

Scope of Food Insecurity at Dartmouth:

2018-2019 Student Assembly

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Introduction

Those of us on Student Assembly aim this academic year to create a more inclusive Dartmouth, as we all came to this school with its small size and “close community feel” in mind. However, after our years as students, Monik Walters (Student Body President) and I have come across a few divisions among the student body along the lines of race and socioeconomic status. In an effort to bring people closer together on campus, we are both motivated to cater towards communities that in the past may have lacked the resources entitled to other members of the student body. In order to do so, we have held several open forums and idea boards for members of the Dartmouth undergraduate community to share their strongest frustrations with us. What did we find out? Most concerns revolved around one thing: *food*.

Besides the usual requests to spend Dining Dollars in town or to open dining halls for longer periods during the weekdays, we found an overwhelming number of people concerned about 1) the limit of Dining Dollars allowed to roll over each term, 2) the requirement to pay out of pocket at the end of a term after maxing out the meal plan, and 3) having access to food over interims.

The first concern pertains to a surplus, as students know that any amount of Dining Dollars left over exceeding \$100 at the end of the term would be wasted, motivating students to spend superfluous amounts of money on pies and desserts at KAF, pastries they didn't want or need. The second concern pertains to a deficit in students' meal plans: any overspending of the plan is charged onto tuition bills - a luxury that some students do not have. Finally, the third worry is that there are not enough resources or dining services open on campus during interim periods for students to feel secure about their next meal.

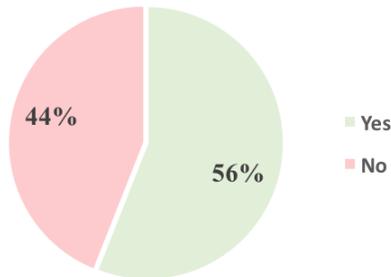
These concerns brought about two important needs that Dartmouth students face on campus: a need to share meal swipes or Dining Dollars to a central storage unit for other students to take advantage of when facing a deficit and a need for a school-wide food pantry for students to turn to at the end of the term or during interim periods.

Access to Food Survey

In order to further assess the needs of the students, Student Assembly released a survey this September (2018) through College Pulse to gather data on opinions about the scope of food insecurity on campus. Below is an outline of the data from eight categories answered by a sample of 335 students. We have listed the results collected from “all students” as well as the responses from the portion of the responders who are “financial aid students” (133 / 335).

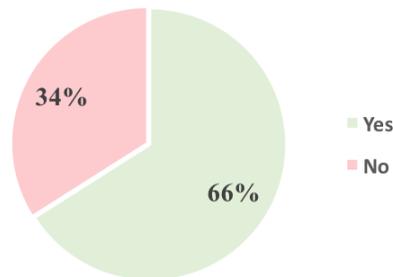
1. Have you ever stayed on campus for interim?

All students:



56%: YES
44%: NO

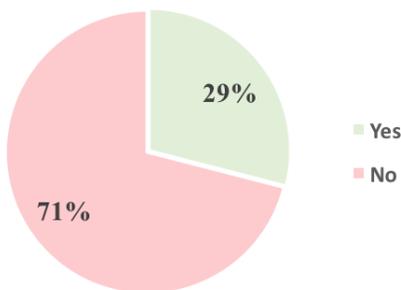
Financial aid students:



66%: YES
34%: NO

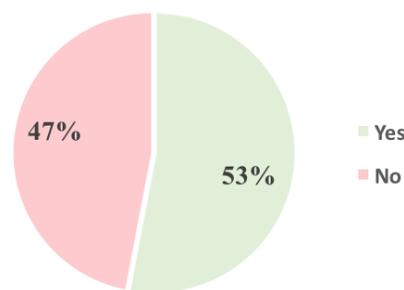
2. Has staying on campus for interim been due to financial restrictions? (answer if “yes” to Q1)

All students:



29%: YES

Financial aid students:



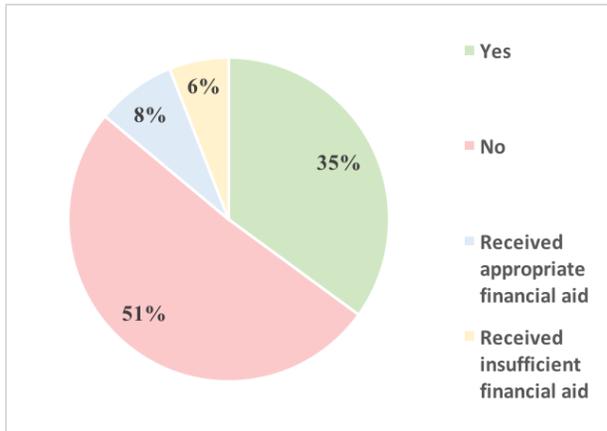
47%: YES

71%: NO

53%: NO

3. Was it financially stable for you to eat in town or buy groceries in town for the entirety of your interim stay? (answer if “yes” to Q1)

All students:



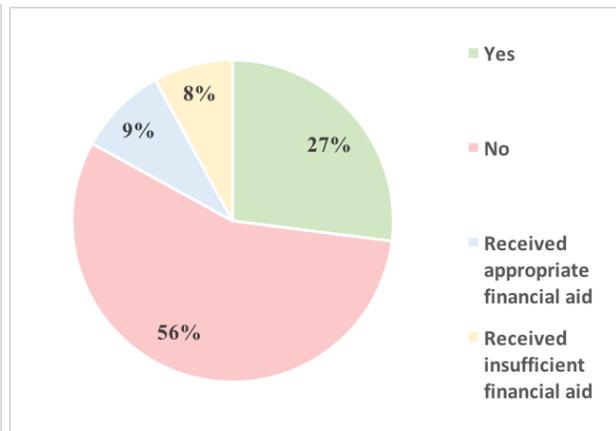
35%: YES

51%: NO

8%: I was given appropriate financial aid

6%: I was given financial aid,
but it was insufficient

Financial aid students:



27%: YES

56%: NO

9%: I was given appropriate financial aid

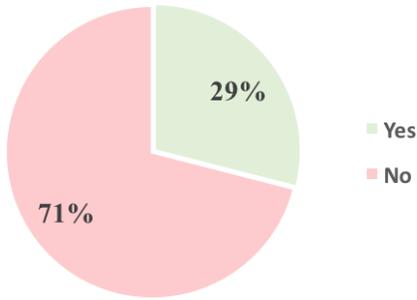
8%: I was given financial aid,
but it was insufficient

4. How much money do you estimate you spent on food during interim? (answer if “yes” to Q1)

Group	Range of \$ Spent	Average \$ Spent
All students	\$0 - \$350	\$106
Financial aid students	\$0 - \$350	\$130

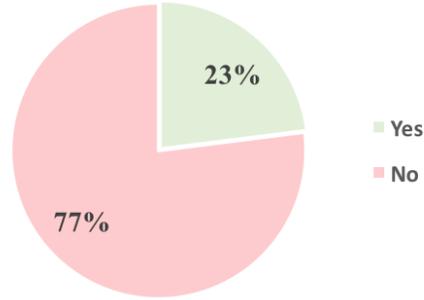
5. Do you have the means of transportation to leave Hanover to buy affordable groceries?

All students:



29%: YES
71%: NO

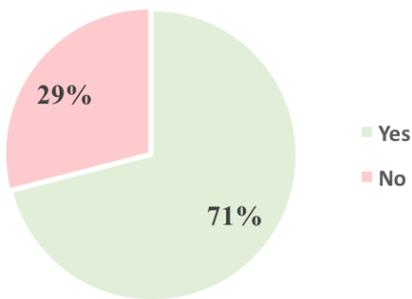
Financial aid students:



23%: YES
77%: NO

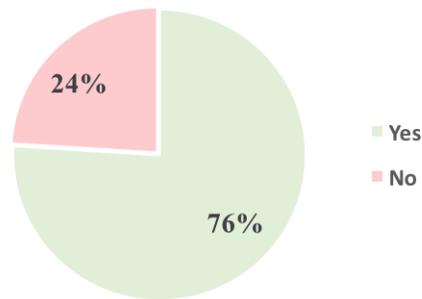
6. Do you find food insecurity during interim to be an issue on Dartmouth's campus?

All students:



71%: YES
29%: NO

Financial aid students:

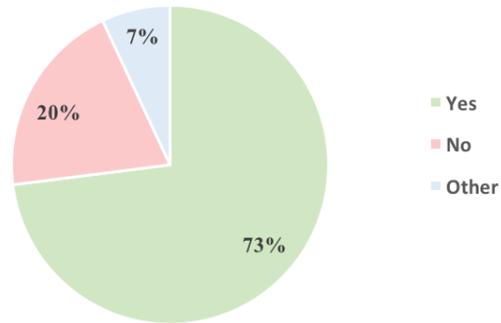
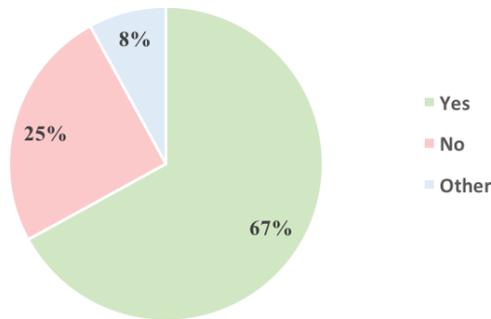


76%: YES
24%: NO

7. How would you feel about campus having a food pantry system?

All students:

Financial aid students:



67%: YES
25%: NO
9%: Other

73%: YES
20%: NO
7%: Other

8. What has been your experience with access to food during your time as an undergraduate at Dartmouth? Tell us your story (anonymously). [Top comments below:]

*Got stranded over winter interim two terms ago because I couldn't afford a plane ticket. Couldn't afford to buy food, as I was waiting to try and score a cheap ticket. **I lived on a large bag of rice, peanut butter, and multivitamins for a week, 0/10 don't recommend your body and mind shut down without proper nutrition.***

I think there should be better access to fresh groceries to those who have limited transportation rather than just letting them have the option of whatever is available at CVS or the gas station.

Being forced to use the meal plan is financially restrictive.

I skip a lot of meals because I don't want to run out of DBA, which isn't helped by the fact that the food on campus is ridiculously expensive. I end up staggering my meals so I can go through the evening and next morning without needing food.

*It's difficult to see peers have to "strategize" how to best use their meal plans. Usually, people get the cheapest meal plan and if they don't strategize how to use their money wisely, they **end up hungry at the end of the***

term. DDS's pricing scale for breakfast/lunch/dinner makes it so many people skip breakfast/lunch in order to use a meal swipe on dinner, to get more bang for their buck. The Hanover Co-Op has some good options, but a lot of the fresh fruits and vegetables are extremely expensive compared to Hannafords/etc. In that weird lull period between finals/interim, DDS also has few options open for those staying on for interim, leaving students no choice but to starve, eat poorly, or spend tons of money eating in town. By the time dinner rolls around, the AT busses no longer run and DDS is closed leaving very few options. It's extremely frustrating to be hungry at such a prestigious institution.

Dartmouth needs more food options and a food pantry system not only because of the high pricing of most meal items and individually packaged foods, but also because **students who need to work in order to finance their time at Dartmouth lose extended periods of time** when they could be earning money or studying or paying attention to their mental health stuck in line for food that they're probably doubting is even worth the wait or the money.

I was really surprised my freshman year when interim started to find that none of the dining halls were opened. I was fortunate enough to be in a situation where an upperclassman agreed to take me to the grocery store in Lebanon which was more affordable than the co-op, but I definitely have heard stories of others who didn't have that option.

I was here over spring summer interim and the food options on campus were pathetic. Only the hop grill was open and it was **disgusting to eat that much fried food**. There were no on campus breakfast options during this time.

During interim freshman year **I didn't eat for days**, and then didn't have the energy to physically leave and get food. Ordered Dominos for 3 days until I could leave again, super expensive.

Why These Student Reports Are Important

From these responses and comments, we see that there is clear-cut **“low food security,”** reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet with little indication of reduced food intake, as well as **“very low food security,”** multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake on our campus. When students are able to access food, some find it not to be affordable or nutritionally adequate, especially during interim periods or late evening dinners for student-athletes. In addition, some students find food not to be available at times towards the end of the term or during interim.

We see this as a major problem on Dartmouth's campus for a variety of reasons:

- 1) On a national scale, we see that groups who tend to be food insecure include students of color, first-generation students, students on financial aid, students who work longer hours at their jobs, and students who identify as LGTBQ.
- 2) It has been scientifically proven that hunger and food insecurity negatively impacts students' abilities to concentrate and learn, which should be the number one priority at Dartmouth College.
- 3) Planning out meals and searching for access to free meals or financially budgeting a dwindling Dining Dollars sum can add to students' stress levels, contributing to poor mental health.
- 4) Lastly, the negative stigma of food insecurity for financial aid students further delineates the difference between low and high-income individuals on this campus, augmenting current campus divisions and social exclusivity.

Strategies Going Forward

I. FOOD PANTRY SYSTEM

We believe that campus needs a centralized food pantry that all students can have access to. The pantry should be stocked with non perishable foods. As of now, we understand that Dick's House has taken over this role and believe that we can supplement it with Co-op vouchers. Students in need could request a voucher in order to cater to their additional nutritional needs by then having access to fruits, vegetables, meats, and other specialty items necessary for a healthy diet.

Evidence of similar programs at other institutions:

Harvard:

"The college arranged for meals through a local cafe," Jack said. In 2014, he helped push Harvard to take steps to feed students on campus during vacations. Now Harvard distributes meal vouchers for those who need them during winter and spring breaks, according to [a profile of Jack](#) last month in the Harvard Gazette.

Brown:

Bear Market Food Exchange: "This small food pantry is available for anyone struggling to get enough to eat on a daily basis. Non-perishable, packaged food items, such as rice, beans, oatmeal, peanut butter, boxed macaroni and cheese, pasta, soup, tuna, and cereal are available for the taking anytime the building is open."

<https://today.brown.edu/announcements/111655>

Columbia University:

The Columbia University Food Bank is the first food bank of its kind at an Ivy League school. It is open to any undergraduate, graduate, or professional student who has any level of food insecurity.

<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2017/03/07/the-road-to-an-ivy-league-education-is-paved-with-hunger/>

Cornell University:

Anabel's Grocery is available to students at lower prices and allows students to apply for subsidies to obtain food for free.

<https://anabelsgrocery.org>

George Washington University:

“To alleviate these issues, GW opened [a food pantry](#) in 2016, stocked with canned goods, produce and day-old bagels, tucked behind an unmarked door in the same food court where students flock for poke. Hundreds of schools have recently launched these sorts of pantries: Membership in the College and University Food Bank Alliance has swelled from 15 in 2012 to more than 600 today.”

500+ university food banks in the College and University Food Bank Alliance:

The first link is a study done on different food pantries coordinated within universities across the nation. The first known university food pantry started at Michigan State University in 1993.

“Over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of food pantries on campuses. According to the College and University Food Bank Alliance (n.d.), there was one known college campus food pantry in 2007 and by 2017 there were more than five hundred registered members. “

*“As of June 4, 2018 there are **641 members registered with CUFBA**”*

1. <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/asap.12161>
2. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/07/hunger-on-college-campus-some-students-rely-on-food-pantries-and-donated-meals.html>
3. <https://sites.temple.edu/cufba/members/> → list of all members / universities in CUFBA

II. MEAL SWIPE AND DINING DOLLARS SHARING SYSTEM

A meal swipe and Dining Dollars sharing system would allow for students to transfer over additional swipes and dollars to other Dartmouth students who have little to no swipes/dollars at the end of a term. This curbs the amount of dining dollars left unused at the end of a term and also limits the amount of dollars in which students go negative, which is billed to a student's family at the end of a term. For low-income students, this is an unnecessary pressure that they may not be able to handle and afford. In addition, those students who have more than \$100 Dining Dollars left at the end of the term would be able to lower their balance for the betterment of a friend in need instead of wasting it on foods they don't need or intend to eat.

Evidence of similar programs at other institutions:

Columbia University:

“Columbia University sophomores, Julio Henriquez, 19, and Helson Taveras, 19, recently launched Swipes, a mobile application that aims to pair students who cannot afford dining hall meals with those who have excess meal swipes. Anyone with an @columbia.edu email address can sign up with the service to either give or receive meals at campus dining halls. **According to Taveras, the Swipes has 936 downloads and 34% of users have signed up to donate swipes since the initial launch on September 20.**”

“Swipes... [has] already spoken to interested students at **Yale University** and the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.**”

1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexadavis/2015/12/17/food-insecurity-on-campus-is-your-ivy-leaguer-s-tarving/#3096a3f679b4>
2. <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2015/09/20/two-cc-students-launch-mobile-meal-sharing-app-swipes/>

NYU:

“To help combat [end of semester stress compounded with food insecurity], NYU teamed up with Jon Chin of **Share Meals**, an app students can use to attain surplus meal swipes that went unused, to distribute 7,000 meals to students dealing with food insecurity.”

<https://nyulocal.com/nyu-and-share-meals-distributing-7-000-ready-made-meals-for-the-end-of-the-semester-6a217e050aec>

“Share Meals is a digital platform where students can share extra meal swipes and post extra food from club events with students who are food insecure. It works in real time, based on your location. You can find extra food within a 5 minute walking distance with one quick glance.”

<https://sharemeals.org>

UCLA:

“In the most recent Fall 2017 drive, the UCLA team collected 8,821 swipes that were converted into 8,821 meal vouchers for at-risk students on campus.”

“At the end of each quarter, Bruins can donate their unused meal swipes to our organization. We then repurpose what would have gone to waste into food items for the student food closet on campus, meal vouchers for food insecure students, prepared meals at local homeless shelters, and materials for our special events like "Sandwiches for Smiles.”

<http://www.swipehunger.org/ucla>

Instructions for starting your own “Swipes” chapter at any university:

https://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/_files/Swipe%20Out%20Hunger%20Guide_Final.pdf

University of Tennessee:

“Students can donate any or all of the five free guest meals they receive with their meal plan each semester”

“The Big Orange Meal Share is a partnership between the Office of the Dean of Students, Student Government Association, Office of Family Engagement, and Volunteer Dining.”

1. <https://news.utk.edu/2016/01/15/ut-launches-meal-share-program-assist-students/>
2. <https://dos.utk.edu/big-orange-meal-share/>

Additional schools:

1. Idaho State University
 2. University of Iowa
 3. California Polytechnic State University
 4. University of California - Davis
 5. North Carolina State University
 6. University of Alaska
 7. Appalachian State University (NC)
 8. University of Alabama
 9. Tufts University
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III. COOKING VESSELS RENTAL SYSTEM

We believe having cooking vessels over the interim will allow for students to cook meals when dining halls are closed. This initiative is being spearheaded by the Sustainability Office currently, and we plan to collaborate with them in whatever ways they need. This may include devising a check-out system with a paid student worker or devoting some funds to getting the plan up in running to accompany the food pantry and vouchers. Students can then use food and produce from the food pantry and Co-op to cook meals in dorm kitchens.

Works Cited

Rule, Cheryl S, and Anthony A Jack. *When Students Are Hungry: An Examination of Food Insecurity in Higher Education*. Bon Appetit Management Company, *When Students Are Hungry: An Examination of Food Insecurity in Higher Education*.

Contact author and Student Body Vice President, Nicole Knape, for questions or more information.

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