

**Hungry Greeners: Findings on College Hunger Through Digital Reading and Suggestions for Creation and Re-enforcement of Anti-hunger Infrastructure at the Evergreen State College**

By M Haynes 2023

**Introduction**

Thousands of college students throughout Washington are experiencing food insecurity, with many concerned where they'll find their next meal. (Wakayama, 2022) Evergreen is not isolated from this, with the 2021 enrollment data showing that 39.8% of students were low income, with 30% of the student body being below the federal poverty level. When students are food insecure their academic success suffers, between an inability to focus (Rodgers & Mumphrey, 2023), and time spent accessing the services that do exist, often through rideshares or public transportation (*Food Insecurity at Urban Universities Perspectives during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2021) the entire purpose of a college is disrupted when students don't have reliable access to food. This document aims to use digital research and lived experience to evaluate the anti-hunger infrastructure that exists at Evergreen, its accessibility to students and contributions to food security, and propose areas in which we can improve or create such projects.

## **Background**

A survey distributed in 2022 found that 38% of college students in Washington state had experienced food insecurity. Food insecurity was measured by a student's ability to buy more food when hungry, access to balanced meals, and whether or not they had been skipping meals to save money. (Zhou, 2023) Nationally, 43% of full-time undergraduate students work while enrolled, almost one-third of whom work more than 20 hours a week. Seventy-one percent of part-time students work more than 20 hours a week, the majority of whom work more than 35 hours each week. (*Food Insecurity at Urban Universities Perspectives during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2021) These statistics show that despite the anti-hunger infrastructure in place some students are working near 80 hours a week with their combined workloads and still not reaching food security. While some colleges have programs in place to combat this issue, we are still

seeing hunger as a prominent issue among students that we can only expect to rise as the economy and the climate worsens.

### **Anti-Hunger Infrastructure Defined**

To best explore and evaluate anti-hunger infrastructure I must first define what it is. By definition infrastructure refers to the physical and organizational needs for successful operation of something. That something can be tangible or not, but most anything requires a physical infrastructure of some kind, even just for storage or record keeping. When I discuss anti-hunger infrastructure I refer to the social programs, projects, and food systems that allow people to access food. This may be direct access to food such as a food bank or indirect access through resources and support such as SNAP workshops.

The infrastructure of social systems within anti-hunger infrastructure is equally as important as the physical infrastructure of the distribution, it is key that we explore the social and community aspects that influence a student's ability to access what is already available and what could be created. Throughout my readings I found many references to a student's sense of belonging within their student body and its effect on a student's willingness to seek out the help they need. Students who are afraid of being labeled "poor" or otherwise seen as in need are less likely to use available services, pushing off their physical needs out of fear. (*Food Insecurity at Urban Universities Perspectives during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2021) Because of this, we cannot simply end the idea of anti-hunger infrastructure the functionality of the projects.

Effective anti-hunger infrastructure not only aims to create accessible food systems but also to de-stigmatize the conversation around hunger and human needs. The development of accessible and student focused food security systems should be done in tandem with projects of

community awareness and demonstrations of compassion. Anti-hunger infrastructure is focused not on the availability of free food but on the food security and hunger mindset of a community.

### **Anti-hunger Infrastructure at the Evergreen State College**

Developing the community bond that will support strong anti-hunger infrastructure is a process that will take time, trust, and cooperation from both the students and the administration. While there are stand-alone student projects and events that attempt to promote these ideals, the school as a whole has not embraced the need for community eating and public discussion of hunger on campus, and asking the administration to do so without a specific directive is a waste of time for both parties. Evergreen *has* free food available for students in some instances, the challenge is to expand access, and incorporate the goal of a strengthened community.

I have explored several of Evergreens options for food access on campus over my 3 years on campus. It is important to note that the services changed dramatically over the COVID-19 pandemic and I am not too knowledgeable about the options prior to 2020. The list here is based on the services available in the Spring quarter of 2023.

- Shelf Pantries (2)
  - Housing Community Center (HCC) location is regularly visited and regularly stocked by Residential and Dining Services (RAD). Non-perishables such as canned vegetables, goldfish crackers, raisins, etc. Not much you can cook without other ingredients but usually some grab and go snack options.
  - SEM I 2150 Evergreen Police Station location is poorly stocked and rarely visited, I have seen the same oats and pasta on the shelves for at least a year.
- The Hungry Greener Program

- Students who fit the criteria set by RAD and Aramark can apply to receive 5 free greenery meals per quarter. The program is open between week 3 and week 9 of the quarter and meal credits expire two weeks after they have been added to the dining account.
- Thurston County Satellite Food Bank
  - Every second and fourth Tuesday of the month students can access the Thurston County Food Bank via a temporary set-up in C-lot. This has both a drive-through and a walk-up option and distributes shelf stable foods as well as vegetable boxes.
- The Basic Needs Advocacy and Resource Center (BNARC)
  - The BNARC is located in CAB 135 and offers two main food access services for students, and students can see availability for each appointment type through their online bookings Calander. I have two years of personal experience using their services, and I would consider them the service I use most often.
  - Tangible needs appointments are 30 minute in-person appointments in CAB 135, which is set up as a small food and clothing bank. As well as stocking non-perishables, refrigerated, and frozen foods, they also stock cooking equipment, clothing, hygiene items, and a few other useful necessities.
  - SNAP application support meetings are via phone or zoom with an Evergreen employee who also works with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to support students facing barriers applying for SNAP benefits.

Despite these services it is my lived experience that Evergreen students are still struggling, and accessibility seems to be a key issue.