

Today's Students + SNAP

Policy Considerations from the Today's Students Coalition



Today's students deserve to be able to afford basic needs, such as food and housing, but that isn't always the case. A recent study by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice in April 2019 found in the 30 days prior to the survey, 45 percent of respondents experienced food insecurity,¹ defined as "the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle."²

Unlike past generations of students, today's students are more diverse in age, race, and family income level, putting them at greater risk for food insecurity. Low-income students are most likely to experience food insecurity and often have one additional risk factor—such as being a first-generation student or a single parent—associated with food insecurity.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal program that offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families. Approximately 3.3 million students are eligible to receive SNAP.³ Students between the ages of 18-49 who are enrolled at an institution of higher education are eligible to receive SNAP benefits if they are below income and resource thresholds and meet certain criteria.

Student SNAP Facts

20% of food insecure students receive SNAP benefits⁴



31% of low-income students receive SNAP benefits⁵

Percent of low-income students who received SNAP at⁵

33% two-year institutions

29% four-year institutions

38% less than two-year institutions

57% of potentially eligible low-income students did not receive SNAP benefits in 2016⁵

¹ College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report. 2019. https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf

² ACE2019: An Examination of Food Insecurity in Higher Education. 2019. <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2019/03/14/ace2019-examination-food-insecurity-higher-education/>

³ Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access

Federal Food Assistance Benefits. 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf>

⁴ College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report. 2019. https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf

⁵ Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits. 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf>

SNAP Eligibility Requirements⁶



**Parent
caring for a
child under
age 6**



**Parent caring
for a child 6-
11-years-old
who is unable
to obtain child
care to attend
school and
work**



**Single
parent
caring for a
child under
12-years-old
and enrolled
full-time**



**Working for
pay at least
20 hours per
week**



**Receiving
any work-
study funds**



**Receiving
TANF
benefits**



**Enrolled
in certain
programs
aimed at
employment**

Student Hunger and SNAP: Policy Challenges + Solutions

SNAP Eligibility

Today's students balance work and family responsibilities with school at a higher rate than any previous generation. Some low-income students, while enrolled in college, may be eligible to receive SNAP benefits, but the eligibility requirements are complex and narrow. In order for a student to qualify for SNAP benefits, a student must work at least twenty hours per week or receive a federal work-study grant; participate in programs under the Social Security Act; take care of dependents; or be placed in college through a workforce training program.⁷

As such, current SNAP eligibility requirements do not ensure that all low-income students, Pell Grant-eligible students, and/or independent students are eligible to apply for SNAP. In addition, SNAP eligibility is dictated by work requirements that state a SNAP recipient must work for pay at least 20 hours per week. These work requirements may prohibit some of today's students from qualifying because they cannot meet the minimum number of hours to work while also attending school and balancing other responsibilities. In some cases, working 20 or more hours a week may even put other financial aid students receive at risk.

Policy solution:

Redefine SNAP eligibility requirements in order to address student hunger challenges and ensure all of today's students—especially low-income students—can earn their degree or credential by allowing for school attendance considered in conjunction with work requirements.

⁶ Facts about SNAP. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/facts>

⁷ Rethinking SNAP Benefits for College Students. 2018. https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Rethinking_SNAP_benefits.pdf

SNAP Notification

Many of today's students who are eligible to receive SNAP may be entirely unaware because of the complex requirements associated with SNAP eligibility, especially for low-income students or working students.

Policy solution:

Create a more seamless process for today's students to be notified of their eligibility for SNAP, such as providing a notification to all students who are determined to not have enough family resources to contribute to the cost of their schooling that they may be eligible for SNAP.

SNAP Data

A number of researchers have conducted surveys to gain a better understanding of food insecurity on college campuses, but there is still a lack of federal data on student hunger. The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) currently only asks whether any member of a student's household received SNAP benefits. In 2020, NPSAS will incorporate basic needs questions into the survey to provide a better sense of what food insecurity looks like on college campuses. But even after 2020, there will be a delay in when the data become available, and other federal data collections should be considered to supplement NPSAS. Beyond 2020, it is unclear if NPSAS will continue to pose such a question to students and, as a result, that data will be reported.

Policy solution:

Ensure that the federal government continues to collect and report data on student hunger on an annual basis.

