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# Food Access and Dignity Among University of Wyoming Students

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# **Food Access and Dignity among University of Wyoming Students**

Alanna Elder

Campus Sustainability Capstone

December 2017

## Contents

I.	Acknowledgements.....	3
II.	Introduction .....	4
III.	Statement of Purpose .....	4
IV.	Background .....	5
	A. Principles of Food Access .....	5
	B. Food Justice, Waste, and Sustainability.....	6
	C. Food Access and College Completion .....	7
	D. Intentions for Intervention .....	7
	E. Existing Services at UW .....	8
	F. Existing Community Services .....	9
	G. Campus Case Studies .....	10
V.	Project Description: .....	12
VI.	Methods:.....	12
VII.	Key Stakeholders and Contacts.....	14
VIII.	Recommendations for Administrators .....	15
IX.	Student Action Guide.....	17
X.	Conclusion.....	19
XI.	Works Cited.....	20
XII.	Appendix .....	24

## I. Acknowledgements

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## II. Introduction

Of all counties in Wyoming, Albany County has the highest rate of food insecurity (17.6%), which the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines as “limited or uncertain access to food” (USDA ERS). The county’s poverty rate of 20.1% is also the highest in the state (U.S. Census Quick Facts). Because Albany County is the home of the state’s only four-year university, there is a question as to how the student population affects the proportion of county residents considered food insecure. Until now, it has been unclear how many students are struggling to access food.

In 2017, a group of University of Wyoming faculty and administrators from the Department of Agricultural Economics, Financial Services, and the Office of Academic Affairs signed up for The Ohio State University’s College Study on Financial Wellness, which included a food security module (Alexander). Surveying 722 undergraduates and using USDA metrics, the researchers discovered that 18.7% of respondents expressed low food security, and another 18.7% expressed very low food security (McDaniel et. al). These statistics are on par with the average of all of the four year public institutions that participated in the survey, but this does not mean they are inconsequential. At a school with nearly 10,000 undergraduates and an additional 2,000 graduate students (none of whom were surveyed), the data suggests that thousands of students may be struggling to nourish themselves (UW Quick Facts).

## III. Statement of Purpose

The University of Wyoming is in an important period of transition. After a downturn in state funding due to a downturn in the energy industry and a reduction in severance taxes, funding cuts have been a force of change on campus. In 2017, the university eliminated 370 positions to cope with tens of millions of dollars in budget cuts (Watson, Victor). At the same time, UW administrators are interested in increasing enrollment and retention rates to boost tuition dollars (Klamann). In July 2017, UW’s strategic planning committee released a new set of intentions and performance measures to define the future direction of the institution. Embedded in the mission statement is a commitment to “promote opportunities for personal health and growth, physical health, athletic competition and leadership development for all members of the university community (“Breaking Through”). Several recent studies have shown that struggles to access resources may limit students’ participation and performance in school and extra-curricular activities (Henry, 15; Maroto et al, 2014). Individuals experiencing food insecurity often report poorer health than their food secure counterparts, and college student data reflects these trends (Food Research and Action Center, Freudenberg et al, 4; Knol et al). Universities around the country have been taking responsibility for financial problems that affect student success, as well as retention (Kinery; Henry, 8). The results from The OSU’s study indicate that UW may need to act to help students meet basic needs, including nutrition, in order to manifest its newly declared mission.

This project is an effort to better understand the experiences of UW students, the existing institutions that are relevant to food access, and the opportunities for better supporting students who are struggling to acquire nutritious food. Local experts assert that any response to food insecurity is more effective and more just if users are involved in its design (Dunning, Porter). Campus culture is another consideration which may stigmatize the use of services that provide food to students at no cost (Alexander). Additionally, the success of campus projects generally depends not only on student interest, but also on some degree of administrative and financial backing from the institution. The

project's outcomes include three parts aimed at motivating institutional support and student action, while reducing stigma surrounding the use of services:

- 1) A set of recommendations for the Office of Academic Affairs, along with a separate set of strategies for students interested in driving changes on UW's campus.
- 2) A narrative piece representing human dimensions of food insecurity among UW students, and exploring its context and potential responses.
- 3) Examples from a pilot program at UW's Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, and suggested best practices for student-driven and institutional response.

## IV. Background

### A. Principles of Food Access

Globally, *food security* may refer to a nation's or region's food supply and the ability to nourish a large group of people. However, supply is only one of the "four dimensions of food security" recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (EC-FAO Food Security Programme). The other three dimensions include household-level "economic and physical access", individual nutritional and cultural needs, and "stability" of food security over time (EC-FAO Food Security Programme). These latter three issues are most relevant in the United States, where there is a plentiful food supply and millions of people struggling to acquire the nutrition they need to feel healthy in control of their lives (Coleman-Jensen et al, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2016"). The United States government and other organizations have adopted the term *food security* to assess individual households' reliable and adequate access to healthy food (Coleman Jensen et al, "Definitions of Food Security"). In contrast, *hunger* is defined as the "physiological" result of long-term or severe food insecurity, and does not fully capture the experience of limited food access (Coleman Jensen et al, "Definitions of Food Security"). Stereotypical views of hunger obscure relationships between food insecurity and health. Recent public health research has linked food insecurity with childhood obesity (Holben and Taylor), and a compilation of studies associate poverty and limited food access with many drivers of health problems (Food Research and Action Council). The wide availability of unhealthy foods compared to healthy ones, "cycles of food deprivation and overeating", physical and mental stress, and nutritional gaps are among the conditions linking food insecurity with poor health (Food Research and Action Council).

A second development in discussions around hunger has been the recognition of a distributional problem in the nation's food system. An estimated 30 – 40 percent of the nation's food supply is thrown away before reaching consumers (Buzby et al), and food is one of the largest constituents in municipal landfills ("Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: Facts and Figures"). More than 35 million pounds of food end up in landfills each year (Thyberg et al). It is in this context that food banks and food recovery networks have emerged in order to direct excess meals or groceries toward persons in need. These programs range in scale, from community food rescue and gleaning programs to regional food banks which redistribute products from warehouses (Vitiello et al). Alongside the responses addressing food insecurity by diverting waste, there are calls to emphasize the humanity of those on the receiving

end of redistributed food (Porter). “Food dignity”, “food justice”, and “food sovereignty” describe the rights of individuals and communities to exercise control over their food supply or food systems (“Draft Principles of Food Justice”; “Vision and Values”). These approaches include historical and systemic barriers to health and choice in food access, and often involve policy advocacy as well as projects on the scale of communities. While the discussion around food access on college campuses has generally been focused on conventional approaches to food insecurity, the philosophies of food dignity, justice, and sovereignty may provide more effective and empowering solutions. Such actions might include involving students in the design and evaluation of responses, providing opportunities for students to engage in local food systems through gardening or other programs, and hosting discussion and scholarship surrounding systemic and cultural dimensions of food access.

## B. Food Justice, Waste, and Sustainability

In recent years, sustainability has become a recruiting tool, an “emerging career field”, and a prominent value espoused on college campuses (Breen, 685). A prominent definition of sustainability comes from the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development, and recommends “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland). Sustainability discussions frequently revolve around the interaction of social, environmental, and economic concerns, in their present and future iterations (Budowle). Sustainability necessitates consideration of all of these dimensions, which may be conflicting and complementary depending on the circumstances. The gray area surrounding these relationships creates a situation in which sustainability is easy to say and not do. The vision statement overarching UW’s strategic plan rings of sustainability, positioning the university to “meet the economic, social and environmental challenges of today, and to create a sustainable, diverse and equitable world without borders for tomorrow” (“Breaking Through”). Campuses attempting to prove their dedication to visions like this one have signed up for grading from third-party organizations, one of the most prominent of which is the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). UW may become one of these. One of the performance targets in the strategic plan is to achieve a bronze rating under AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, & Rating System (STARS) by 2022 (“Breaking Through”). To do this, it will have to facilitate programs that earn STARS points, for which food access may be an avenue.

A 2012 study found that the U.S.’s food waste dilemma described earlier amounts to 113 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year (2% of national emissions) and \$198 billion dollars (Venkat). This accounts for the production, processing, distribution, and decomposition of wasted food. AASHE STARS also recognizes food waste reductions to be a pathway to emissions reductions, with points earned for reducing food waste, recovering food to share with people, and composting (Zahniser et al). Points are also available for courses which recognize the role of social justice in determining sustainability, and for dining halls which achieve certifications including food justice principles (Zahniser et al). Philosophically speaking, interpreting food access in terms of overlapping social, economic, and environmental concerns *and* considering the future will make for robust actions that will last.

### C. Food Access and College Completion

As Albany County's largest employer and the center of the local economy, UW is part of the context surrounding local poverty and food insecurity. As an institution of higher education, UW is also part of a national discussion around food security on college campuses. The cost of higher education has escalated in recent decades (Rothman); simultaneously, a college degree has evolved into a prerequisite for economic wellbeing (Freeman, Carnevale). In addition to building loan debt, many students are juggling financial burdens *while* they are in school (Freeman, Kinery). Research from institutions across the country indicates that large numbers of students face the choice between acquiring food and paying for housing (McDaniel et al). Financial strife may contribute to mental and physical health problems (Freudenberg et al, 4; Knol et al), and constrain students' opportunities to make the most of or complete their college educations (Henry, 15; Maroto et al; Martinez et al). Chaparro et al found that students with children at University of Hawai'i at Manoa were more likely to experience food insecurity than students without children, and that Native Hawai'ian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino students had significantly higher rates of food insecurity than Japanese students. In other studies, higher rates of African American and Latino students were food insecure compared to white students (Freudenberg et al, Martinez et al). These data suggest that inequalities in food access among college students reflect those evident at the state or national level.

Data for UW, noted earlier at 18.7% low food security and 18.7% very low food security, is similar to that of a random sample of graduates and undergraduates across 10 campuses in the University of California system, where 23 percent of students exhibited low, and 19 percent very low food security (Martinez et al). Additionally, 22.9% of UW students reported that they had gone hungry in the last year because they did not have money to pay for food. After asking the same question of students at the City University of New York (CUNY), researchers found that the same proportion (22.7%) of students would sometimes refrain from eating because they could not afford to (Freudenberg et al). Tuition and local living expenses for CUNY or California system are much pricier than those for UW, and yet the three surveys found nearly equal levels of very low food security. The data indicates that food access is a distraction for many Wyoming students. Since struggling to acquire nutrition can lead to negative health outcomes and limit academic and extra-curricular performance, the implications of these numbers may reach far beyond a few skipped meals. UW has a stake in addressing food insecurity among its students.

### D. Intentions for Intervention

UW is situated within a relatively small community of about 30,000 residents. The campus and community are interdependent with one another, and this means that programs initiated within the institution may impact the broader community. Albany County boasts an energetic local food movement that has gained momentum over the last decade (Dunning). Several local organizations have insights into food security and food justice which would be useful to UW in considering approaches to improving student food access. Successful responses will take community stakeholders and the local food system into account, emphasizing ways to collaborate and complement existing services, rather than hinder or



overwhelm them. It will also be important to recognize what logistical and social factors may influence student use of local services.

Research indicates that college students struggling to acquire adequate or reliable nutrition are reluctant to seek help (Koller, Watson et al). Despite the high prevalence of food insecurity evident from The OSU, local organizations report comparably low numbers of students accessing their services (Cramer, Vercauteran). This may be due to a limited awareness of local resources, time or travel limitations, a scarcity of dialogue de-stigmatizing food insecurity, or some combination. Discussing food access openly, and exploring institutional solutions, will demonstrate to students that they can speak to their needs. As the nationwide discussion around college food security has gained traction, many universities have developed institutional support systems including food banks, funds, and meal sharing programs (Figure 1). In several instances, these initiatives have emerged from student action, including the creation of innovative meal sharing programs and the formation of student-led organizations advocating for food pantries or shared meals (Chin, Johnson, Houser). The purpose of this report is to enable and encourage action to address food insecurity at UW. Ideal responses will encompass institutional steps from administrators, faculty and staff as well as student action (Brinkhurst et al).

In summary, apt recommendations will take into account 1) best practices, philosophies, and resource limitations of community organizations; 2) existing services (on and off campus), and cultural and logistical barriers to students using those services; and 3) examples from other universities where students, staff, and/or administrators are attempting to give students better access to healthy food.

### E. Existing Services at UW

Services exist within the University of Wyoming to respond to students' holistic needs. The health clinic and counseling center offer appointments free of charge. The federal TRIO program provides advising to students from underrepresented populations ("Student Success Services"), and several departments house emergency funds intended to cover costs such as an unexpected surgery or textbook replacements after a house fire (Alexander). In the realm of nutrition, student groups have occasionally set up one-time food pantries located in churches near campus (Porter). A variety of campus events, such as speakers, film screenings, and workshops provide free food, though these are unlikely to be reliable sources of nourishment. Many students work in campus restaurants, the dining hall, or UW Catering, and receive a free meal during each shift (Bey, Jones). Those employed in food service off campus may also obtain free food during work hours. The UW Wellness Center offers classes on cooking and nutrition that may help students learn to prepare food when time and money is limited ("Wellness Center: Educational Programming"). Finally, ACRES Student Farm currently provides up to 12 4 x 10 foot garden plots and free vegetables to volunteers. Because the farm is located over a mile from campus, and Laramie's growing season matches only a few months of the school year, these resources are effectively limited. Free garden plots are available for students who will be in town during the summer, and farm produce for those who have time to volunteer. Students who work or lack transportation may be unable to be involved with ACRES, and many may be unaware that the student farm exists. In short, there are no long-term, institutionalized responses to food insecurity in place at the University of Wyoming.

Particularly for more than 800 international students enrolled at UW (“International Students and Scholars”), it may be difficult to access the types of food that help them feel their best. According to the global Food and Agriculture Organization, “culturally acceptable food... is understood as food that corresponds to individual and collective consumer demand and preferences” (Charles). More research is needed to understand the need for and availability of culturally appropriate food for UW students.

## F. Existing Community Services

Within Laramie, Wyoming, the seat of Albany County and the home of UW, several organizations provide food to people at no cost. In addition to federal assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), many residents use the Laramie Soup Kitchen, which serves one hot meal for three hours Monday through Friday, and has food available during normal work hours (Cramer). Another organization called Interfaith Good Samaritan hosts a food pantry and gives away about 900 pounds of groceries daily (Vercauteran). This generally includes past-date perishable and non-perishable foods that have been donated from warehouses and grocery stores (Vercauteran). Feeding Laramie Valley (FLV) is a non-profit organization focused on creating an equitable and sustainable local food system (Dunning). FLV provides free garden space and distributes food weekly to Laramie residents enrolled in their shares program; it also gives produce to Interfaith (Dunning, Vercauteran). The organization is part of a movement to promote food production and preservation within the community. All of these non-governmental services are open to students, and staff from each report that they occasionally do serve students (Cramer, Dunning, Vercauteran). These individuals suspect, however, that students are drastically underrepresented. Interfaith and FLV anticipate that they do not have the capacity to support all of those students who are struggling with food insecurity (Dunning, Vercauteran). According to its director, Laramie Soup Kitchen has access to more food than it can give away, and is limited by time and resources for distribution (Cramer). The organization receives plentiful, if unpredictable, quantities of food from the University’s Dining and Catering Services (Cramer). It remains uncertain, however, whether Laramie Soup Kitchen could accommodate the numbers of students identified as food insecure by The OSU’s study.

In addition, there is evidence to show that students are generally hesitant to use community resources. There may be several reasons for this. Many students understand their financial stress to be temporary (Martinez et al, Porter), while the regular users of these local programs often experience long-term food and/or housing insecurity (Vercauteran). This reality may create a social division which deters students from utilizing the same services as community members. Laramie Soup Kitchen’s staff and board are endeavoring to create an inviting space, and conducting outreach to welcome more students (Cramer). As part of these efforts, volunteers, many of whom are attending the university, are encouraged to participate in Soup Kitchen meals. Given the social and logistical barriers described above, on-campus solutions are also necessary to adequately meet the needs of UW students.

## G. Campus Case Studies

The following examples of campus interventions to help students feel nourished are far from exhaustive. The five models below were chosen because they are particularly creative or particularly similar to the University of Wyoming. It is possible that these institutions or their surrounding communities have resources that were not described, but what *is* shown provides several ideas, strategies, and opportunities that could inform action at UW. Each of these approaches has elements that emphasize the dignity and humanity of the students utilizing resources. The table below describes programs implemented at three of UW's comparator institutions, and three programs that are relevant on a national scale. The right column identifies advantages of these approaches. While none are perfect, the purpose of this section was to explore possibilities that could be tailored to UW. Further analysis would be necessary to pick apart the disadvantages of each approach as they might apply to this campus. Implementation of a pilot program at UW will aid in identifying issues and developing best practices (Appendix).

Near	Lessons and Advantages
<p>As a land-grant institutions located in the Intermountain West, Colorado State University, University of Idaho and Utah State University bear cultural and institutional similarities to the University of Wyoming. The latter two schools were identified as “close peer institutions” during the strategic planning process in 2016 (Schueler). CSU was defined as a “stretch peer”.</p> <p><b>University of Idaho</b> was the institution identified to be most comparable with UW. The school currently has a network of seven food pantries, mapped on its website alongside a blog with recipes and food preparation tips. The website emphasizes that anyone is welcome to give or take, without proving need or, presumably, enrollment.  <a href="http://servicecenter.usu.edu/programs/snac">http://servicecenter.usu.edu/programs/snac</a></p> <p><b>Utah State University</b> hosts a small food pantry called the Student Nutrition Access Center (SNAC), founded in 2010 by a student group. The food comes from an off-campus community food pantry, dining services, USU's organic student farm, and Utah Conservation Corps.  <a href="https://www.uidaho.edu/current-students/student-involvement/volunteer/food-pantry">https://www.uidaho.edu/current-students/student-involvement/volunteer/food-pantry</a></p>	<p><i>Open, inviting language and centralized information meant to attract students, reduce social barriers, and suggest similarity between givers and users. Intended for student use, but seemingly not strictly regulated.</i></p> <p><i>Created out of student action over seven years ago. Involves collaboration between multiple groups on and off campus, including the university's student farm.</i></p>

<p><b>Colorado State University</b> has implemented a program in which students can apply for up to 75 free meal swipes in the dining hall each semester? This is paid for through private financial donations. In addition, a student-led chapter of the organization Swipe Out Hunger redistributes funds from unused, purchased meal swipes to various food closets on campus.</p> <p><i>Jennifer Johnson, Assistant Director Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement at CSU</i></p>	<p><i>Free meal swipe program protects anonymity to a much greater degree than pantries. The university uses alumni fundraising to pay for discounted meal cards, distributed based on need. Currently more need than free swipes available. Student-driven project provides additional support.</i></p>
<p><b>Far</b></p> <p>At the two institutions in this section, students have implemented innovative programs to improve students' access to healthy food. They may now be looking to consult with other schools around the country to expand their models. Swipe Out Hunger is an organization already working with students on various campuses to create localized solutions.</p> <p><b>New York University</b></p> <p><i>Share Meals</i> was started by an undergraduate student skilled in computer programming. After hearing the story of one student struggling with food insecurity, he created a platform for students to share extra meal swipes. The organization has expanded to host food sharing events, including cooking classes.</p> <p><i>Jonathan Chin, Share Meals founder</i></p> <p><b>Johns Hopkins University</b></p> <p><i>Free Food Alert</i> is an email system which notifies students who are registered when there is food about to go to waste at an event. This emerged from a student project, but the student was paid and supported by a campus sustainability office. As of October 2017, 1,700 students were signed up, 10% of which self-identified as food-insecure. Eventually, the administrators of the alert system plan to send notifications as text messages.</p> <p><i>Leana Houser, Homewood Recycling Manager, JHU</i></p> <p><b>Swipe Out Hunger</b></p> <p>This organization started at UCLA in 2009, originally as a way for students to share food from their meal plans with the community. Now, its mission and vision specifically recognize "student</p>	<p><i>Emphasis on community and mutual responsibility. Technological innovation created new ways to share struggles, resources. Project created entirely by students – support from NYU came later.</i></p> <p><i>Recognizes intersection of food waste and food access. Accounts for the food waste at events that has seen a self-service line, and by regulation cannot be redistributed. The alert has been well received by students, event organizers, and the institution's caterer. A task force is evaluating other interventions to make healthy food more available to students. Events unlikely to be a reliable or consistent source of nutrition.</i></p> <p><i>Membership is free, and includes toolkits and a network of students working toward similar goals. SOH staff advise leaders from each chapter on ways to propose, campaign for, and implement projects that will address their campuses' needs.</i></p>

hunger” as the problem they are responding to. <a href="http://www.swipehunger.org/">http://www.swipehunger.org/</a>	
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#### IV. Project Description:

The three parts of this project are meant to generate dialogue and facilitate meaningful action around food access at UW. The first part includes two separate sets of recommendations: one intended for institutional responses and the other for student action. The document for staff, faculty, and administrators includes a brief overview of potential interventions, along with important questions to consider during their planning and implementation. A list of central stakeholders and at least one contact may help the University in designing programs to help students acquire healthy food. Student recommendations include project ideas, helpful contacts, and steps and strategies to accomplish change.

The second outcome of the project is an audio story representing the experiences of three students who were willing to share. The piece will explore resources and approaches available in the Laramie community as well as solutions implemented on other campuses. The intent of the story is to portray how food access impacts real people, and ask what institutional changes may better support students at UW.

The final piece is a description of a two new pilot projects meant to develop best practices and create an immediate response to student nutritional needs. This was added to the project when faculty and staff in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources decided to open a food pantry. Academic Administrative Associate Mandy Gifford started this discussion after speaking with a student who had been unable to afford food. The screen shots and description in the Appendix represent an effort to design this program in ways that would be welcoming to participants and share high quality, nutritious food. The Kendall House Food Share Cabinet and the Food Share Alert opened in early December 2017 (Appendix).

#### V. Methods:

The research for this project began with a literature review exploring the methods of food insecurity studies like the one that identified Albany County’s rate as 17.6%. A preponderance of studies used the same six-question survey created by the USDA. Nearly all campus-based surveys used this method. A review of research into food insecurity among college students provided a context for the data from UW, and indications that food access may impact student health, performance, and college completion.

Case studies from most peer institutions were compiled through web searches, while those from CSU, NYU, and JHU emerged from semi-structured interviews with project organizers. NYU, JHU, and Swipe Out Hunger were chosen as examples of innovative programs with at least the potential to have national reach. Initiatives at CSU, Utah State University, and University of Idaho were included as models from

institutions that are comparable with UW in terms of enrollment, geography, and other factors (Schueler).

Interviews were also conducted with local service organizations, stakeholders at UW, and students who were willing to share their experiences. The local organizations were chosen based on recommendations from Dr. Christine Porter, who was the Principal Investigator for two research projects involving local food justice issues, and this project's advisor Rachael Budowle, who is a researcher on one of those projects. UW stakeholders included Residence Life & Dining and Catering, and were identified based on their role in providing food at UW, their relationships with Laramie Soup Kitchen, and their potential involvement in the kinds of projects modeled by other universities. As Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and co-chair of the Student Success Action Group, Dr. Anne Alexander played an important role in arranging for UW to participate in The OSU's research. A flyer calling for student stories was distributed in hard copy around campus and on university listservs. One student responded to the flyer, and two others agreed to participate in the audio story after being contacted through personal communication. It is important to note that the student interviews were used explicitly for the journalistic piece, and not as scientifically generalizable accounts of food insecurity at UW.

The Kendall House Food Share description and alert system was developed through meetings with students and staff employed in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources. Haub School personnel provided and refurbished the physical cabinet. The Zero Waste Events Committee and the Special Events Coordinator helped implement the Food Share Alert. The Appendix of this report includes descriptions of both programs, which were first disseminated through the Haub School's email lists and social media in December 2017.

## VI. Key Stakeholders and Contacts

### University of Wyoming:

Rachael Budowle, Assistant Lecturer, Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources  
[rbudowle@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbudowle@uwyo.edu)

Dr. Christine Porter, Associate Professor, Kinesiology and Health  
 Principle Investigator for Food Dignity and Growing Resilience  
[christine.porter@uwyo.edu](mailto:christine.porter@uwyo.edu)

Amy Bey, Lead Dietician, Residence Life and Dining Services  
[alittle2@uwyo.edu](mailto:alittle2@uwyo.edu)

Derek Jones, Director, UW Catering  
[djones32@uwyo.edu](mailto:djones32@uwyo.edu)

Student Success Action Group  
 Anne Alexander, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education  
[aalex@uwyo.edu](mailto:aalex@uwyo.edu)

### Student Organizations:

ACRES Student Farm  
[uwstudentfarm@uwyo.edu](mailto:uwstudentfarm@uwyo.edu)  
 Food Justice Chair (email subject to change)  
 Urszula Norton, Faculty Advisor, ACRES Student Farm  
[unorton1@uwyo.edu](mailto:unorton1@uwyo.edu)

Student Dietetic Association (SDA)  
 (email subject to change)

International Student Association (ISA)  
 (email subject to change)

Sustainability Coalition  
[sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com](mailto:sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com)

### Community Organizations

Ted Cramer, Executive Director, Laramie Soup Kitchen  
[director@laramiesoupkitchen.org](mailto:director@laramiesoupkitchen.org)

Mike Vercauteran, Executive Director, Interfaith Good Samaritan  
[director@laramieinterfaith.org](mailto:director@laramieinterfaith.org)

Lina Dunning, Community Engagement Director, Feeding Laramie Valley  
[lina@feedinglaramievalley.org](mailto:lina@feedinglaramievalley.org)

## VII. Recommendations for Staff, Faculty, and Administrators

The following ideas are not mutually exclusive, but rather designed to complement one another by addressing different elements of food security, dignity and justice. Recommendation #1 would build community and mutual support among students and allow those struggling to access food to eat in a social setting. #2 would enable students to access food on their own terms, when they need it, and provides a physical and digital hub for information about resources. Recommendation #3 would reduce food waste at campus events while feeding students and encouraging social interaction. And finally, #4 would empower students to have more control over their present and future wellbeing, by providing opportunities for them to grow, preserve, and prepare their own food.

**Recommendation 1: Allow students with meal plans to share excess meal swipes with students who are having difficulties accessing food.** Ideally, there would be no burden of proof on students receiving swipes beyond personal communication with a designated staff person. Any money leftover from swipe transfers leftover at the end of the term could roll over or be put toward emergency funds and/or food pantries on campus.

*Key questions: How would the program respect the anonymity of participants? What would be the avenues for participants to give feedback? How could Washakie Dining Center accommodate changes to its budget? What would be the most effective way to transfer swipes from one student account to another? How would the opportunity to give and receive meals be marketed across campus in ways that do not stigmatize limited food access? How will this information be centralized with other campus/community resources?*

Central stakeholders: students, Washakie Dining Center staff and administrators

Suggested Contact: Amy Bey, Residence Life and Dining Services ([alittle2@uwyo.edu](mailto:alittle2@uwyo.edu))

**Recommendation 2: Establish a network of small food distribution sites in centralized and discrete locations on campus.** Students should be involved in the design, siting, and sourcing of these programs. The university should make available a variety of nutritious foods that are relatively easy to prepare, and provide users with opportunities to anonymously give suggestions, appreciations, and preferences. With support from UW, the Registered Student Organization (RSO) ACRES Student Farm could supply fresh produce grown by students to help students. Laramie based business Plenty could be a year-round source of freshly grown vegetables. Users should not be required to sign in or give any personal information, and use language that describes a culture of sharing over charity (See Haub School Food Share Description). One of these sites is already open!

*Key questions: How will the food pantry be kept stocked with a variety of healthy foods representing diverse cultural backgrounds? How are users given opportunities to make choices and exercise control over their food supply? Are pick-up sites and web pages ADA accessible? What are the most effective ways to get the word out? How will information about these sites be centralized with other campus/community resources?*



Central stakeholders: students, staff in offices or departments with pantries, food sharers

Suggested Contact(s): Mandy Gifford ([mandyj@uwyo.edu](mailto:mandyj@uwyo.edu)) and Rachael Budowle ([rbudowle@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbudowle@uwyo.edu)), Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources

**Recommendation 3: Support student leadership in developing alert systems to recover food at campus events.** There has recently been a great deal of student interest in reducing food waste through compost and recovery programs at UW. This interest has manifested over the years in several student-led programs bolstered by UW, including a memorandum of understanding between UW and the Laramie Soup Kitchen. This agreement has enabled UW Catering and Residence Life and Dining Services to give some of its outdated or excess food to the community organization. However, UW is barred by food safety regulations from giving away any food that has reached a self service line. To reduce food waste, provide for student wellbeing, and protect guests from foodborne illness, other universities have developed programs to bring more people to the line at the end of an event when food is leftover.

Key questions: *What constraints will need to exist to justify institutional support for such a program? How can these be met? What are the most efficient and compassionate ways of communicating with a large group of students? How will participants' information be kept confidential?*

Central stakeholders: Students, staff from University Catering and university approved caterers, event organizers

Suggested Contact(s): Sustainability Coalition ([sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com](mailto:sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com)), Rachael Budowle ([rbudowle@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbudowle@uwyo.edu)), Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources

**Recommendation 4: Collaborate with ACRES Student Farm to help students grow their own food.** In the long term, ACRES could work with UW to provide garden space near the center of campus. Raised beds maintained by UW Landscaping could be converted into space for growing healthy produce during the summer and early fall. Although classes are not in session during all of this time, this would provide mental and physical health benefits to those undergraduate and two months of the school semester. Gardening and food preservation resources already available through Laramie Local Foods and UW Extension could enable students to use this produce well into the winter (). This could be an opportunity for University departments, local organizations, and students to work together around a common goal of nourishing people. UW would be providing institutional glue to support relationships that already exist.

Key questions: *What logistics and assurances would be needed to create a community garden near campus? What spaces may meet these criteria? What are ACRES Student Farm's opportunities and limitations?*

Central stakeholders: students, ACRES Student Farm, University Extension, UW facilities, UW landscaping, and other relevant departments

Suggested Contact(s): ACRES Student Farm ([uwstudentfarm@gmail.com](mailto:uwstudentfarm@gmail.com)); Urszula Norton, Faculty Advisor ([unorton@uwyo.edu](mailto:unorton@uwyo.edu))

## VIII. Student Action Guide

Students across the nation are responding to gaps in food access by creating programs to facilitate sharing across campus. These initiatives can break the stigma around food insecurity and support students toward completion of their degrees. University of Wyoming students are no exception to the increasing costs and increasing economic importance of a college education. UW's low tuition rate make it more accessible than many universities, but its food insecurity rate appears no different. Students at UW often face tough choices when paying for books, rent, and food. Even *if* they generally find ways to survive, the fact that people are resourceful is not reason to do nothing to support them. Tracking down free or inexpensive food is time-consuming and uncertain. These strategies generally don't give people the opportunity to make real choices about what they eat, or to obtain the nutrients to stay focused and living their best lives. All people should have a right to help design their food systems. Any initiatives for which YOU are involved in the planning and implementation will be more effective, more responsive to students' needs, and more just. This guide is an effort to help students make their voices heard.

Food insecurity among UW students is a *real* issue.

There are several models that other campuses are using to respond:

### Meal Swipe Transfers

Students transfer their extra meal swipes either as credit for others to use to enter the dining hall, or as funds to be put toward food sharing programs. There is a network in the organization Swipe Out Hunger (SOH) that can help students develop these programs. There are examples of this model working all over the country, *with* and *without* support from the institutions. ShareMeals at NYU responded to the problem quickly, operating for months without approval from administrators (which it eventually received). SOH generally helps students work with their dining halls to develop swipe transfers before deciding to operate independently, with the idea that institutional support makes these programs longer lasting. Washakie Dining Center currently factors leftover swipes into its budget, and may have to adjust to prepare for or respond to a swipe transfer program.

Suggested Contact: Marissa Schnitman, Swipe Out Hunger ([marissa@swipesforthehomeless.org](mailto:marissa@swipesforthehomeless.org))

### Sharing Cupboards and Resource Map

Students, faculty, and staff share food via cupboards or closets located on campus. Ideally, these locations are centralized, accessible, and protect users' anonymity. The food itself should be a variety of healthy foods representing different cultures and dietary needs. Users should not be required to prove anything. These principles are aimed at creating an experience that respects human dignity, improves the availability of nutrition, and allows people to make choices based on their values and preferences. This will make the program more effective in reaching those who need it, despite the stigma around food insecurity. The locations could be mapped along with other resources (the Counseling Center, emergency funds), and housed and distributed online. One of these already exists at the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, and more could be coming soon. You can be a part of their design.

Suggested Contact(s): Mandy Gifford ([mandyj@uwyo.edu](mailto:mandyj@uwyo.edu)) and Rachael Budowle ([rbudowle@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbudowle@uwyo.edu)), Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources; Christine Porter ([christine.porter@uwyo.edu](mailto:christine.porter@uwyo.edu)), Kinesiology and Health

### Post-Event Food Alert System

Organizers of events on campus message students inviting them to help reduce food waste, and sharing the food remaining at the end of the event. The Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources has implemented a pilot alert program that also notifies students of the pantry. While this is a simple idea logistically, there are liability and risk management concerns that stakeholders at UW will likely be thinking about. UW Catering has expressed that it is okay for students to eat extra food at the end of events, but that it poses a liability risk if those students are encouraged to take food away from the event.

Suggested Contact(s): Sustainability Coalition ([sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com](mailto:sustainability.coalition.uwyo@gmail.com)); Rachael Budowle, Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources ([rbudowle@uwyo.edu](mailto:rbudowle@uwyo.edu))

### Community Gardening Programs

ACRES Student Farm currently offers free garden space from late spring until whenever it gets too cold in the fall. The organization also lets volunteers take excess produce from farmers markets or harvest their own when they help at the farm. The limitations of these opportunities are that the farm is located far away from campus, and many students are unaware of it. Laramie's growing season does not match up well with fall and spring terms, and ACRES has only 12 plots available. A second gardening and grazing area located nearer to the center of campus would make produce accessible to students who are in Laramie from summer until early October. This could benefit students' physical and mental health while letting them control their food supply.

Suggested Contact(s): ACRES Student Farm ([uwstudentfarm@gmail.com](mailto:uwstudentfarm@gmail.com))

## Pathways to Change on Campus:

**Bug your Local Government:** ASUW has access to thousands of dollars in funding intended to benefit students. Developing a proposal and applying for funds could be a way to get a food sharing program started at UW. The student government can also act symbolically to support actions on campus by passing resolutions or endorsing petitions. The simplest way to start may be talking to your own senators.

**Build a Network:** Talk to staff, administrators, faculty, and students about your ideas. Ask questions and come prepared to meetings having done the research you need to know what you're talking about. Stay committed to your idea, and you may be able to develop a proposal that will work for all stakeholders.

**Organize:** You can amplify conversations on campus by getting other students to show support for a program through signatures or demonstrations. Awareness campaigns can be effective, *and* they can be quickly forgotten. Think about ways to make your message stick, and strategies to reach people outside of your usual circles. One-on-one relationships are the best way to build coalitions.

**Respect and Know Your Time:** Organizing takes time and dedication. Even when students are really passionate about making something happen on campus, the demands of courses, jobs, and other commitments can make it hard to see an idea through. Consider ways that you might be able to receive college credit or pay for time spend on a project. That way, you will have to prioritize it.

## IX. Conclusion

This exploration of food insecurity at UW came the same semester the Office of Academic Affairs received the results of The OSU's Study of Collegiate Financial Wellness. The study included a survey of food insecurity which provides numbers to represent the prevalence of unreliable and inadequate food access among UW students. With 18.7% of students experiencing the USDA's lowest level of food security and an additional 18.7% exhibiting low food security, the data indicates that thousands of undergraduates may be struggling to access nutrition. Full understanding of this issue requires recognition of the human dimensions of food access as well as its wider context. Principles of food justice, sovereignty, and dignity inform approaches that affirm the rights of all people to make choices about what they eat. Sustainability is an important guiding principal because it includes the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of problems to inform solutions that work in the present and the future. Actions to address food insecurity on UW's campus support the newly defined goals in the university's strategic plan, such as affirming the holistic health and opportunities of students, improving retention rates, and implementing sustainability initiatives. Projects on other college campuses provide useful models for programs to help UW students feel nourished, while the work of community organizations provides opportunities for collaboration, realistic appraisal of students' use of existing resources, and best practices for campus-based responses. Involvement at the student and institutional levels will lead to responses that are just, effective, well-rounded, and long-lasting. Hopefully the three parts of this project will enable the UW community to meet the needs of students struggling to acquire food.

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## XI. Appendix

### Haub School Food Share

The Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources' food sharing efforts help students stay energized, build community, and reduce waste. The Food Share Alert program notifies students who register when food is available at the end of Haub School events. Similarly, students may receive updates when the Kendall House Food Share Cabinet is restocked. The cabinet is open to all students during normal business hours, no sign-in or application required. We're excited to share the best of what we have: healthy, high quality food that will help students thrive.

We will not share your name or any personal information. Your participation in this Food Share Alert is private and confidential.

\* Required

Would you like to receive text and/or email alerts when food is available at the end of Haub School events? \*

Email

Text

What is your University of Wyoming email address?

Your answer

What is your phone number?

Your answer

Would you like to receive updates regarding the Kendall House Food Share cabinet?

Yes

No

Our food share pantry is stocked! Please feel welcome to enter the Bim Kendall House at any time during our business hours to help yourself to the food in this pantry. The pantry is located down the hall to the left when you first enter the building through the front entrance. The pantry is pictured below for your reference.

**Bim Kendall House**  
**804 E Fremont St**  
**Laramie, WY**  
**Mon-Fri (8AM-5PM)**

Food will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Thanks!

### **Haub School Food Share**

The Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources is starting two new projects to help students stay energized and build community through sharing food. The Kendall House Food Share Cabinet is open to all students during normal business hours, no sign-in or application required. The Food Share Alert program invites students to help reduce food waste by picking up extra food from Haub School events. When an event is ending with extra food, participants will receive an email/text with instructions for where to pick it up. The food will generally be available for 30 minutes after this information goes out. Students can help divert waste from Haub School events, and receive updates about the Food Share Cabinet by [filling out this form](#).