: “I feel like if there is something that’s there for you, you should use it. And I feel good using it.” Jay said, “It’s helping me, and if it’s helping me, I would like to spread the word to more people who need to find that food.”

Eliot and Brooke both addressed their lack of shame. Eliot described running after the school bus in his early teen years, and said, “Any shame I felt about anything went away in middle school.” Brooke stated simply, “I’m not shame based.”

Theme 2: Survival Attributes

A second theme emerged in the study regarding survival attributes, and included subthemes of strategy, resource, and priorities. Strategy involved students making use of all available resources, using the food pantry at the end of the month, especially, and combining food from the pantry with that obtained at local food banks and food stores. The resource subtheme acknowledged the food pantry as a campus investment that led to better nutrition and healthier eating to mitigate actual hunger and food insecurity. Additionally, participants cited comfort, convenience, financial savings, and gratitude for its presence. It offered peace of mind and served universally as a back-up plan for students at PNW College. Finally, the priorities subtheme emerged as evidence of the hierarchy of student needs. Participants often had to prioritize food and housing over their studies. Their survival necessitated sacrifice and finding food first.

Subtheme 1: Strategy. Study participants used a variety of strategies to combat food insecurity and hunger. In a raw and revealing example, Kay explained, “Towards the end of each month, I would have to ration things out. I even use a method of drinking water so that I can subside that hunger.” Tree Young talked about her methods: “It’s all about being strategic and not giving up, because if there’s a will, there’s a way. That’s how I survive.” Eliot pointed out, “Not having food kinda puts you back in that survival mode.” He explained, “I can supplement with stuff I get from the food bank.” Another participant, Lea, was pragmatic: “We eat what’s available. We eat what’s on sale. We eat what someone gives us. But there’s never a question of being hungry. We may not always have what we want, but we always have good food.” She expressed frustration in people experiencing hunger, saying, “There’s no reason for anyone to go hungry, because there is food available and there are people willing to help.”

Subtheme 2: Resource. The food pantry at PNW College was recognized by all participants as a resource. “I don’t have to be worried about being hungry during the day,” said Kay. Echoing this statement, Lea stated, “Just knowing that the food pantry is there is a stress reliever for me.” She continued, “I have used it several times, when I’ve needed that extra food and I was impressed with the variety that was available.” JJ said, “It helps to save me money and sometimes saving time.” Having the food pantry on campus was seen as a real lifesaver. Mulema explained, “Whenever I’m hungry and I don’t have any money, I just go there.” Brooke further detailed, “Just knowing it was here and I could run and grab something…and the fact that it’s in a school rather than a church or community center – it’s convenient, it’s nice. I like having it there as back-up.”

A number of participants remarked on how welcome they felt at the food pantry. Kay said, “I feel better here. Because it’s more comfortable.” Akeem agreed, saying, “This is such a nice community around here. I just feel like this is a place where I can be safe and just be relaxed.” Alex noted, “I’m glad it’s there, and it’s been helpful.”

Even among students with less need, the food pantry was seen as a resource. International student JJ said, “I go for free food. Domestic students, this is helping them for saving their money.” Brooke described the pantry’s benefits: “It’s nice not to have to think about another thing. It’s there, it’s convenient, it’s easy, it’s nice, it’s clean, it’s not messy. All of those things make you feel better about yourself.” Tree Young summed up the situation: “Food insecurity is not a joke, especially for college students who are independent.”

Subtheme 3: Priorities. Participants expressed a challenge around prioritizing various demands. School and work were seen to be competing interests: as Akeem said, “I can either do this job and save money and get my rest in, or I can hurry up and finish school.” Financially, there were conflicting challenges as well. Tree Young noted, “When I first worked in the dorms, I had to stretch out my dollars.”

Hunger was generally seen as at odds with other demands. Akeem talked about the distraction of hunger, saying, “If I haven’t eaten, I’m focusing on trying to get out of class to go eat, like I just wanna get something in my stomach.” Eliot echoed this sentiment: “Being hungry, you just feel lethargic and not really able to do much of anything.” Alex tied the experience directly to theory, noting, “The food pantry is part of Maslow’s triangle. If you can’t eat, you can’t get any of the rest of it.”

That survival attributes emerged as a key theme to the study speaks to the appropriateness of its theoretical framework. That participants noted the need to focus on survival over academic excellence – and even called out Maslow by name – validates the theory’s use in the study. The importance of the food pantry as a campus resource and the use of a variety of strategies illustrated some evolved survival thinking on the part of the participants.

Theme 3: Personal Characteristics

A variety of personal characteristics emerged collectively as a third theme of the study and included resilience, caring, feelings, worry/apprehension, and self-sufficiency. The subtheme of resilience emphasized student pride in survival and pointed to character building, independence, and empowerment. The caring subtheme represented altruism among students and their conscientious use of the food pantry. Many helped to promote and inform about the food pantry, donate when possible, and share food or cooking. Participants would generally not use the pantry when it wasn’t absolutely necessary; when stock was low, they frequently took fewer items than allowed. Interestingly, the more frequent mention of money issues seemed to correspond to more considerate use of the resource. Feelings referenced in the third subtheme included shame, dependency, guilt, and resignation. The fourth subtheme, worry/apprehension, covered anxiousness about the first use, which was seen as universally difficult. Every participant who spoke of this had a quick peek inside the food pantry to check it out before coming back to take food on a separate visit. Participants talked about the impact of worrying about food. Finally, the subtheme of self-sufficiency involved discussion on meal prep and planning, developing cooking skills, and wanting to teach others the basics of cooking and nutrition.

Subtheme 1: Resilience. A strong theme among participants’ lived experience was resilience. Many students had overcome severe hardship just to get to school, as Akeem did. He shared, “I was kicked out when I was 16. I learned how to navigate. I was taught to persevere through those hardships.” Students who identified as independent or alone were not necessarily lonely but keenly aware of their status. Tree Young expressed this in a positive manner: “It builds character, knowing that I’m doing this without a lot of help.” Akeem explained in a matter-of-fact way, “I don’t really have a backbone or a family to support me.”

Pride and persistence showed up in many stories. Tree Young said, “I am a person who doesn’t give up, so I made it work for me. I definitely don’t allow anything to be an excuse because if it’s something you really want to do you’ll find a way, no matter how long it takes. That's what I do. I get it done." There was also a great deal of awareness around the temporary basis of their food insecurity and financial stress. The resilience exhibited now was understood to be a strength that would be carried with the participants. As Tree Young explained, "I'm OK. And I'll be OK throughout the rest of my career."

Subtheme 2: Caring. Students exhibited a great deal of concern for others in a similar situation. Sometimes, this was shown as conscientious use of food pantry resources, as evidenced by Lea, who said, "I try not to use the food pantry if I don't need it." Along the same lines, Alex shared, "When they're low, I don't take as much as I would when they're better stocked, cause I wanna make sure there's enough for other students." They (Alex) continued, "Once in a while, it gets down a little bit and you're like, 'I'll just take one or two items instead of the five they say you can have.'"

Participants were interested in helping to support other students through a variety of means. Jay wanted to inform others: "I would like to spread the word to people who need to find food." Tree Young stated, "I can help students who might be going through something worse than I am." Brooke spoke of collaboration possibilities among various parts of campus and proposed, "Service learning would be a great way of working for somebody else and providing services."

Donations were another way that participants proposed to help other students. Lea explained, "I have donated to the food pantry if I've had extra or have had extra given to me, so that I can pass it along." Alex also was purposeful about giving to the pantry, saying, "Sometimes when I'm doing a little better, I'll donate food, too." Eliot often cooked for a group in the dorm, explaining, "I usually try to share with anyone else who comes by while I'm cooking."

Subtheme 3: Feelings. Participants acknowledged a multitude of feelings associated with food pantry use. Guilt or embarrassment did surface as occasional experiences. Alex noted, “Sometimes I feel guilty, like there’s probably people starving more than me,” as they (Alex) gestured to their belly. Mulema explained the effect using the pantry on her: “Sometimes people feel like using it makes you less than other students.” Kay echoed this idea of self-consciousness about food pantry use, saying, “It’s an iffy thing. I’ll admit, I go to the food pantry cause I’m hungry, but…” Brooke related a story in which she interacted with a fellow student, remembering, “You made fun of me, so I’m only now telling you about it.”

Beyond the emotional effects of using the food pantry was an awareness of lack of choice or control. When asked about the selection of foods at the pantry, Alex replied, “Beggars shouldn’t be choosers.” Even those without a great deal to say regarding feelings about food insecurity still evidenced an attitude, as Eliot’s response revealed. He said shortly, “I feel fine. I don’t know.”

Subtheme 4: Worry/Apprehension. Worry and apprehension about using the food pantry surfaced in two ways during the interviews. The first was the initial anxiety around using the food pantry for the first time. Jay related, “At first I just went to glance at it, what it looks like, cause I was just kinda nervous.” While students universally shared that the first visit was the most difficult and anxiety producing, sometimes the nervousness would resurface. Kay shared, “Every now and then I’ll get a little bit worried to even step in, but once I step in, the people are welcoming, and I feel welcomed.”

The second way in which worry and apprehension were mentioned was in acknowledgment of the freedom from worry provided by the food pantry. Kay said, “The biggest impact is my relief from the worry of being hungry.” Lea noted a similar experience: “It takes a lot of the stress off because I know that it’s there. I know that my children are not gonna go hungry. I know that I’m not gonna go hungry.” Lea continued, “Every bit of help takes that pressure off, adds to the security.” Brooke noted the positive impact as well, saying, “It made me feel confident. It just made me go, ‘OK, I can relax. I can do this.’”

Subtheme 5: Self-sufficiency. Participants spoke of their self-sufficiency in a variety of ways. Many are extremely conscientious about food use and nutrition or food preparation. Kay represented many of the students in saying, “It’s been really helpful because I actually meal prep the whole thing.” Similarly, Lea spoke about great frugality and care many participants exercised in approaching food: “You make choices, you don’t waste food. You know, you make wise choices.”

Many students spoke about the importance of their own self-motivated involvement on campus and its key role in their success. Akeem noted, “I’ve been very productive, building relationships with other students on campus.” Tree Young remarked, “It helps to be active in different organizations, such as TRiO, getting accommodations through CDS, also speaking with other students with really good study habits and learning their study tricks. Also tutoring, meeting with advisers as well as your instructors” and added, “I’ve been active on campus, extremely involved.”

Students also shared insights about their belief in personal responsibility, like Lea: “The help is there, if you can find the resources and you’re willing to do your part.” Ultimately, many students did reflect a survivor mentality of extreme independence and capability; said Tree Young, “I’m alone. I’ve always had this mindset of survival at all costs.”

Theme 4: Food Pantry Impacts

A final theme emerged from the study regarding the impacts of having a campus food pantry. Subthemes included the importance of education, feelings of validation, and improved health. The education subtheme covered the importance of grades and participant identity as serious learner or lifelong learner. Students in the study generally identified as goal oriented and dedicated to their studies and cited the food pantry’s role in contributing to increased focus and, sometimes, GPA as well. The validation subtheme concerned the sentiment that PNW College cares about its students, as do the fellow students who started the food pantry for those experiencing food insecurity. Finally, the subtheme regarding improved health spoke to the better food choices, healthier eating, and ability to recover from significant or chronic illness among participants who cited access to food on campus as key. Further, having a food pantry provided immediate support for those who need it due to illness or conditions such as diabetes.

Subtheme 1: Education/Increased focus. Participants were generally aware of the role of proper nutrition and its availability via the campus food pantry in the context of being able to focus on schoolwork. Jay noted, “Having the food pantry helps at least in order to have a good amount of nutrition in order to function in class.” He continued, “Not having the food pantry means I wouldn’t be active in class.” Akeem felt similarly: “Food is important, because if you don’t eat, you can’t focus. If I haven’t eaten that day, I’m not gonna be paying attention. Food is essential if you wanna be a good student.” Kay concurred: “I can focus more, that’s fair to say. The relief from the worry of being hungry is important." Mulema also understood the role of the food pantry in her ability to concentrate on her studies, saying, "When you're hungry, you can't really focus in class or on anything, you know? But when you get food, you get more energy to function." Eliot echoed this sentiment: "Being hungry makes it hard to do pretty much anything, you know?"

Roughly half of the students pointed directly to an improvement in grades when asked about the food pantry. The other half generally agreed that the food pantry helped with grade improvement once their own words about focus and freedom from worry were restated to them. One of those who immediately recognized the connection between food pantry and GPA, Akeem noted, "I started to use the food pantry again; I felt like my grades were better because I was able to focus more." He continued, "Once I got here and I was eating right, I was able to focus, and I saw a major spark in my grades." Lea was thoughtful about the role of the food supports and her grades: "If the food banks weren't there, I think that would impact my GPA. But the fact that they are and I've known that they are, and I've been able to have that backing…" Mulema saw a clear link between the food pantry and her own GPA, stating, "There has been a difference in my grades, cause my last GPA was not the best." Eliot summed it up, even borrowing from a theoretical framework of this study: "If you're worried about basic needs, it's kind of hard to worry about keeping up with your coursework. It goes back to the whole Maslow's pyramid thing I learned about way back when."

Subtheme 2: Validation. Participants frequently expressed a sense of welcoming and validation from PNW College as a result of having the food pantry as a campus resource available to them. Alex shared, "It's a good feeling that the college cares about you to have something like that." Mulema said, "I'm just thankful that we have the food pantry." Akeem reflected, "I really love this college. I'm glad I was chosen to come here." Lea spoke broadly about her time on campus: "I was so grateful because I learned a lot about things that were available. Counseling and the food pantry and tutoring and financial aid, and people basically bending over backwards to help me." Ultimately, the positivity rooted in the supports provided by PNW College appeared to have wide impacts in how students felt about the school generally: Mulema expressed, "This has been like a home to me, where I can meet new people and have fun."

Subtheme 3: Improved health. A variety of health concerns were noted by participants, as was the positive impact of having the food pantry on campus to support health. Jay said, "The food pantry has been helping me to eat properly. I have been not feeling hungry as often since I first started going to the food pantry." Akeem, sipping on a supplement beverage, noted, "I'm trying to improve my weight; trying to eat more from the food pantry really helps with that." He continued, "I need to survive, I need food, I need to be healthy, and so this is a good opportunity for me to stay healthy." Brooke mentioned a number of health issues in her interview. She said, "I have rheumatoid arthritis and Hashimoto's, so having food that doesn't make me ill or tired is a good thing." Additionally, she spoke of the freedom from anxiety about health provided by the food pantry: "Being a diabetic and knowing that I have access to food is, on another level, relaxing and comforting." Many participants expressed the support for health as echoed by Alex's words: "It helps me eat a little bit healthier. I get something a little better." They joked, "It's helpful to have some food. You don't want me hangry!"

That participants cited education and increased focus, validation, and improved health as impacts of having a food pantry affirms its large significance on campus. Allowing students to concentrate on their education, inviting them to feel welcomed and validated, and helping to support health may all be seen as critically worthwhile endeavors in support of academic progress. Additionally, students supported in these ways appeared to be more likely to engage in campus activities, as seen by the number of student government and residential advisor participants in the study. Of course, the study self-selects for more involved and potentially more assertive students to offer themselves as participants.

Figure 4.1 Illustration

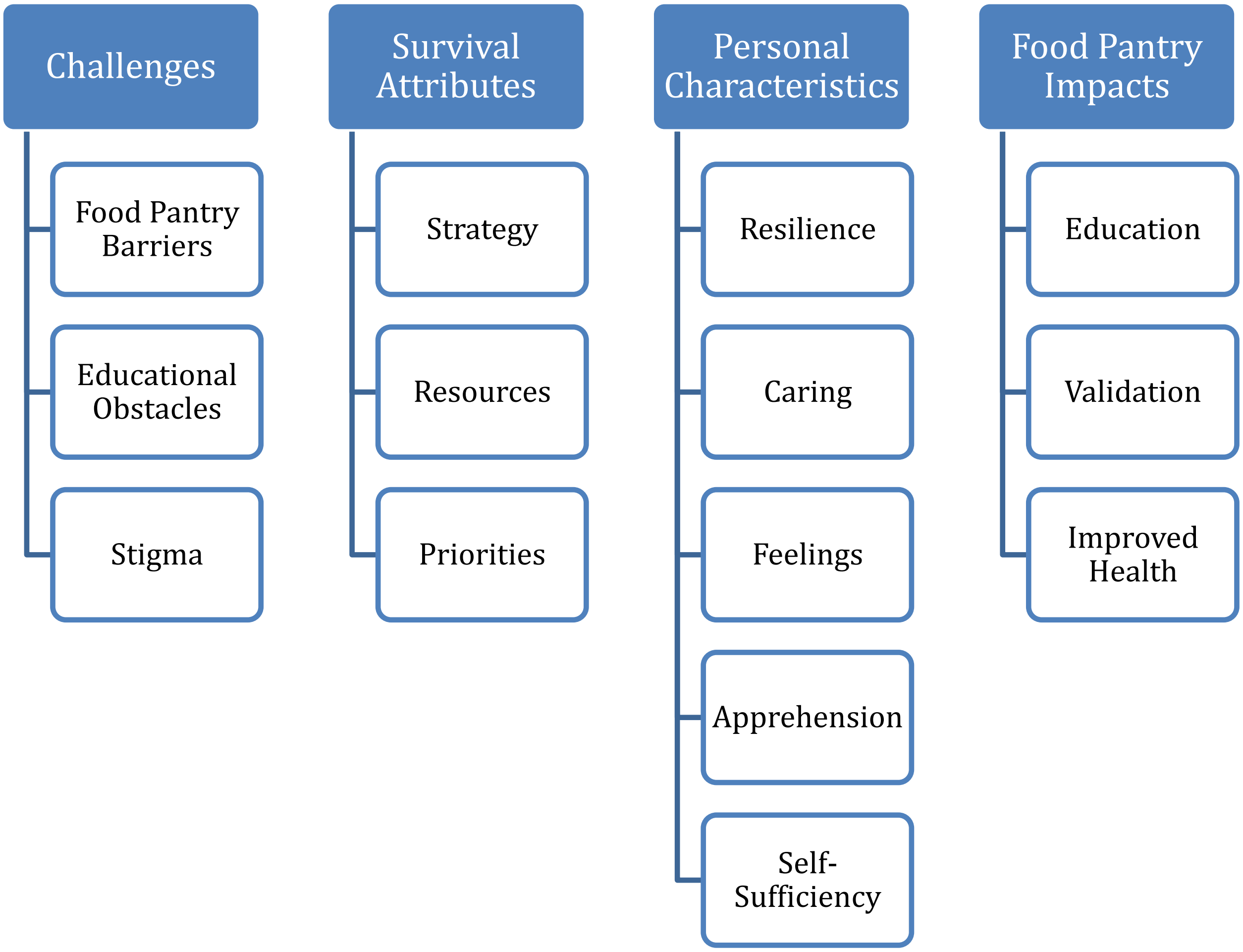
Challenges
Food Pantry Barriers
Educational Obstacles
Stigma
Survival Attributes
Strategy
Resources
Priorities
Personal Characteristics
Resilience
Caring
Feelings
Apprehension
Self-Sufficiency
Food Pantry Impacts
Education
Validation
Improved Health

Figure 4.1. Themes and Subthemes emerging from interviews with food pantry users.

Notes on Themes

The theme of challenges was not a surprising one. Community college students face numerous non-academic barriers to their scholarly success, so hearing participants describe obstacles regarding food, housing, childcare, family obligations, transportation, and health was not shocking (David, et al., 2013). The important question that emerges is how best to support student learning in this context.

Within the theme of personal characteristics, it was noted that anxiety contributed to a lack of focus, and community colleges with open access may enroll students with mental illness than a competitive university. Certainly, students' issues vary, and community college students as a whole have more significant psychological concerns, coupled with fewer institutional resources (Katz, D. S., & Davison, K., 2014).

While a theme of personal characteristics is not necessarily revolutionary to discover, it was possibly not anticipated that community college students would speak of resilience and self-sufficiency. Perhaps more surprising among individuals exhibiting a survival mindset were findings of altruism, extensive planning and cooking skill, and recognition of the role of the food pantry in combatting worry.

Suggested Improvements

Study participants were asked directly about what might improve their experience at the food pantry. Not surprisingly, they offered a variety of suggestions for bettering the two-year-old facility at PNW College. In addition to proposing planting a garden, collaborating with service learning, adding a microwave, fridge, and freezer, expanding/updating the facility, and promoting it more widely through orientation and College 101 classes, students universally asked for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Many students asked for longer hours that would allow them better access to the food pantry. Specifically, Jay requested, “Having longer hours and having it open Monday-Friday.” Explained Kay, “I have to figure out a break during the day to go and quickly get my items.”

Participants universally requested the availability of fresh food items. Lea voiced, ““I wish there was a way they could incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables. Maybe planting fruits and vegetables.” Brooke reflected on the possibilities for service learning as well as fresh foods: “Interclass relationships would be really great. Maybe planting things.” Mulema spoke for many participants asked about the potential for improvement, saying, “I think just by adding fresh food.”

Some students commented on the somewhat uninviting environment within the food pantry. Kay reflected, “It’s plain, and it’s not as exciting to get food from there, so it’s like this feeling of dread.” The pantry was widely seen as location to grab and go rather than to linger and visit. The pantry was also not viewed as adequately stocked. Tree Young wished “it would be more organized, because it not being stocked deters students from using the food pantry.” She continued, “If it was more stocked, it would be more popular. Because a lot of students, they don’t really wanna spend money on Uber Eats.” Certainly, students wished for additional amenities like a fridge or freezer. Added Brooke, “It would be great to actually have a microwave.”

The limit on the number of items that could be taken in a day was also seen as prohibitive. Brooke expressed, “It’s frustrating that it’s a limit of five items.” Those who shared similar views proposed point values or a system that accounted for varying value among single items. For example, a candy might be five for one item, where a bag of rice might count as two items.

Many participants were happy with the location, though some had come across it only fortuitously, because of arts or science classes in the same building. Lea pondered, “I don’t know if it would help to have it in a more centralized area, like in the student union building. But then again, maybe people would feel more embarrassed.” Generally, open access in a visible location was seen as a positive.

Finally, some participants suggested that the food pantry might be missing out on opportunities to teach pantry users, particularly regarding nutrition or cooking. Brooke suggested, “Maybe having a little bit of education, for example, on things that can be used in multiple ways, like baking soda.” Cooking lessons and nutritional information (and nutritionally guided selection) were generally seen as useful initiatives moving forward.

Summary

Ten students at PNW College, representing a variety of areas of study, ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, genders, and socioeconomic statuses, spoke with the researcher in Spring Quarter 2019. They had in common the fact that they had used the food pantry at PNW College on more than one occasion and that they were willing to speak with a researcher who was also a faculty member on campus. As part of the study, they answered a total of 16 questions (or related groups of shorter questions). In the spirit of phenomenological inquiry and its goal of representing the lived experience of participants, the researcher opted in this dissertation to keep quotations intact and let the students’ words take center stage, with minimal intervention. For each study question, each participant’s relevant answer has been placed without commentary.

In terms of addressing the research question – What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College? – the themes broadly responded to each aspect of the query. Student users of the food pantry experienced obstacles, some degree of stigma, and institutional resource as aspects of their lived experiences. Perceptions around the food pantry as an intervention included validation, reported improvement in health, freedom from worry/anxiety, and institutional caring. Finally, the educational impacts were not always initially apparent to participants, but when asked to reflect on their own words, all pointed to educational support, and sometimes even an attributed direct increase in GPA.

As a main goal of the study was to give voice and a platform to students potentially unused to having either, the concept of allowing groupings of participant quotations to support themes directly seemed important. The seven months spent interacting with the interview texts was testament to the fact that the researcher values the privilege afforded her by the students and the emphasis she places on conveying their thoughts as precisely as possible.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In seeking to answer the question “What are the lived experiences, perceptions, and educational impacts for community college students who use the food pantry at PNW College?” a phenomenological inquiry was selected to communicate the participants’ lived experience in interacting with a campus food pantry. This final chapter discusses the study’s major findings, reviews limitations of the study, offers suggestions for further research, and provides reflections and final thoughts.

Discussion of Key Findings

One of the more important findings in this study is that reducing barriers to access appears to help with reducing stigma associated with using a campus food pantry. Because all students and staff may technically use the facility, it is not just “for the poor kids.” Asking for proof of income or ID to show affiliation with campus may be seen as extra barriers that make access more difficult for potential users, both physically and emotionally.

Because we have a food distribution issue in this country rather than an actual food scarcity, the task as a society is to move food around more effectively rather than restrict its availability (de Souza, 2019). Individual or corporate donations, partnerships with local food banks, gleaning, growing food on campus, service learning projects, and college foundation funding (often via staff and faculty payroll deductions) directed at the food pantry are all potential ways to increase the available food and fend off any need to restrict access.

The open access of the food pantry on campus at PNW College also causes philosophical debate around whether such a facility may be abused. This study found that one student who identified as wealthy used the pantry strictly for its convenience and budgetary impact. However, the ratio of self-identified wealthy to non-wealthy students in this study seems to suggest that this type of use is not the norm. The findings of stigma-free (or certainly stigma-reduced) access to food for all campus community members seem to outweigh any allegations of abuse.

While admittedly this study self-selects for students who may be less susceptible to stigma – they were willing to talk to a stranger about hunger, after all – the broad feedback was that there was little shame associated with accessing this particular facility. Beyond this, students felt overwhelmingly relieved about being able to obtain food conveniently and without barriers. This student said it best: “There are some people who abuse it, who may not need the food bank and use it, but I would rather have those type of people served and still have it open for those who need it.” (Lea)

A second key observation from the study is the importance of reflection in understanding the value or significance of an intervention. What students explained and what they fully understood as impact frequently varied in this study. As any classroom teacher knows, reflection is a crucial part of learning (Mezirow, 1998). Students may learn about topics - or in this case, experience the food pantry - without really considering what they know or the impact of this knowledge or resource. One aspect of this food pantry use that might be improved upon is that lack of invitation to reflect.

Participants in this study were asked to consider the role of the food pantry in supporting their education; while half were immediately able to point to academic achievement, the other half had to be prompted to consider how benefits like the ability to show up in class, supporting student focus, relieving stress and anxiety, and promoting personal health might be seen to be bolstering a person’s educational outcomes. After such prompting, using their own words repeated to them, student participants agreed that the food pantry did in fact support their education, and a number of them mentioned Maslow’s (1943) theoretical framework directly. A reflective opportunity would potentially enhance this ability to connect the idea of available campus resources with educational support, much as pupils are asked to reflect on their learning in class (Mezirow, 1998).

Similarly, many of the participants did not initially think that having a food pantry at PNW College was particularly remarkable. When it was pointed out that such a resource did not exist two years prior, they were incredulous and wondered what students possibly did without it. It was in this comparison that participants were suddenly able to appreciate the current resource. If the food pantry could somehow harness this information and invite reflection, it is possible that students would understand more clearly and directly the vital role of the food pantry and its importance in their overall academic and personal well-being (Mezirow, 1998).

A third finding of the study is that a simple intervention can represent an important start. Even the most basic of food pantries can help to make a difference for community college students when compared with not having any such support at all (Lenhart & Petty, 2017). Moving from faculty members handing out granola bars during office hours to a student-initiated and institutionally endorsed food pantry provided not only helped with meeting basic needs but also made students feel welcomed and cared about; it provided validation and evidence of concern. In addition, support services on campus provide comfort and a bridge to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may view higher education as less accessible for them as a middle class institution (Payne, 2005).

It seems that the basic design established by students at PNW College works well: no applications, no proof of need, no badge scanning or ID required, a five-item daily limit, soliciting donations and working with the college foundation. Any other, more elaborate elements, like food literacy education, cooking classes, service learning opportunities, or planting a garden on campus, may certainly be added at a later time (Lenhart & Petty, 2017).

An unexpected and potentially meaningful finding from the study was that most students in this study did not identify as food insecure when asked. Interestingly, many who did not wish to be considered "hungry" did make use of a variety of community supports, including the local food bank in town. To an outsider, this might look like food insecurity, but to those with this lived experience, the term may not fit (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This distinction varies from other studies, in which food insecurity is determined on a five-point scale, and students are defined by external measures.

Participant hesitation about being defined as food insecure or hungry could have implications for how campuses support or reach these students. It is possible that barriers to food pantry access would further cause identity issues around hunger and result in fewer students accessing facilities that purport to help them (Kearns, Muldoon, Msetfi, & Surgenor, 2015). Essentially, "I don't identify as hungry, so this food pantry is not for me, and I will not use it."

A final, important observation from the study process provided a finding that emerged a bit accidentally. Though not the initial goal of the study, peripheral information about obstacles to student success is important to note. As observed previously, over two-thirds of scheduled interviews did not take place as agreed. For example, rescheduling appointments repeatedly, not replying to e-mails, and no-showing entirely for commitments all represented typical behaviors for this participant (and potential participant) group. Repeated attempts by the researcher to reschedule and to reach out were necessary in a majority of cases.

These specific scheduling, organizational, and communication issues are representative of broad behaviors that undermine student success and that have a relevance to classroom success (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012). There exist parallel academic examples such as submitting late work, failing to hand in assignments, missing class, and not communicating with instructors. Often, such behaviors seem to be related to the non-academic barriers mentioned throughout this dissertation: housing, hunger, transportation, health, childcare, and financial challenges. Better understanding of the causes of these behaviors and further supports (beyond college success classes and tutoring centers) are needed to support students at risk of failing to complete their studies as a result of these habits.

Essence of the Data – the Student Experience

While the study participants came from different backgrounds and represented widely varied races, genders, and ages, some commonalities may be drawn in their interactions with the campus food pantry.

Universally, the first interaction with the food pantry was a fleeting one, involving apprehension. Students would come in and check it out quickly, just to look at it to try to understand how it worked, then run away and try again in earnest on the second visit.

They learned about the existence of the food pantry mainly through flyers and posters around campus or by living in the dorm, where it receives great promotion. Some of the students learned about the food pantry through class.

The decision to use the food pantry was made on the basis of a need for food, the ability to save money, convenience of having the pantry on campus, and hunger. A number of the students noted personal health considerations or were on disability.

Frequency of use ranged from once or twice per week to once a month. Typically, once students started using the pantry and became comfortable, they then became more regular users.

Commonly, students found the food pantry to be useful, and they felt welcomed. As a result of the comfort they felt, they were quickly able to overcome their initial hesitation about using the pantry. This corresponded to a positive feeling around visiting the food pantry, and an overall lack of shame was noted. Some students mentioned feeling guilty about taking resources from other students who might need them more. Nearly all cited the easy access as a significant feature that encouraged use of the food pantry.

When asked if they went to the food pantry alone or with friends, participants remarked that they did not really care if others knew they used it and sometimes went with friends or classmates if they happened to be together. Some students preferred to visit alone; those who went with others were often limited by schedule anyway, ending up at the food pantry on their own.

The food pantry was universally seen to be a plain, small, unexciting space. Several called it “grab and go”: certainly no one went to linger. This makes one wonder about the possibility of a deliberate creation of a space purpose-made to attract students and invite them to gather.

As the food pantry is stocked completely with non-perishable items, student favorites were along similar lines. Participants mostly said they took mac and cheese, beans, rice, peanut butter, feminine supplies, cereal, pasta, sauce, and canned fruit and vegetables.

There was general consensus about the results of using the food pantry, with participants saying that it helped them to eat well, aided with finances, and provided security in knowing they wouldn’t go hungry. All saw it as a valuable resource on campus. The food pantry was almost universally seen as an asset that allowed students to improve focus and feel supported, like the college cared.

Less helpful were the issues of no fresh food, along with the need to keep the pantry adequately stocked and schedule more hours.

Participants faced common problems: financial issues (all but one participant), lack of family support, and the need to look for scholarships/funding sources. Family demands weighed heavy: younger siblings cousins to babysit, parents to care for, and young children to raise. Half of the participants were single without these considerations, but they also had no family support.

Among participants, the hunger experienced ranged from almost all the time/frequent to an adamant “I never go hungry.” In supplement of their food pantry visits, many students also frequented the local food bank and other food banks further afield.

Findings Related to the Literature

This study fills several gaps in existing literature. As established in Chapter 2, most previous research on food insecurity focused on proving a need in order to justify establishing campus food pantries. Thirteen years into this phenomenon, the concept of food insecurity among students in higher education is fairly widely illustrated, for example, in the studies by Broton, Frank, and Goldrick-Rab (2014), Goldrick-Rab, Broton, and Eisenberg (2015), and Goldrick-Rab, Richarson, and Hernandez (2017) that studied basic needs in higher education, building on the foundational work of Chaparro, Zaghoul, Holck, and Dobbs (2009) and Freudenberg, Manzo, Jones, Kwan, Tsui, and Gagnon (2011).

There has until recently been an emphasis on understanding hunger among university students rather than community college learners, though this has begun to change, notably with the March 2019 report by Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, and Looker. Though students at community colleges represent a majority of U.S. college freshmen and those of lower socioeconomic status on average, research has chiefly taken place at four-year universities (Ma & Baum, 2016).

Further, most studies have primarily relied on quantitative methods, where students have served chiefly as data points and responded to ratings surveys. This current study gave voice to students not traditionally asked for their stories: community college students experiencing food insecurity. In some extremely important ways, this study represents a novel approach that humanizes our students and puts their experience at the center of the conversation. In an era that demands student-centered learning and recognizes the need for support, this understanding directly from our students' lived experiences is highly significant.

One notable and potentially comparable study employing mixed methods research examined how low-income minority students at an urban community college accessed food on their campus. Students' written narratives illustrated a desire for more affordable and appealing food options on campus and their distrust of the college institution, which influenced their emotional and academic development (Illieva, Ahmed, & Yan, 2018). Findings included perceived difficulties concerning food price and accessibility, the importance of the student voice being heard, the significance of solutions to student food insecurity, institutional strength, and the importance of social supports (Illieva, Ahmed, & Yan, 2018). Participants in the study at PNW College generally felt welcomed and supported by the institution, in contrast to the students in this 2018 study. While PNW College students also noted a lack of convenient and affordable food options, they felt validated and connected to the institution and to peers.

Another recent study considered student perceptions of a campus food pantry, though the college itself was a four-year, rural institution. The conclusion drawn was that food insecure students appreciate and are benefited by a campus food pantry so should be encouraged to use it until long-term solutions are found (McArthur, Farris, Fasczewski, & Petrone, 2019). Students remarked that they felt thankful and supported in using the food pantry, echoing the sentiments of students at PNW College.

A similar study (narrative inquiry) at a dissimilar institution (four-year, rural) pointed to familiar student yearning for resources such as education about cooking and nutrition, connections among peers, and creating awareness of the food pantry

(Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019). Developing personal priorities in budgeting and maximizing resource utilization were also overlapping findings between the 2019 study and the study at PNW College.

Finally, there is still a substantial gap to be filled in the literature. A 2020 study noted the irony in the fact that despite a research focus at many universities, there still exists a lack in meaningful evidence to support programs that enhance student capacity to learn (Davis, Sisson, & Clifton). The authors observed further: though there is an important focus on nutrition and diet, there is still an absence on research about food access and food security on our higher education campuses, and the research team was unable to find published literature addressing program outcomes regarding enhanced food security and access. (Davis, Sisson, & Clifton, 2020).

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research

Students in today's community colleges face obstacles to their academic success that may have little to do with their actual brain power or intellect (David, et al., 2013; Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2014). Instead, food insecurity, housing instability, mental illness, health problems, family demands, transportation, and lack of childcare create an uneven playing field in our classrooms that ultimately perpetuates and exacerbates inequalities in our society. The following section will offer ideas about how findings can be used to inform and potentially improve practice and policy, as well as discussing implications for research.

Implications for Practice

Leaders in higher education, and especially those responsible for our nation's two-year colleges, absolutely must focus on these non-academic barriers that interfere with our students’ persistence and completion rates. Faculty must be aware of the students on their rosters and the hurdles these students face and understand campus resources sufficiently to connect students to supports. Even communicating the availability of campus resources to their students would represent a significant improvement among faculty in many instances. Faculty might consider the addition of a basic needs security statement to their syllabus to inform themselves and their students of available supports (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020). Similarly, campuses might create a basic needs website that lists available supports and consider centralizing fundraising for and distribution of emergency aid (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020). Administrators should support the implementation and running of food pantries on their campuses, in recognition of the great need among students in higher education. Collectively on our campuses, we need to collaborate to form more broad solutions to assist students experiencing challenges.

Part of the challenge is to further reduce any remaining stigma and increase student comfort in accessing supports. For example, in noting that students’ first encounter with the food pantry is generally anxiety-inducing, a potential solution would be for all College 101 classes at PNW College to tour the food pantry. This is a low-stakes way to increase awareness and exposure among students. Similarly, as is done on some college campuses, athletic teams might make it routine to head to the food pantry after practice, whether individual athletes technically need free food or not. Normalizing the use of the food pantry, in tandem with keeping it well stocked, will lead higher usage.

We at the two-year college must consider how best to support students exhibiting strong survival behaviors. How do we harness this power and encourage peer to peer support or mentoring? More importantly, how do we better institutionalize support for students so that they don’t need a remarkable depth of resilience just to make it through a quarter or semester? Offering a sort of support group for new users of the food pantry and connecting them to experienced users is one possibility for improving advocacy and support among students (Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019). Certainly, any sort of mentoring arrangement that connects students and offers assistance would potentially be impactful (Kuh, 2008). Beyond creating a dialogue around food insecurity and promoting available resources on campus and in the community, we must also maximize resource utilization and educational opportunities such as providing recipes or cooking lessons (Daugherty, Birnbaum, & Clark, 2019).

On campus, faculty, staff, and administrators can help to identify successful behaviors in students and work to increase them. College 101/college success classes already teach time management skills and acquaint students with campus resources; faculty could consider expanding content in the curriculum, and they might partner with staff and administrators to consider further opportunities for students to receive this information, such as during orientation, at welcome week, or from student events.

Many research participants unknowingly identified Kuh’s (2008) high-impact educational practices as pivotal to their success. Peer connections, tutoring resources, service learning, and collaboration were all mentioned as fostering positive outcomes. Institutionally, we can find ways to reinforce this knowledge and reward these skills. One emergent idea on the campus of PNW College is a proposed smartphone app that tracks student interaction with various campus resources and offers incentives like discounts at local businesses or actual prizes for visiting the tutoring center, accessing the food pantry, or seeing an advisor, for example. Communicating about campus resources and then encouraging students to make use of them is solid practice.

The positive results of instituting a food pantry on campus must inform and drive campus practices in higher education. While food pantries are more widely present than ever, those campuses without one should consider implementing some method of support for students experiencing food insecurity. Beyond this, campuses will want to begin working with community organizations to direct students to broader community support efforts. Successful models exist of partnerships between campus food pantries and local food banks, perhaps most notably in Houston, Texas (Goldrick-Rab, Hernandez, Coca, Williams, & Richardson, 2020). From this partnership was also born the Houston Food Scholarship Program, which supplies students with free groceries to facilitate degree completion, with the stated goals of promoting economic mobility and potentially reducing future reliance on food banks. Specifically, food scholarships work to support students at risk of food insecurity before it impacts their education. Food scholarships provide a wider variety and greater volume of food than a food pantry, offering nutritional food shown to support cognitive performance and are awarded at the start of the term to help cover students' unmet financial need (Goldrick-Rab, Hernandez, Coca, Williams, & Richardson, 2020). Food scholarships represent an important innovation in practice that should be considered widely.

In addition to thinking about scholarships and, at a minimum, implementing a food pantry, campus leaders should consider how to make food available in other ways.

Vouchers for hot meals on campus and cafeteria receptacles or refrigerators for unused kitchen surplus or unused, unopened food taken by students should be readily available. Food lockers and food hubs in easily accessible locations, as well as snack baskets in various offices around campus make food even more readily available to students experiencing food insecurity, or indeed, to the entire student body.

Strategies to increase understanding about food insecurity also have benefits. Using social media to promote awareness of the campus food pantry, sharing student stories about using the food pantry, and distributing general information about food insecurity may have multiple benefits (Ullevig, Vasquez, Ratcliffe, Oswalt, Lee, & Lobitz, 2020). Not only might students be more informed about resources, but stigma may be reduced through communication and the sharing of stories.

As a number of participants in this study mentioned, there is also potential in establishing a campus garden. However, it is vital to learn from other projects; a recent study outlined the struggles of a campus garden as a result of student turnover, limited financial support, and lack of regulatory guidance (Ullevig, Vasquez, Ratcliffe, Oswalt, Lee, & Lobitz, 2020). The conclusion drawn was that it is imperative to secure college financial support, dedicated staff, and collaboration with local organizations prior to embarking on a garden project. (Ullevig, Vasquez, Ratcliffe, Oswalt, Lee, & Lobitz, 2020).

There may also be an advantage to having a student-led campus food pantry. First, students may be more engaged in participating in initiatives led by other students (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). Further, student programs may be protected from ordinary institutional budget cuts. If food pantries are funded through ASB dollars, for example, administration cannot look to cut these programs to save money in fiscally challenging times. Indeed, during COVID-19, early anecdotal evidence is that student-run campus food pantries have thus far survived in a way that institutionally funded food pantries may not (J. Rhodes, personal communication, May 13, 2020). The student government at PNW College has exhibited adaptability that would not typically be possible through the bureaucracy of the institution. Decisions can be made and students can be served much more expediently via ASB funding and with student staffing. This reality was flagged by Lenhart and Petty (2017) in their work for Achieving the Dream: larger colleges and districts with multiple campuses may take longer to get approval and launch food pantry initiatives. The ability of student organizations to adapt and operate independently, then, suggests that the oversight of a campus food pantry may be best placed in their purview.

In terms of understanding the positive impacts of the food pantry, some sort of reflection should be implemented in order to help students to understand the link between resources like the food pantry and their own success; this might be incorporated widely into campus College 101 curriculum as well as at the food pantry. Certainly, some sort of user survey that asks students to answer reflective questions about the role of the food pantry in supporting their health, freedom from worry, and ability to focus on academics would be a minimum initial effort.

Implications for Policy

Knowledge of non-academic barriers identified in this study, such as food insecurity, housing instability, childcare, transportation, health, and finances, should inform policy in education and in public services, as modeled by colleges that provide wraparound services through links with community transit, public housing, and the food bank. Programs such as those at Tacoma Community College and the University of California, Berkeley offer models for collaboration. Currently, embedded Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) navigators who work for the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) on campus at PNW College represent a move towards integrating social services even within the fabric of the community college. Since January 2020, each Wednesday, an ABAWD navigator sits at the food pantry to familiarize students with resources available to them.

In pockets, there are also new trends towards expanding SNAP eligibility, even as the federal government cuts programs. State Senator Dodd of California in 2019 introduced legislature to increase CalFresh eligibility in that state, saying, “Students shouldn’t have to starve in order to get an education” (Dodd, 2019). Certainly, food pantries on campus represent short-term fixes rather than long-term solutions that must be rooted in policy change.

Loan repayment for our students will become critical, as will understanding the implications of taking loans to finance education. Whether or not debt forgiveness or free college gains further traction nationally, there is an urgent need for students to understand the financial implications of educational attainment. There is a push to increase financial literacy among college students, including pending legislation regarding higher ed curriculum in the State of Washington, which will only help our students to be better prepared and more savvy about their own education.

Understanding the impact of strong personal characteristics, we can leverage the K-12 system to begin to introduce students to success habits from an earlier age. While programs like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) exist in middle and high schools around the U.S., we must develop ways to reach more students before they even arrive on college campuses. Expansion of the current U.S. Department of Education GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) model that exists only in pockets and for certain cohorts – for example, in the school district adjacent to PNW College, it was for the Class of 2017 only – seems an obvious start to reaching more students at an earlier age.

Legislation at the local, state, and federal level would help with food insecurity on campus and food pantry execution, broadly. Rather than scrutinizing response rates in specific studies, acknowledging that student hunger is a problem, especially for community college students, will allow politicians to implement policies to support students in their educational endeavors. Critically, later in 2020, the federal government will begin assessing food and housing insecurity among students using the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey – something they have never done before (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020).

Extending the National School Lunch Program to support learners beyond K-12 would help college students, particularly those at our two-year institutions. On campus, meal vouchers might be provided to fill this gap until legislators recognize hunger among students in higher ed and work to mitigate it through the expansion of federal support programs. Pell eligibility is a ready marker to identify students who would benefit from food supports on campus. On some campuses, like PNW College, dual enrollment students have already identified themselves as receiving free or reduced lunch in high school in order to receive tuition reduction. These students in particular would benefit from food supports on campus in the form of meal vouchers.

Another possibility for policy adaptation would be in the expansion of promise programs. Subsidized tuition allows students to focus spending in other areas, like food, housing, and childcare, thereby lessening the financial burdens and necessity of choosing against education. It is possible that those programs with navigators (ie, Kalamazoo Promise) may be more successful than those without (Jameson-Meledy, 2016). Because promise programs vary by sponsorship, financial award structure (first/last dollar), type of postsecondary institution at which the award may be used, and eligibility criteria (universal versus merit or need), it is important to consider which best meet the needs of students prior to implementation (Perna & Leigh, 2017). All, however, offer an award to individuals who meet defined eligibility criteria and therefore have the potential to promote higher education attainment (Perna & Leigh, 2017).

Implications for Research

More research is needed about what actual supports are helpful to students who face non-academic challenges. Further studies are indicated here regarding the success of current interventions on college campuses, beyond Kuh's high-impact practices (2008).

Further research is needed to determine how best to work with students regarding these success characteristics highlighted in this study, such as resilience and self-sufficiency. Where do they come from? How do we promote them on campus? We already work with students to develop successful study skills in college success classes that didn't exist a decade ago. Colleges need to consider ways to innovate and scale practices that reinforce positive study habits and successful behaviors, while working to support students and their non-academic needs on campus.

More research, particularly on two-year college campuses and involving a qualitative approach, is needed to determine impact and best practices in food insecurity and more widely in supporting our students' success. As so often is the case on our campuses, student opinion is frequently among the last to be solicited. In terms of an issue so major that involves them so implicitly, seeking student input in both future research and solutions will be pivotal.

Because qualitative research is rooted in understanding how people interpret their experiences and what meanings they attribute to these experiences, a qualitative approach helps us to understand meaning for those involved in an experience (Yin, 2016). If we wish to better understand the essence or structure of an experience, then qualitative research is called for (Merriam, 2009). Giving voice to the student story and understanding the student experience requires inquiry that leads to a holistic picture formed with words, reporting the detailed views of informants (Creswell, 1994). Alongside the solid work that has already been done from a quantitative perspective in this research, increasing understanding of food insecurity from a student perspective, using qualitative research, will be vital in fully addressing this fundamental issue in higher education.

Certainly, there is also a need to perform systematic research to look at effectiveness and innovation in terms of program design. Specifically, future research should include intervention studies focusing on outcomes, including, at a minimum, food pantries, but also potentially looking at campus gardens and adapted meal plans (Davis, Sisson, & Clifton, 2020). Continued studies should focus on perceived barriers and contribute to reducing stigma, improving outreach and awareness, and increasing pantry access (El Zein, Mathews, House, & Shelnutt, 2018). A recent program review study offers a glimpse of what might come next in terms of outlining challenges and best practices in food pantry management. Price, Watters, Reppond, Sampson, and Thomas-Brown (2019) noted issues with infrastructure and resources, operations within the university system, building and sustaining partnerships, and data, research, and assessment. There is an opportunity to build upon this work and conduct program reviews of community college food pantries and work to outline best practices.

Across every category comparing two-year and four-year students concerning rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness, two-year students are more impacted by hunger and housing instability (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019). Regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or race, community college students are more significantly impacted by these non-academic barriers. This points to a distinct need for continued research about hunger at two-year colleges in the U.S.

A Caution for the Future

Beginning in mid-2019, there were heard the first rumblings of politicization of hunger as a "liberal" issue, complete with victim blame and with language reminiscent of Reagan's vilification of "Welfare Queens." Considering the fractures within our government and the current administration's larger right-wing agenda, this is hardly surprising. With the conservative media portraying hungry students as snowflakes, food insecurity becomes a polarized issue instead of a universal one, asking that we expend our energies in justifying the existence of hungry students rather than focusing on their support.

For example, *The National Review* published an article entitled, “College Students are not Starving,” which used a lead image of happy students in a cafeteria line receiving heaping portions of warm food. The author found fault with Sara Goldrick-Rab’s methods and response rate, as well as her definitions of food insecurity (Verbruggen, 2019). Rather than acknowledging that many students are hungry on our campuses and lack support with school meals after exiting the K-12 system with its National School Lunch program, conversations that politicize the issue and demonize individuals experiencing hunger detract from the larger problem and prevent us from collectively reaching potential solutions.

More productive are questions around study accuracy that seek to get the solutions right. “The main reason we are concerned about accuracy with these surveys is so we can effectively implement and assess the solutions…if the surveys aren’t accurate, then the endeavors to address college food insecurity are potentially being compromised,” said Cassandra Nikolaus (Smith, 2019). In a personal interview in January 2020, Nikolaus agreed that student hunger was indeed a significant issue on college campuses, especially at the community college level, and that supports such as the food pantry at PNW College represented positive interventions.

Summary

The findings drawn from interviews with ten students revealed a range of themes and important conclusions. Ideas around challenges, survival attributes, personal characteristics, and results of having a food pantry on campus were broad themes, within which food pantry barriers, educational obstacles, stigma, strategy, resource, priorities, resilience, caring, feelings, worry/apprehension, self-sufficiency, education/GPA, validation, and improved health were dominant subthemes.

As related to the existing literature, the study filled in gaps by offering a focus on community college food insecurity, with a qualitative approach rather than quantitative, and using a phenomenological inquiry to highlight the student experience in the students' own words. Participant comments around the effects of hunger, the anxiety of worrying about food, and the prevalence of food insecurity among peers reflected current research on the topic of campus food insecurity.

Additionally, the need for innovations in policy, practice, and future research were highlighted. Five important discoveries were also noted: the part played by no-barrier food pantries in mitigating stigma, the vital role of reflection in using campus supports, the idea that a basic food pantry is absolutely better than none, food insecurity and its relation to identity and what that means for students accessing support services, and more general behaviors that undermine academic success.

In reality, students – particularly those at two-year colleges - are often presented with a complex web of interrelated non-academic barriers and no real support in navigating them. Students facing food insecurity rarely experience this phenomenon in isolation. Frequently, housing instability, childcare issues, transportation challenges, job demands, health problems, and poverty work together as collective obstacles to student success.

In sum, food pantries on campus represent a vital support. Like many other interventions, students do not always recognize the significance of the assistance until a comparison (ie, what if it were not here?) is pointed out. In this way, the ability and space to reflect on meaning is important. The broad impact of food pantries on educational success can be seen: supporting studies and often GPA, allowing increased student focus, and providing freedom from stress and worry just by being there.

Final Thoughts

Students in the community college system do not typically simply lack a native ability to succeed in school. Casual anecdotal testimony among faculty at PNW College suggests that only on extremely rare occasions do students simply lack the brainpower to pass our classes. Students who have managed to navigate the multiple steps to enroll in college courses typically have the mental wherewithal to do the scholarly work.

As defined by Vaughan (2006), community college students are often citizen-students rather than student-citizens, which impacts their ability to prioritize their schooling as a result of outside life demands. Furthermore, there is a gender bias regarding external demands on citizen-students (for example, childcare), and citizen-students more frequently represent lower socioeconomic levels (Vaughan, 2006). When the situation is framed in this way, we can see a clear equity issue on campus.

It is frequently non-academic barriers like food insecurity, housing instability, transportation, childcare, finances, work demands that stand in the way of students' scholastic achievement rather than anything to do with their intelligence. As such, it is our duty as educators to support students by focusing on these inequitable factors. How can we level the playing field so that the couch-surfing single mother raising a child with ADHD and working two jobs has a chance at the same academic success enjoyed by the dual-enrolled teen who drives his own car to campus, was just fed a hot breakfast, and whose parents pay for a private tutor? Beyond this, when we consider that White students have lower rates of food insecurity (36%) than most of their peers, like Latinx (47%), Black (54%), and Indigenous (60%) students (Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020), we are squarely facing a race issue that must be addressed.

Often, higher ed practitioners may be heard to say, “I am not a social worker”; however, it is becoming ever-more apparent that our students desperately need such services to succeed on our community college campuses. It is time to reframe the conversation: away from what students cannot do and towards supportive solutions to help them to achieve their goals at our institutions. Far from being strictly a faculty (or student services) obligation, this is a whole campus issue.

Remembering the promise of community college in promoting accessible education as a great equalizer compels those of us in the field to recognize the deep problem and work toward equitable solutions. Particularly as retention and completion become increasingly important to colleges and their funding, it is worth recalling our wider mission. As Wyner (2014) wrote, “Community colleges send a clear message to students: from a one-year certificate in welding to a two-year preparation for a bachelor’s in engineering, nothing is off-limits” (p. 41).

Students who want to succeed are currently exhibiting extreme resilience and fortitude daily in overcoming non-academic barriers. They do require effective institutional support to have a chance at success on campus and later subsequent social mobility.

In the moving words of Akeem, who was kicked out of his home at 16 and currently works three jobs to put himself through college: “I’m trying to make it work. It’s exhausting.”

EPILOGUE: COVID-19

In view of the global pandemic that began impacting higher education in early 2020, food insecurity is a more pressing matter than ever. The effect of non-academic barriers on student success is likely to become more amplified; certainly, the equity impacts of COVID-19 are already being felt. As one example, the incoming college class in 2020 is likely to be the least diverse in decades (Hurd, 2020).

According to Harvard's Anthony Jack (2020), COVID is exacerbating existing inequities that have been ignored in higher education for far too long. As a result of the pandemic, we now find ourselves in a situation where learning ranks as a third, fourth, or fifth priority; students impacted more severely by COVID are those who have always been juggling other concerns (Jack, 2020). Furthermore, learning from new locales amplifies class inequalities, and food insecurity may be more severe when students are removed from campuses that served as their source of food and housing (Jack, 2020).

In a similar theme, Sara Goldrick-Rab (2020) recommended an emphasis on peer-to-peer resources, as well as an understanding of the stress and anxiety resulting from the COVID pandemic. She pointed out that such stress reduces one's executive functioning, leading to an inability to plan or to think long-term; this is directly reminiscent of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs.

Goldrick-Rab's (2020) recommendation was that campus food pantries make every effort to stay open at this critical time and suggested the possibility of partnering with local food banks. The struggle for students impacted by food insecurity is not new, and it is critical to care for them if we would like them back on our campuses in fall

(Goldrick-Rab, 2020). Some crucial strategies in the near future may include food recovery and distribution and expanding SNAP eligibility (Goldrick-Rab, 2020).

Some campuses like PNW College, where ASB runs the food pantry, have been able to maintain support of students remotely. This is despite a physical campus closure and the moving of college services online. At PNW College, students may sign up on the college website for food pick-ups. A Google form allows them to select family size and dietary restrictions, and a food bag is then prepared especially for their needs, to be picked up at a scheduled collection time. According to the Associate Dean of Student LIFE, because of the increase in donations, generous foundation funding, and a gift by faculty senate, the bags are actually full of a variety of items (J. Rhodes, personal communication, May 7, 2020). Students then come to campus to collect their bag at a drive-through stop, where staff place the goods into student vehicles; there is also a procedure for students on foot to receive food. Ideally, such practices may inform later post-COVID food pantry ability to serve online students who experience food insecurity.

Ultimately, the question is what we in higher education will learn from the COVID disruption (Jack, 2020). The social inequities faced by students, particularly in our community colleges, have been long standing and are being both exacerbated and highlighted in a pandemic world. Our opportunity in higher education is to ponder: in the new normal, what might change? How can we be more student focused? (Goldrick-Rab, 2020). Surely, seeing so clearly and understanding the challenges our students face brings a novel opportunity for improvement.

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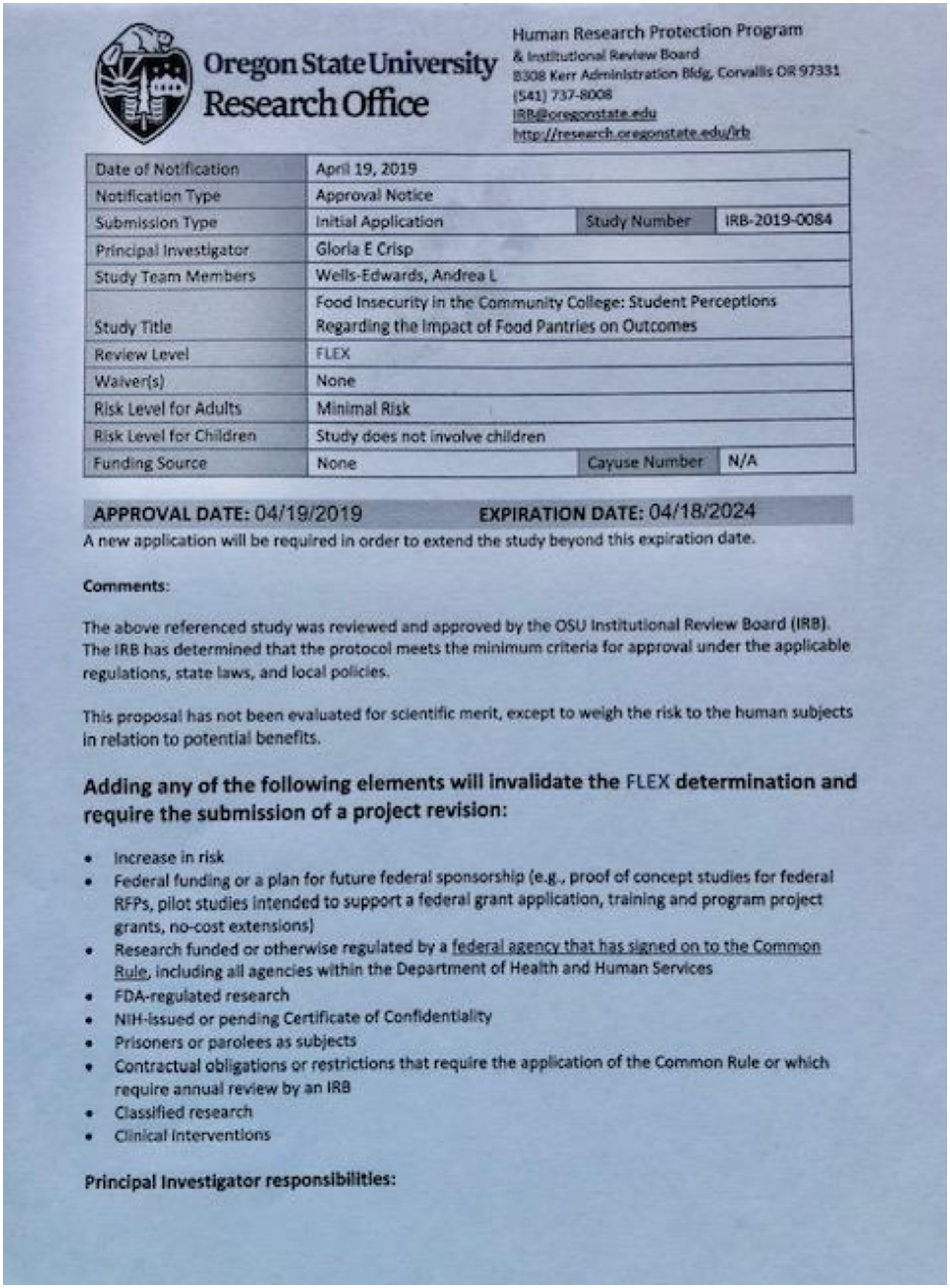
Appendix A



Oregon State University
Research Office

Human Research Protection Program
& Institutional Review Board
B308 Kerr Administration Bldg, Corvallis OR 97331
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IRB@oregonstate.edu
http://research.oregonstate.edu/irb

Date of Notification	April 19, 2019		
Notification Type	Approval Notice		
Submission Type	Initial Application	Study Number	IRB-2019-0084
Principal Investigator	Gloria E Crisp		
Study Team Members	Wells-Edwards, Andrea L		
Study Title	Food Insecurity in the Community College: Student Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Food Pantries on Outcomes		
Review Level	FLEX		
Waiver(s)	None		
Risk Level for Adults	Minimal Risk		
Risk Level for Children	Study does not involve children		
Funding Source	None	Cayuse Number	N/A

APPROVAL DATE: 04/19/2019 **EXPIRATION DATE:** 04/18/2024

A new application will be required in order to extend the study beyond this expiration date.

Comments:

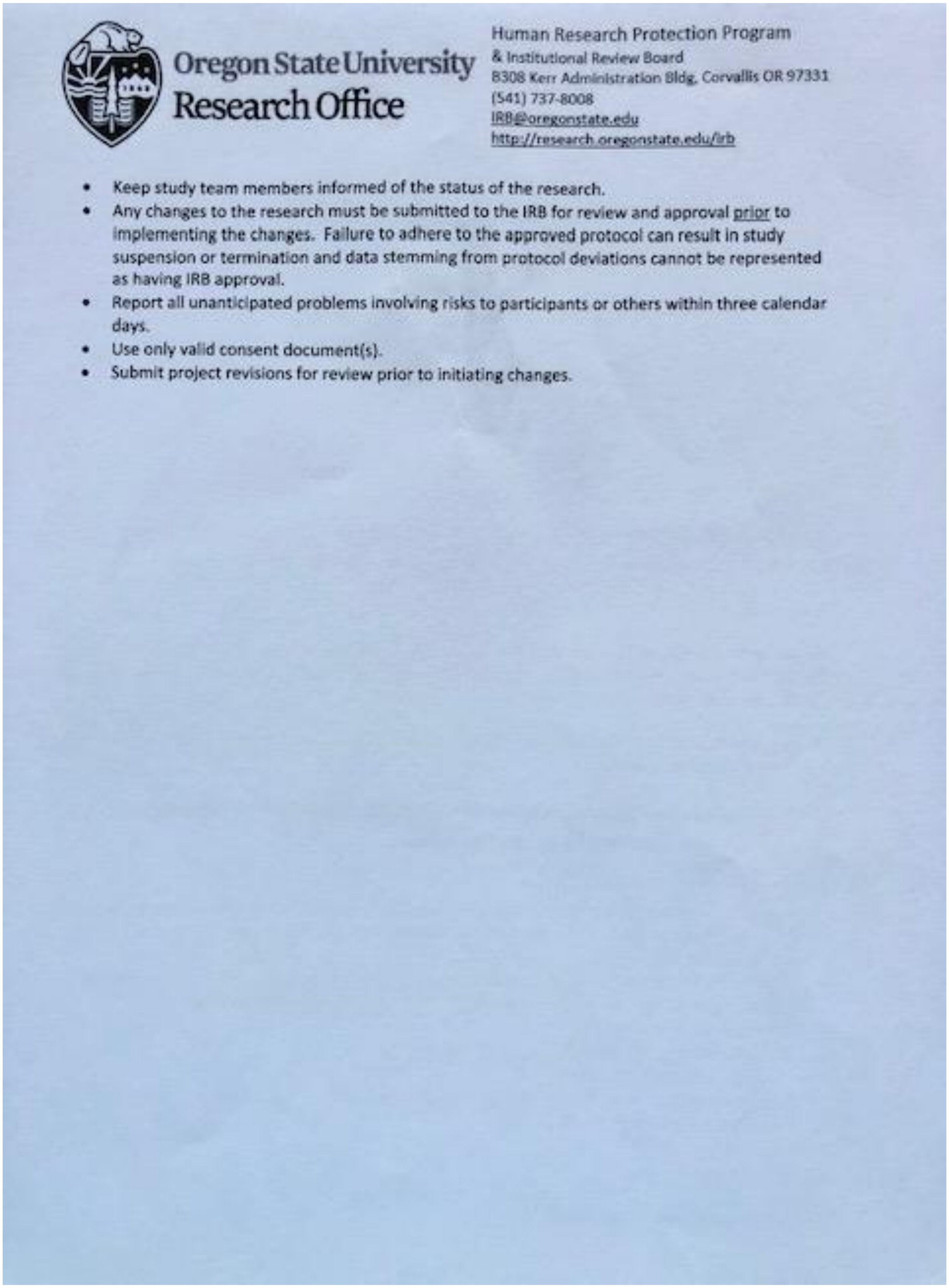
The above referenced study was reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that the protocol meets the minimum criteria for approval under the applicable regulations, state laws, and local policies.

This proposal has not been evaluated for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human subjects in relation to potential benefits.

Adding any of the following elements will invalidate the FLEX determination and require the submission of a project revision:

- Increase in risk
- Federal funding or a plan for future federal sponsorship (e.g., proof of concept studies for federal RFPs, pilot studies intended to support a federal grant application, training and program project grants, no-cost extensions)
- Research funded or otherwise regulated by a federal agency that has signed on to the Common Rule, including all agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services
- FDA-regulated research
- NIH-issued or pending Certificate of Confidentiality
- Prisoners or parolees as subjects
- Contractual obligations or restrictions that require the application of the Common Rule or which require annual review by an IRB
- Classified research
- Clinical interventions

Principal Investigator responsibilities:



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- Keep study team members informed of the status of the research.
- Any changes to the research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementing the changes. Failure to adhere to the approved protocol can result in study suspension or termination and data stemming from protocol deviations cannot be represented as having IRB approval.
- Report all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others within three calendar days.
- Use only valid consent document(s).
- Submit project revisions for review prior to initiating changes.

Appendix B

Would you like to help with research?

Students who have used the campus food pantry on more than one occasion are needed!

Your experience with the campus food pantry can help us to understand more about how food pantries work in community colleges to support student success. By spending up to an hour of your time in an interview and a half hour reviewing the interview transcript later, you can offer some insights that might help us to better help community college students.

What is it about?

The goal of this research is to understand the experience of community college students who use the campus food pantry. In particular, I would like to interview students 18 or older who have used the food pantry on more than one occasion and who are not enrolled in any of my classes.

What do participants do?

I will ask the students to work with me in a one-hour individual interview. This will be arranged at a time convenient for participants and will take place in an office on campus. After the interview, participants will be asked to review the interview notes for accuracy and e-mail back any corrections. They will have two weeks to do this. As a "thank you" for participating, each student will receive a $10.00 Target gift card, even if they are not able to complete the whole study.

How do we get in touch?

If you are interested or know any students who fit our description and who might enjoy helping with our short study, please contact the student researcher named below. We will be in touch!

Andrea Wells-Edwards, wellseda@oregonstate.edu or 425-366-7649

Thank you for considering participation in this research!

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

The interviews will take place in a quiet office on the campus where the participants are located. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher (per phenomenological inquiry). An interview will be conducted one-on-one for one to two hours.

Questions listed below represent a script to structure the interviews. It is anticipated that the order of questions will be followed; however, if additional topics arise that relate to the questions asked, it is important to explore fully the topic of the participants lived experiences with the food pantry (in accordance with phenomenological inquiry). Below is an overview of the protocol to be submitted to IRB:

Purpose of the research study and reason for your participation:

I am asking you to take part in a study about the experiences of students using the food pantry on campus. Research has shown that it is important to provide such resources on college campuses, and I am interested in learning about students' experiences with the food pantry that has been established. I invite you to take part in this research study because you are a community college student who has used the food pantry, and learning of your experience and your challenges or support is important.

Conditions surrounding your participation:

I will explain this research study to you.
Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You can choose not to take part.
You may agree to take part and later change your mind.
Your decision will not be held against you.
You can ask any questions you wish before you decide.

Contact information:

If you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think the research has harmed you, you may speak to the primary investigator for this project, Andrea Wells-Edwards, at 425-366-7649 or wellseda@oregonstate.edu.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oregon State University. You may also contact the IRB at 541-737-3467, by emailing IRB@oregonstate.edu, or through their website: https://research.oregonstate.edu/irb.

Participation in the research study:

If you agree to participate in the study, Andrea Wells-Edwards will contact you to schedule a one-on-one interview. For the interview, your name and any identifiable information will be removed. You may also elect to use a pseudonym of your own choosing. Your responses will be kept in a locked drawer and will not be seen by anyone except the primary researcher.

You will be asked to participate in an interview with Andrea Wells-Edwards that will last up to one hour. As a follow up, Ms. Wells-Edwards may contact you for clarification and will share her notes with you to allow you to check the accuracy of her recording of the conversation (member checking).

The interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you in a private room on campus sometime during the Spring/Fall 2019 quarters. If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to provide Andrea Wells-Edwards with your email address and phone number. This information will be kept in a locked drawer and will not be seen or used by anyone except the primary researcher. Any work done by the researcher on her own personal computer will be password protected as well. The interview assignments and interview notes will be retained for use in future research conducted by Andrea Wells-Edwards.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts to participating in this research study.

Participant Privacy and Research Record Confidentiality:

Your interview assignment and interviewer notes will not contain anything to connect your identity with your information. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. Your records may be viewed by the Institutional Review Board, but the confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The data resulting from your participation may be used in publications and/or presentations, but your identity will not be disclosed.

Interview Questions:

What programs do you currently use on campus?
Do you have challenges to funding your education? Do you feel that your basic needs for food and shelter are being met (relates to Maslow’s theory)?
You’ve kindly agreed to come here today to talk about the food pantry on campus. How often do you use the PNW College food pantry? How long have you been using it?
How do you decide when to use the food pantry?
How often would you say that you experience hunger (food insecurity)?
What is your experience with the PNW College food pantry (guiding question – allow most time for this reflection)?
Do you feel that visiting the food pantry has an impact on how you do in school?
Is there anything about how the food pantry is run that seems to help you?
Is there anything about how the food pantry is run that might be changed to better help you?
What is your experience with navigating college life in general? How easy is it to find and use resources?

	Are there any other challenges that you can think of that affect your success or ability to stay in school?
	Finally, do you have any other ideas about how the college might better support your success in school?

Appendix D

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM – OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Study Title: Food Insecurity in the Community College: Student Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Food Pantries on Outcomes

Principal Investigator: Gloria Crisp

Student Researcher: Andrea Wells-Edwards

Version: April 17, 2019

We are inviting you to take part in a research study.

Purpose: This study is about your experiences with the campus food pantry. We hope that by hearing about your time at the food pantry, we can learn about whether it helps you and how. We also want to discover ways that we can better support students on campus. Findings will be used for the student researcher's dissertation.

We are asking you if you want to be in this study because you are a full or part-time student (18 and over) who has accessed the campus food pantry on at least one occasion.

You should not be in this study if you are not a current student, if you are under the age of 18, or if you are currently or have previously enrolled in a class taught by Andrea Wells-Edwards.

Voluntary: You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your decision not to participate or to participate will not impact the services you are receiving from the food pantry, your standing at the college, or your relationship with the student researcher.

Activities: The study includes an interview that will take approximately an hour to complete. As part of the study, the researcher will contact you again a few weeks later to ask you for clarification regarding any of your interview responses or to get your feedback about the findings. You will have two weeks to respond to the request for feedback. If you choose not to provide further feedback, your data will be used as originally captured.

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be asked to provide Andrea Wells-Edwards with your email and phone number. This information (name, e-mail, phone number) will not be seen or used by anyone except the study team. The interview assignments and interview notes will be retained for use in future research conducted by the researchers.

Information collected from you for this research will be stored by the researchers for future use. We are asking your permission now to use or share your data without asking you again in the future. Future use of your data will be limited to research involving food insecurity. All identifying information will be destroyed once data collection is complete. If you do not consent now to future use of your information, you should not participate as we will be unable to remove your information from the larger data set once identifiers have been destroyed.

Time: Your participation in this study will last up to an hour for the interview. In addition, you will be asked to review interviewer notes for accuracy. It is expected that this will take approximately 30 minutes.

Risks: The risks associated with participation are minimal. The possible risk associated with being in the study includes emotional discomfort that may arise from reflecting and speaking about your experiences with food insecurity. You are able to leave or withdraw your participation at any time. If you request or need counseling services, you will be referred to a licensed campus counselor. You will also be provided with a list of local health and human services resources.

Benefit: There are no known direct benefits to participating in the study. However, participation may lead to improvements being made in campus support systems that might benefit all students.

Confidentiality: The interview will be conducted in a private space on campus so that others can not overhear our conversation. Your name and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcript and notes that are collected from the study. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Any paper documents will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. There is a chance that we could disclose that would make it possible to identify you. The security of information collected online cannot be guaranteed.

Data collected may be shared with food pantry administrators in order that they may consider ways to improve their service to students. Such information will be de-identified and be restricted to broad themes that emerge from conversations with multiple participants.

Payment: You will be offered a $10 gift card to Target for participating in this research study. Even if you decide to stop participating during the interview, you will receive the gift card.

Study contacts: We would like you to ask us questions if there is anything about the study that you do not understand. You can call Andrea Wells-Edwards at 425-366-7649 or Gloria Crisp at 541-737-9286, or email us at wellseda@oregonstate.edu or gloria.crisp@oregonstate.edu.

You can also contact the Human Research Protection Program with any concerns that you have about your rights or welfare as a study participant. This office can be reached at 541-737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Signatures: Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant Name:
____

Participant Signature:
____

Date Signed: ____________________________________

Researcher Name:____

Researcher Signature: ____

Date Signed: ____________________________________

Appendix E

Campus and Community Resources (given to all participants)

PNW College Counseling and Student Success (CSS)
Student Union
Phone number
____

Health and Human Services Information, Washington: www.win211.org
Full listing of local services

Volunteers of America Food Bank
1230 Broadway Avenue, Everett, WA 98201
425-259-3191

Compass Health, Snohomish County
Outpatient Counseling
4526 Federal Avenue, Everett, WA 98203
425-349-8200

Sunrise Community Behavioral Health
1718 Broadway Avenue, Everett, WA 98201
425-595-5200

Snohomish County Legal Services (Legal/Bankruptcy)
2731 Wetmore Avenue, Everett, WA 98201
888-201-1014

24-Hour Care Crisis Hotline – Behavioral Health
800-584-3578