

Exploring the Factors Behind Food Pantry Usage: Insight from Literature Reviews to Enhance University Food Pantry Participation



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Background

- Research shows the growing population of marginalized students in college and rising tuition costs leads to new need for student support. The addition of other school related expenses such as transportation and housing places students at risk for food insecurity as studies show students often prioritize school related expenses over nutritious food (El Zein et al., 2018).
- Food insecurity is linked to lower grades, lower graduation rates and higher rates of depression and anxiety (Peterson et al., 2022).
- Food pantries have been shown to alleviate some of the challenges faced with food insecurity, therefore making its utilization a most beneficial resource for college students (Mitchell & Prescott, 2022).

Objective

The study's objective were to explore factors that affect food pantries use in the research literature and to identify changes that could be implemented in food pantries to boost its utilization.

Methodology

Databases:

PubMed, EBSCO Academic Search Complete, and University Library.

Keywords:

Food insecurity, food pantry, college, students, university, satisfaction, acceptability, reach, fruits and vegetables, obstacles, nutrition policy, sodium, diet, food preference, evaluation, environment, implementation.

Number of Articles:

A review of 11 articles were identified.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed articles focusing on food pantry utilization at university campuses, including discussion on barriers and recommendations for enhancement.
- Articles published between 2018 and 2024.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-English articles.
- Studies conducted outside the United States.
- Articles that do not specifically focus on food pantries at college campuses.
- Studies published before 2018.

Results



Students' suggestions:

- To combat stigma, students want a rebranding of the terms used like "low-income" to describe students who utilize the food pantry.
- Reduce stigma associated with utilizing the food pantry by discussing it more openly in classroom settings.
- Rebranding of the SNAP EBT card to make it more obscure or change it to look like a student identification card.
- Students want more fresh produce, spices and sauces that suggest students cook more frequently than had been anticipated.
- Implement a digital ordering system like Instacart to align with students' busy schedule.

Researchers' suggestion:

- Reallocation of funds to reduce the cost of transportation, tuition, books.
- Increase salary of student workers.
- Implement interventions to rebrand the food pantries from "Food-shortage crisis" to "community resources" that includes cooking classes, understanding nutrition labeling, meal prepping, budgeting, and grocery shopping strategies.
- Advertise fruits and vegetables with a "masculine" approach to enhance awareness and social acceptability among the male population.
- Implement a profiling system that can be shown to donors to increase the quality and quantity of certain foods.



Conclusion

Research on the food Pantry utilization among University students has provided valuable insight into the barriers that hinder access to these resources. By identifying and addressing these barriers, we can enhance food pantry utilization and may improve the overall nutrition and health of students.

By incorporating suggestions from both students and researchers, we can develop innovative strategies to not only increase the quality of food available at the pantry but also create a supportive environment that promotes healthy eating habits. Ultimately, by working together to overcome these barriers, we can create a more nourishing campus community.

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Relevant

Innovative

Sustainable

Barriers for not frequenting the food pantry may be influenced by a combination of these reasons simultaneously.

Stigma

- Associate with their own personal failures.
- Hinders their independence.
- Do not want to be seen as underprivileged.
- Consider embarrassing, lowering self esteem.
- Normalizing the "starving student" mentality.
- Do not want to be considered lazy.

Believe other students need the resources more.

- Do not want to be seen as selfish.
- Believed others situation was worse than their own.

Lack of awareness

- Unaware of food pantry existence.
- Unsure of eligibility requirements.

Need for more diversity in food options.

- Inclusion of more protein options.
- More fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Less food nearing expiration date.
- Increase of more spices and sauces.

Inconvenience hours of operation