The Impacts of a Food Pantry on College Students

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THE IMPACTS OF A FOOD PANTRY
ON COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The issue of food insecurity on college campuses has been explored in great depth in the last decade; however, there is much less research on the impacts of interventions such as food pantries. Some scholars suggest that food pantries alone are not enough to make an impact on food insecurity, asserting that, “not a single study has examined the effectiveness of food pantries at decreasing food insecurity on postsecondary education institutions” (Bruening, Argo, Payne-Sturges, and Laska 2017: 1788). This study aimed to gain insight into the student experience of using a food pantry and the impact that it has on their college experience. This study focused on what additional access to food and resources means to college students at a large, public, four-year institution. Interviews were conducted with twenty-eight UCF students who have used the Knights Pantry. The student experience using the pantry was explored, including entry to the pantry, barriers, how the pantry is used, and the emotions that students feel when using the pantry services. Further, the impact of the pantry on students was profound: students report more financial stability, more food security, and even, in some cases, better ability to perform in classes. In addition, a “ripple effect” of impact is seen, with services reaching others in the community, most often family members of students. Overall, this study serves as a model for future explorations of the impact of food insecurity interventions and provides the first insights into how additional food access impacts college students.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The field of sociology plays a very important role in the realm of social issues, including such issues as welfare reform and food security (Wilson 2017). It is often the work of sociologists that brings important inequalities and lived experiences into the public sphere (Wilson 2017). Public policy makers and decision-makers will not always heed the advice of sociologists or take seriously the outcomes, but the field still has a vital role to play in the sharing of information and findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

In the present work, the issue of food insecurity on the college campus will be explored. Although it has been well-documented that food insecurity exists among college students (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016; El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018; Ferrara Waity, Huelskamp, and Russell 2020; Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, and Arria 2018; Siddiqi, Cantor, Dastidar, Beckman, Richardson, Baird, and Dubowitz 2021; Silva, Kleinert, Sheppard, Cantrell, Freeman-Coppadge, Tsoy, Roberts, and Pearrow 2017), what is less understood is the impact of campus services, such as food pantries, that attempt to support student success and mitigate the negative impacts of experiencing food insecurity. So much is lacking that Davis, Sisson, and Clifton (2021) published a call for evidence on interventions provided at colleges to address food insecurity. In fact, the impacts of community food pantries in general have not been well-explored in the literature, aside from reports on quantities of food and the number of families served. This study attempts to fill some of the gaps in the extant research by understanding the lived experiences of students facing food insecurity, with an emphasis on the impacts of the services from the pantry. The focus on the impact of the food pantry sets this study apart from other studies on food insecurity on the college campus, which
tend to focus on whether food insecurity exists (it does) or the general experiences of the students who have low food security.

This particular study explores the impacts of the food pantry at the University of Central Florida, known as the Knights Pantry. The central research questions of this study are: How do students utilizing Knights Pantry perceive their experiences and the impact of additional support in their lives? How does acquiring food through Knights Pantry impact their lives as both students and as individuals? Although this study is conducted on one college campus, it is the hope that this study will inspire others of its kind in order to gain a better idea of the impacts across regions and contexts. It is easy to assume that providing additional food makes a large impact and changes lives, but there is very little research to back up that assumption or to qualify what it means for people to have access to additional, limited resources. Unfortunately, oftentimes the resources are limited due to a need to spread food out among many students. For example, the Knights Pantry limits each visit to five food items, although there are some items without a limit. Regardless, material items cannot be converted into cash to pay for other bills or expenses.

This study does not aim to determine the status of students’ food insecurity. Indeed, the Knights Pantry on campus does not have any need-based requirements and is open to any student who wishes to use the services. The purpose of this study is to explore students’ personal, lived experiences accessing food through a campus resource. As discussed previously, there is a lack of data related to the self-expressed impact of increased access to food, both on the college campus but also in communities more broadly. Much of the literature focuses on the number of individuals (students or otherwise) who are food insecure; the action step following is usually focused on how to increase that population’s access to food. There is very little, however, to
explore the emotional and practical impacts of that increased access once it exists. This study is one attempt to document the lived experience of individuals accessing food in a way that they were not able to before. It is important to understand the difference that increased food access makes to the people who are accessing it, so that practitioners and scholars can give the best recommendations for future support in alleviating hunger. Although this study is focused on college students accessing food, it is the researcher’s hope that it might be used as a template for future studies focused on a wider population of individuals accessing food.

In order to properly understand the context of the issue, it is important to first gain a thorough understanding of the issue of food insecurity in the United States at large, as well as the economic landscape underscoring the issue. Food insecurity is explored in detail in chapter two, including the causes, the economic backdrop, and the impacts of food insecurity on individuals, students, and families. Chapter three explores the systems at play in the United States, with an overview of theoretical underpinnings that keep food insecurity a part of society. These theories include the neoliberalist tradition, which often shifts blame onto individuals rather than fixing broken systems that perpetuate inequality and poverty, critical race theory, which accounts for differences in rates of food insecurity between racially diverse groups, and feminist theory, which helps explain the ways that women have historically been responsible for food preparation and acquisition.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the social safety net and the welfare state as it currently stands in the United States. Services and support for individuals in the U.S. have waned in the last forty years, which impacts the ways that people in this country can afford the cost of daily living, but also additional expenses, such as a college education. The financial support has
declined while the cost of living has risen substantially. This chapter outlines what is currently available to families and individuals and how it has changed over the course of history.

Chapter five explains the methods employed in this qualitative study, including the recruitment methods, population, interview protocols, and analysis strategy. The results are presented in chapter six, which shares the student experience at the pantry, and chapter seven, which covers the impact of the food pantry in several different categories. Finally, chapter eight presents a discussion and conclusions, with connections back to the literature, recommendations, limitations, and future research.
CHAPTER TWO: FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity in the United States is a nuanced social issue with many complicating factors. The first is the distinction between hunger and food insecurity. Hunger can be understood as the physical manifestation of not having enough food to eat for the body to function properly, which includes physical discomfort (Feeding America n.d.). Food insecurity, on the other hand, refers to the economic means of a family or individual to procure enough food to last for a period of time (Feeding America n.d.). Food insecurity is the preferred terminology amongst sociologists and policy makers, as it more accurately captures the experiences of families and individuals who are not able to put enough food on the table consistently, even if they are not always feeling hungry.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the official government entity tasked with tracking and providing solutions for food insecurity in the United States. The USDA defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Coleman-Jenson, Rabbitt, Gregory, and Singh 2019: 2). Food insecurity is defined as “access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources” (Coleman-Jenson, Rabbitt, Gregory, and Singh 2019: v). In order to clearly define what makes someone food insecure, the USDA created an eighteen-item module, whose metrics primarily revolve around the ability to purchase and obtain food. Many researchers use that module (or the smaller, six-item inventory used in this study) to measure food insecurity levels in communities.

The survey items in the module consist of questions that ask the respondent to reply to inquiries about their food situation in the last twelve months on a scale of often true, sometimes
true, and never true. Statements include: “(I/We) worried whether (my/our) food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more,” “The food that (I/we) bought just didn’t last, and (I/we) didn’t have money to get more,” and “(I/we) couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Additionally, there are a series of yes/no questions asked that include questions such as: “In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?” and “In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?” (USDA 2012). At its core, then, food insecurity is the inability of families and individuals to put food on the table, which relies on income and access to food resources. As such, food insecurity is intricately tied to other social inequalities, including income inequality, the wage gap, racial equality, and gender equality.

**The Numbers**

Food insecurity is an issue that impacts individuals and families across the United States. For the purposes of this study, “family” refers to households with dependents living in the household. In 2018, 11.1% of households in the United States were food insecure (Coleman-Jenson, Rabbitt, Gregory, and Singh 2019), which amounts to over 36 million individuals in the U.S. experiencing food insecurity. That number dropped to 10.5% in 2019 but rose steeply to 14% of all U.S. households in 2020 (Siddiqi, Cantor, Dastidar, Beckman, Richardson, Baird, and Dubowitz 2021), adding an additional ten million food insecure households. Not all households are impacted equally, however; the statistics for food insecure Black and Hispanic households in 2020 were higher than the national average at 24% and 21%, respectively (Siddiqi, et. al 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented rises in food insecurity, most of which are still not fully understood, having an especially concerning and disproportionate impact
on communities of color (Cavaliere, Drew, and Martin 2021). Feeding America, one of the nation’s largest food bank networks, reported distributing six billion meals during the pandemic and most food banks across the country served 55%-60% more people than they did in 2018 (Feeding America 2021; Stanger 2020). Families and individuals without children were impacted, with the overall food insecurity rate rising to 23% in April 2020, up from 11% in 2018 (Bitler, Hoynes, and Schanzenbach 2020). Further, a recent study on the impact of COVID-19 found that food insecurity rates among families with children increased during the 2020 pandemic, with numbers collected in April 2020 indicating that 34% of families did not have food to last through the week (Bitler, Hoynes, and Schanzenbach 2020). That same demographic group experienced food insecurity at 13% in 2018 (Bitler, Hoynes, and Schanzenbach 2020).

The experience for those with children during the pandemic was likely exacerbated by the absence of free and reduced lunches, since children were removed from schools in March of 2020 (Bitler, Hoynes, and Schanzenbach 2020). The details and benefits of the National School Lunch Program will be discussed in the next section. According to a recent qualitative study of families in New England seeking food bank assistance, as many as 70% of families had never gone to a food pantry or needed emergency food assistance (Cavaliere, Drew, and Martin 2021). It is worth noting that the study was not meant to be representative of the population, but rather a snapshot of one non-profit’s experience with the need for food associated with COVID-19.

Food insecurity on the college campus is not far removed from food insecurity on the national scale. The same inequalities that plague the country, related to socioeconomic status, race, and gender, among other identities, are replicated in the experiences of food insecurity on the college campus. A recent study of minority students at a New York community college found that 100% of the students in their study experienced low or very low food security (Ilieva,
Ahmed, and Yan, 2019). It has been suggested that households with students enrolled in two-year colleges may be at higher risk for higher food insecurity rates than those with students enrolled in four-year colleges (Blagg, Gundersen, Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Ziliak 2017). Focus groups of college students in California found a normalizing effect, where students associated food insecurity as ‘part of the college experience’ (Watson, Malan, Glik, and Martinez 2017). One study at a northeastern college found greater risk for food insecurity among off-campus students and first-generation students; this includes a spike in student food insecurity rates when they move off-campus in their junior or senior year (Riddle, Niles, and Nickerson 2020).

Studies of food insecurity on college campuses have mostly been conducted on individual campuses, with varying results. At one mid-Atlantic college, roughly 15% of students were food insecure, while an additional 16% were at risk of food insecurity (Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, and Arria 2018). At a medium-sized, four-year public institution in the southeastern United States, researchers found that 40% of students had cut their meal sizes (Ferrara Waity, Huelskamp, and Russell 2020). A study at the University of Florida found that 32% of college students surveyed were food insecure (El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018). Another study at the University of Massachusetts in Boston showed about one in four students experienced some form of food insecurity (Silva, Kleinert, Sheppard, Cantrell, Freeman-Coppadge, Tsoy, Roberts, and Pearrow 2017).

One of the most prominent research bodies studying college food insecurity in the United States is the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, which has been connecting studies on the topic since 2008 (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016). Recently, the HOPE lab attempted to conduct an aggregate study across multiple campuses, which took into account over 3,000 college students from 12
different states, finding the issue of food insecurity on college campuses to be widespread, even across school types (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016). Twenty-two percent of students reported very high levels of food insecurity and forty-eight percent of respondents reported some food insecurity in the past month (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016). Taking into account the HOPE Lab study and the individual college studies, the percentage of food insecurity college students appear to be higher than the national average of food insecurity, which was 14% in 2020 (Siddiqi, Cantor, Dastidar, Beckman, Richardson, Baird, and Dubowitz 2021).

**Causes of Food Insecurity**

The right to food is outlined as a fundamental human right in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, set in 1948 by the United Nations, and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights n.d.). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.) defines it as “a right to all nutritional elements that a person needs to live a healthy and active life, and to the means to access them.” The Declaration of Human Rights is an aspirational document with no enforcement protocols; as such, individuals sovereign states make decisions on how to provide access to food and when to supplement the food supplies of its citizens. So what does the United States think about food as a human right? “The USA is the only industrialized country in the world that does not formally accept food as a human right” (Anderson 2020: 439).

In the U.S., as in most of the world, the right to food has been defined as a commoditized product that consumers turn to the market to procure (Shannon, Kim, McKenzie, and Lawrence 2015; Anderson 2020). Although individuals are free to plant or raise their own food sources, it
may not be a feasible option, given the land, space, time, and money required to do so. The right to food, then, boils down to what people can afford to acquire from the stores that are available to them. In the United States, the underlying cause of food insecurity comes down to economic earnings of individuals because the way to access food is to purchase it. This section discusses the ways in which monetary factors impact one’s ability to be food secure in a system that prioritizes food as an economic interest rather than a human right.

Risk factors for food insecurity include loss of employment, low earnings, loss of public benefits, and recent hardships (Biggerstaff, McGrath Morris, and Nicholas-Casebolt 2002). When it comes to poverty, housing and homelessness are intimately related to food security. Without a stable home environment, it can be difficult to cook and prepare food (Schweid 2016; Smith, Butterfass, and Richards 2010). Housing and food insecurity are intimately related, of course. A recent study (King 2018) examined the relationship between housing stability and food security and found a correlational relationship between the two; that is, if one is experiencing food insecurity, they are at a greater risk of experiencing housing instability as well. Individuals experiencing food insecurity and homelessness may face additional barriers to healthy food, including lack of access to produce and lack of cooking and refrigeration facilities (Smith, Butterfass, and Richards 2010). Further, there are complicating factors behind food insecurity because not all individuals living below the poverty line are food insecure. A 2017 study (Gundersen, Engelhard, and Hake) found that food insecure households had difficulty paying other expenditures in addition to food and often traded off which bills could get paid on a monthly basis. That same study acknowledged that other variables and conditions might be unknown, making the issue all the more complicated (Gunderson, Engelhard, and Hake 2017).
One of the factors of food insecurity is access to food resources. For instance, a family with a car and nearby grocery stores will find it easier to access food than a family without a car where the nearest grocery store is more than five miles away. Areas without nearby access to supermarkets or grocery stores are often referred to as food deserts. The USDA goes one step further and defines a food desert as an area where residents experience both low-income levels and low access to supermarkets or grocery stores (USDA 2019). Low income is defined by the census tract and more than 20% of families in a given census tract must fall below the poverty line (USDA 2019 Definitions; Hamidi 2020). Low access is defined as being more than a mile away from a grocery store in urban areas (USDA 2019 Definitions).

When thinking about a food desert as an area lacking proximal supermarkets, it is important to note that studies show that supermarkets are typically located in areas and neighborhoods with financial resources (Hamidi 2020). Resolving the issue of food deserts is not so easy as mandating a grocery store to open in a certain area. Farmers and others in the supply chain point out a significant number of barriers to supplying fresh produce to corner stores and local grocers (Lacagnina, Hughner, Barroso, Hall, and Wharton 2017). They even go so far as to say that it is cheaper and more financially beneficial for them to leave crops in the field or donate them to local non-profit organizations instead of selling to smaller stores (Lacagnina, Hughner, Barroso, Hall, and Wharton 2017). Further, grocery stores do not always thrive in neighborhoods; a recent study showed that newly opened grocery stores often close without a clear pattern (Engler-Stringer, Fuller, Hasanthi Abeykoon, Olauson, and Muhajarine 2019). These barriers make it difficult to advocate for bringing supermarkets and fresh produce to food deserts.
Additionally, there is no guarantee that residents will grocery shop within their own neighborhoods. Sometimes bus lines or other transportation do not run directly to stores within their own neighborhood (LeDoux and Vojnovic 2013). Individuals may rely on transportation from friends or family who do not shop in the same area (Shannon 2016). As such, focusing on supermarkets as the solution may not be sufficient (Shannon 2016). Food banks do provide support to communities in need. One study finds that access to food donations improves a family’s nutrition intake (Mousa and Freeland-Graves 2019). However, food banks may not be able to provide food to all families in need. More information and details about current food access are provided in sections below but resolving the issue of food access and food deserts has not proved to be an easy process.

Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck (2019) identify five reasons why food insecurity among college students has been on the rise: more students face financial insecurity, college costs have risen drastically, the Pell Grant has less purchasing power, it is more difficult to work and pay for school, and colleges have less money to support the costs of tuition for students. The resulting high numbers of food insecure college students means that more students are struggling to put food on the table and complete their studies. Food insecure students reported disruptions in academic work (Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, and Arria 2018). Further, thirty-two percent of the students surveyed in the HOPE aggregate study indicated that food insecurity had an impact on their studies, with 55% saying they are unable to afford a textbook for a class, with additional students stating that they are missing class (53%) or dropping a class (25%) (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016). Another study in New York revealed a positive correlation between levels of food insecurity and academic performance,
meaning that students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to experience academic hardship or difficulties (Ilieva, Ahmed, and Yan, 2019).

Finally, as the next sections move to explore low wages and the impacts of food insecurity on individuals and families, it is important to remember that social issues do not exist in a vacuum; housing, the job market, and other factors, including racism and sexism, all play a role in the lived experiences of those in our society. The purpose of this study is to understand how improved access to food impacts the daily lives of college students who live in the same context as the rest of the country. The theoretical foundations for this study are laid out in a later chapter, but food insecurity runs in tandem with many other concerns for families, individuals, and students, making it a complicated, but necessary, social issue to better understand.

The Economic Landscape

Although the United States is often lauded as the land of opportunity with the potential for the American dream, research quickly shows that many families struggle to make ends meet on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis. Economic mobility in the United States has not changed substantially in the last forty years (Autor 2014). In fact, absolute income mobility has fallen across all income levels, driven primarily by the fact that wealth is being distributed unequally across socio-economic lines, with the rich getting richer (Chetty, Grusky, Hell, Hendren, Manuca, and Narang 2017). The unequal distribution of wealth is perpetuated by a socioeconomic wage gap and then further results in additional costs to low-wage workers, whose work is nonetheless deemed essential to the economy.
The Wage Gap

Three in ten families do not have enough financial resources every month (Jarosz and Mather 2018). According to a 2019 study by the Brooking Institute (Ross and Bateman 2019), more than 53 million working individuals in the United States earn low hourly wages in the workforce; that comprises about 44% of all working adults aged 18-64. That same study shows that women and Black workers disproportionately make up more of the low-wage income earner group than other demographics, relative to their population size (Ross and Bateman 2019), putting them at a distinct disadvantage. Additionally, women of all races are also disproportionately responsible for household chores, including food preparation (DeVault 1991; Hochschild 1989), which adds to the burdens of those earning low wages.

Further, workers with high school diplomas have seen their real income fall, even while college-educated folks have seen their wages stagnate, causing the gap between groups to widen (Autor 2014). Even with this growing gap, citizens within the United States have not widely supported wealth or income redistribution (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016). Suggestions by scholars for mitigating the gap between high school wage earners and college-educated individuals include strengthening Pre-K-12 education (Autor 2014); however, without minimum wage increases, the wage gap will likely continue. Nevertheless, Americans vastly overestimate their own social mobility, thinking that there is mobility even when it does not exist (Kraus and Tan 2015).

The majority of families at or below the poverty line are employed in at least a part-time job, although they have a difficult time making ends meet (Jarosz and Mather 2018). A recent study (Jarosz and Mather 2018) indicated that service industry jobs dominate the low-income job sector. According to Pietykowski (2017), the highest-occupied jobs within the low-paying
service industry are sales, food preparation/service, building/grounds maintenance, personal services, and health care support. Oftentimes, these jobs are billed as “low-skill” jobs, even though they do take skill and the economy needs these positions; for these reasons, there has been a push in the last few years for an increase to minimum wage up to $15/hour to create a living wage for low-income workers (Pietrykowski 2017).

Minimum wage in the restaurant sector for tipped workers is $2.13 an hour, the same amount as it was in 1991 (Hanauer 2016); the federal minimum wage remains at $7.25 an hour for non-exempt hourly work, although some states have passed laws or voted on bills to increase state minimum wage requirements (Hanauer 2016; US Dept of Labor 2021). In 2020, voters in the state of Florida supported Amendment 2 to increase minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2026, making it the eighth state to support a $15 minimum wage (Pramuk 2020). Those in favor of a living wage argue that it would pump more money into the economy because workers would have more disposable income to spend on goods and services, such as new cars, electronics/tech gear, and hair salons, as well as more money on groceries and restaurants (Hanauer 2016).

*Additional Costs for Low-Wage Workers*

Not only are positions not valuing the contributions of employees by compensating with a living wage, but a recent study (Vargas 2017) also brought to light an additional psychological stress for some service industry workers: increased scrutiny and mistrust from employers. In her ethnographic study of one retailer in the dollar store industry, Vargas (2017) found policies, procedures, and practices that place undue scrutiny, surveillance, and stress on workers in the industry. The stores have begun to view employees as liabilities, choosing to micromanage every part of their day and assume the worst of employees in the industry. Although her study is
limited to one such retail store, it highlights the added stress that workers might experience while at work, in addition to the stress of not being able to afford bills, such as groceries and rent.

For working poor families, there are many ongoing concerns. Desmond and Gershenson (2016) set out to explore the connections between job loss and housing loss. They found that housing instability can actually lead to job loss among working class families; since many low wage jobs do not provide much (if any) time off or leave, individuals cannot take time off work to dispute eviction decisions or attend lengthy court hearings. The loss of a home may result in transportation and attendance issues, which can then lead to involuntary termination (Desmond and Gershenson 2016). It becomes an incredibly precarious situation for the family unit and can additionally result in negative health outcomes and mental health concerns.

Low-income wage earners often see negative health impacts for a variety of reasons, including limited access to health and preventative care (Cunningham 2018; Jarosz and Mather 2018). Early childhood health can also perpetuate the cycle of poverty (Palloni 2006). Folks in low-income brackets tend to experience a barrage of physical and mental health concerns, including an increased risk of obesity, fears related to neighborhood safety, stress about paying bills, anxiety, depression, and trust issues (Cunningham 2018). Despite low-wage earners disproportionately experiencing negative health outcomes, few employers provide workplace health programs to their employees (Hannon, Garson, Harris, Hammerback, Sopher, and Clegg-Thorp 2012). High-wage earning jobs are much more likely to have employer supported health initiatives (Hannon, et.al. 2012). Additionally, an increase in wealth is positively associated with an increase in life expectancy, with the top 5% of income earners gaining an average of three years of life, while other income brackets have not seen similar increases (Chetty, Stephner, Abraham, Lin, Scuderi, Turner, Bergeron 2016).
Because of the long hours and low pay, food preparation and mealtimes become one more chore to finish, which sometimes leads to skipping meals entirely (Devine, Jastran, Jabs, Wethington, Farell, and Bisogni 2006). Mothers and fathers alike express negative spillover from their jobs, such as stress and fatigue (Devine, et. al 2006). Parents are forced to trade off on other things as well, such as choosing between nutrition and cheap meals; parents themselves also skip meals to ensure that their children can eat (Devine, et. al 2006). Families and individuals struggling with low wages and food insecurity also make important decisions every month about paying bills; there is a history of families “trading off” by paying for some bills one month and other bills the next (Gundersen, Engelhard, and Hake 2017; Knowles, Rabinowich, Ettinger De Cuba, Cutts, and Chilton 2016). This practice means that adults in the household are constantly making difficult choices to prioritize bill planning, which can result in stress as well as falling behind on bill payments. Understandably, these stressful choices have an impact on those in the household, in addition to the impacts of food insecurity itself.

Further, scholars (Cubrich 2020) have expressed concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on low-wage workers, due to the lack of benefits like time off and health care. The COVID-19 pandemic sent many white-collar positions to remote work-from-home scenarios, while those in low-income wage positions, such as grocery store clerks, delivery drivers, and food service workers, had no choice but to continue to show up in-person and continue interacting with customers (Cubrich 2020). The long-term impacts of COVID-19 on low-income wage earners is not yet fully understood; however, given the disparities that existed before the pandemic, it would not be surprising to see those disparities grow and transform in other ways in the next few years.
Although this study is focused specifically on food insecurity, it cannot be ignored that financial insecurity results in other areas of financial concern as well, including housing insecurity and transportation issues (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016). Students with all three insecurities were more likely to experience anxiety and depression (Leung, Forooqui, Wolfson, and Cohen 2021; Bruening, Brennhofer, Woerden, Todd, and Laska 2016). This research is similar to that of the general population, given the impacts of food insecurity and financial insecurity generally. The purpose of this study is to explore how access to additional food support impacts the college student experience, so these additional financial factors are a necessary part of the conversation but are not the central focus of the research at this time.

Known Impacts of Food Insecurity on Individuals, Families, Children, and Students

It is not surprising that a lack of food and subsequent nutrition has an impact on one’s quality of life. Children are especially at risk and “households with children are more likely to be food insecure than those without” (Gundersen and Ziliak 2015: 1830). The impacts on children are well documented, given that children are still developing and have little control over their access to food and nutrients. That does not mean, however, that kids are not aware of their family’s food situation. One study interviewed children ages nine-sixteen to gauge their understanding of food insecurity (Fram, Frongillo, Jones, Williams, Burke, DeLoach, and Blake 2011). Although mothers explicitly reported that they are protecting their children from food insecurity, the children interviewed were not only conscious of the issue but were actively changing their behaviors to accommodate. Children reported being aware of the “cheap” foods that meant that money was tight and even reported policing their own eating as well as their siblings in attempts to make the food last longer, as well as intentionally not asking for treats or
specific food at the grocery store (Fram, Frongillo, Jones, Williams, Burke, DeLoach, and Blake 2011).

Children living in food insecure households are also at risk for health and mental health concerns. A recent study examining National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data found that children in food insecure households were significantly more likely to have mental health concerns than children in food secure households (Burke, Martini, Çayır, Hartline-Grafton, and Meade 2016). Adolescents were particularly vulnerable, as they tend to feel the impacts of food insecurity more strongly, especially when in very low food secure households (Burke, Martini, Çayır, Hartline-Grafton, and Meade 2016). Further, families experiencing food insecurity can also see an increase in chaos at mealtimes, resulting in disrupted mealtimes and fraught relationships (Rosemond, Blake, Shapiro, Burke, Bernal, Adams, and Frongillo 2019).

Food insecurity can also be dangerous for young children. Food insecurity in children under the age of five can result in decreased social-emotional and cognitive function decreases upon entering kindergarten (Johnson and Markowitz 2018). Additionally, kindergarteners who experience low food security over time experience lower scores in subjects such as math, reading, and science (Kimbro and Denney 2015). In addition to mental and behavioral health, negative physical health impacts are present, including an increased risk of childhood asthma (Mangini, Hayward, Dong, and Forman 2015).

However, not all food security results in negative impacts. Transient food insecurity, that is, food insecurity lasting for short periods of time, is not linked to negative outcomes for families and children (Ryu and Bartfeld 2012; Kimbro and Denney 2015). It is sometimes difficult to know the extent to which families and individuals experience food insecurity, however, making it challenging to understand the true impacts. The difficulty is exacerbated by
the fact that most research in the field is concentrated on the impact on children. There is some data to show that adults under the age of fifty-five can experience negative health outcomes, including issues such as hypertension, mental health concerns, and, of course, decreased nutrient intake (Gundersen and Ziliak 2015). The purpose of the dissertation is to fill in some of the gaps on impact and gain a better understanding of the day-to-day impacts of food insecurity, especially on nonchildren, non-senior college-aged adults, with the purpose of also understanding the impacts that increased access to food through the college pantry might bring.

A recent mixed-methods study (Khosla, Gamba, Taylor, Adediji, Bovey, Engelman, Jones-Bey, Kwan Lan, Vo, Washington, and Inch 2020) discussed the impacts of food insecurity on student academic performance. Students pointed to a lack of time to study due to work obligations and family obligations (Khosla, et al 2020). Another qualitative study (Beam 2020) found that nontraditional students experiencing food insecurity feel tired and ignore hunger pangs during class and while completing schoolwork, in addition to the emotional stress of dealing with finances and food insecurity for themselves and their families. Additionally, there was a feeling of isolation due to the inability to socialize around food, since much of the college experience involves eating together (Beam 2020). In terms of the academic impact, the students pointed to missing class, reduced learning, and difficulty with academic expenses, although most of the students also stated that they were committed to graduation even with the hardships (Beam 2020). In a qualitative study focused on nontraditional students who are food insecure, they pointed to similar coping strategies as the general population, including making food last, borrowing food or money, sacrificing food or food quality, and making trade-offs to pay for other bills (Beam 2020).
Current Food Access

Food insecurity is not an issue that has gone unaddressed, although it does remain unresolved. There are a number of programs, both governmental and in the private sector, that attempt to address the issues related to food access. For better or for worse, most programs and initiatives address only the symptoms of food insecurity; that is, they are focused on providing direct access to food products only. This section explores that variety of avenues that are available for accessing food and the various mechanisms of control that are exerted over working families in the process. The unfortunate piece, as will become apparent, is that there is very little emphasis on addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity, which boils down to lack of income and affordability. That being said, the current interventions are important to understand. There are two primary ways that individuals in need can access food under the current United States infrastructure: government food assistance programs and private food banks and pantries within communities. A third set of solutions are rather unconventional and are covered as well.

Government Support

Government assistance programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, which both provide direct food provisions. An additional benefit for families with children is the National School Lunch Program, which is available in schools for children whose families fall below a certain income threshold. Additionally, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) supplements family income for low-income families through direct payment options.

With the exception of TANF, which is technically a social safety net/welfare program, all the federal programs listed provide access to specific food items that families may need. As a
social safety net program, the history and details of TANF will be covered in a later chapter, as this chapter is concentrated on food assistance programs specifically. The first food assistance program, SNAP, was more commonly known as food stamps until 2008, when the name was changed from its original conception in the 1960s (Gunderson 2020; Schembri 2019). SNAP is available to families at or below 130% of the poverty line ($25,100 in 2018 for a family of four), and its main purpose is to decrease food insecurity (Gunderson 2020). Administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), SNAP is an entitlement program, which means that anyone who qualifies for benefits will receive them (Gunderson 2020). Roughly 45% of SNAP recipients are under the age of eighteen (Vissing, Gu, Jones, and Gabriel 2017).

SNAP benefits are not restrictive to certain quantities and types of food. The food benefits can be redeemed for any food item in the grocery store, with the exception of prepared hot foods, such as hot chicken or meals from the deli. There is occasionally talk among lawmakers of restricting SNAP benefits to certain foods or food types and eliminating options to certain things (such as soda or high-priced seafood). Gunderson (2020) argues that removing autonomy and dignity from the SNAP program by imposing restrictions on food items would negatively influence the success of the program.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits are provided to women with children aged five and under. Unlike SNAP, the WIC program is restricted and allows families to access very specific high-nutrition foods in specific quantities (Besharov and Germanis 2001). The eligibility guidelines for WIC mean that a family must fall below 185% of the poverty line as well as show nutritional risks, which could be anemia or inadequate growth; they must also attend quarterly check-ups to continuously prove their need for support (Barnes 2021). Each state has the
autonomy to create their own list of redeemable foods. WIC benefits can only be used for particular approved foods and will not work for anything else. Additionally, WIC is not an entitlement program; there is a limited number of funds available to support families on WIC, and not all families who qualify will receive benefits.

Both WIC and SNAP require families to fall under a certain income threshold to qualify for benefits. However, the threshold can negatively impact families. When families begin making “too much” money, they can have their SNAP benefits pulled, resulting in increased financial and economic strain (Ettinger De Cuba, Chilton, Bovell-Ammon, Knowles, Coleman, Black, Cook, Becker Cutts, Casey, Heeren, and Frank 2019). Further, families saw reduced health outcomes when their SNAP benefits were removed; as such, having a system that slowly weans families off the program instead of immediate removal would be more beneficial to positive family outcomes (Ettinger De Cuba, et. al 2019).

Both SNAP and WIC benefits are almost universally redeemed through an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which can be used at the check-out line (Gunderson 2020). This is a massive improvement on previous methods, which, in the case of WIC benefits, involved complicated paper vouchers that increased stigma at the checkout line and limited families in their ability to claim their full benefits (Chauvenet, De Marco, Barnes, and Ammerman 2018). The move to using EBT cards in all states will hopefully reduce stigma for families using government food assistance benefits. Although technology has grown substantially, a recent study examined participant attitudes toward online EBT purchases. Recipients were largely hesitant to order groceries online, preferring to purchase items they could see and scrutinize for

1 Florida’s list of WIC-approved items can be found here.
themselves (Martinez, Tagliaferro, Rodriguez, Athens, Abrams, and Elbel 2018). The challenges of transportation in food deserts and food access discussed previously will likely remain for at least the next few years.

Unfortunately, SNAP benefits alone are often not enough (Vissing, Gu, Jones, and Gabriel 2017). Schembri (2019) found in a qualitative study of SNAP recipients in Texas that food banks are frequented in addition to utilizing SNAP benefits. Additional research points to a gap at the end of the month when benefits run out (Keith-Jennings, Llobrera, and Dean 2019), presumably due to recipients spending more heavily at the beginning of the monthly cycle (Beatty, Bitler, Huang Cheng, and van der Werf 2019). Indeed, the practice of spending more heavily at the beginning of the monthly cycle is consistent across SNAP recipients, independent of other income streams, such as wages (Beatty, et al 2019).

Additionally, not all working class families enroll in SNAP benefits. A 2017 study (Smith, Bertmann, Pinard, Schober, Shuval, Nguyen, Fricke, and Yaroch 2017) found that 39% of the working poor and 45% of the non-working poor used SNAP benefits. The stringent paperwork and possibility of having benefits removed may be barriers to participation for the working poor group (Smith, et al 2017). Eligible families with one or more undocumented immigrants in their household may not apply to SNAP benefits because of fears that enrollment will put their family members in jeopardy or impact their own citizenship status (Pelto, Ocampo, Garduno-Ortega, Barraza Lopez, Macaluso, Ramirez, and Gonzalez 2020). A 2020 study of Asian and Pacific Islander immigrant communities in the United States found that barriers to participation in SNAP included shame, pride, misinformation about the program or not knowing about its existence, and the application process itself, which can be complex and time-
consuming, especially when staff is only available to help during weekday hours (Louie, Pham Kim, and Chan 2020).

When it comes to the use of the Supplemental Nutrition and Assistant Program (SNAP) among college students, the results are largely mixed. The HOPE Lab study suggests that about 25% of food insecure college students have used SNAP benefits (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016). Unfortunately, however, “the current social safety net typically excludes college students with financial need from getting support,” because of the work requirements for SNAP benefits (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016: 21). As currently written, SNAP requires a twenty-hour work week in order to receive food support. Full-time students were deemed ineligible for SNAP as part of the welfare reform discussed in Chapter Four, so SNAP benefits must either be used by a fully independent student (not claimed on parent tax returns) or be used within the family unit (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019). The current language from the USDA around SNAP benefits is that most college students are not eligible (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019).

The remaining government supported program providing access to food is limited in its scope to children only. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was founded in 1946 under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (USDA 2019 NSLP). In 2016, the program served 30.4 million children in the United States and operates in both public and private childcare, elementary, and secondary schools (USDA 2019 NSLP). Similar to WIC, eligibility for NSLP is based on the household income and relies on the same standards as SNAP and WIC; schools with over 40% of students who qualify can apply for community eligibility, in which all students in the school have access to free and reduced lunch (Arteaga and Heflin 2014). NSLP is
relevant in that it is another way that children and families can access food, at least during the school year.

**Food Pantries**

When families need additional food support, they often turn to non-profit organizations, such as food banks and food pantries. Although there is a subtle distinction between the two, with food pantries typically distributing to community members and food banks typically collecting food within a region to allocate to food pantries, both serve a similar purpose, which is to provide food access to low-income, food insecure families (Long, Rowland, Steelman, and McElfish 2019; An, Wang, Liu, Shen, Loehmer, and McCaffrey 2019). Food pantries have expanded since the 1980s (Kicinski 2012). One set of authors goes so far as to assert that “food pantries are an important addition to the food acquisition system” (Vissing, Gu, Jones, and Gabriel 2017 p. 475). A 2009 study found that pantry users fall into two general categories: individuals who have recently needed to use the pantry due to unforeseen need, such as being laid off, and individuals who use the pantry on a long-term basis, often for years (Kicinski 2012).

The studies showing the impact of food pantries on health, well-being, and other metrics are few and far between. A scoping study on the impact of food pantries on health metrics found very little data to show the impacts on traditional physical health, with the exception of BMI; the study cited several limitations, including lack of longitudinal data and tracking as well as the difficulties with full-time staff support at non-profit organizations (Long, et al 2019). A recent study examined the experience clients have at a food pantry in their community (Vissing, Gu, Jones, and Gabriel 2017). The study unsurprisingly showed that clients prefer to have their privacy respected and be treated with dignity (Vissing, Gu, Jones, and Gabriel 2017).
Even those who are not considered “poor” may experience food insecurity and accompanying challenges. When high to middle-class adults experience unexpected food insecurity, they often do not seek out food pantries, hiding their food insecurity from those closest to them in their lives, with many attributing it to stigma (Zepeda 2018). There also tends to be a lack of understanding of how food pantries work and the qualifications required, further restricting access for those new to food insecurity (Zepeda 2018). This finding may point to a need for food pantries to have less stringent requirements for supplying food to community members, as it can sometimes be difficult to find pantries without income restrictions.

It is important that families receiving assistance from food banks receive it in a welcoming environment, as it helps to remove the stigma and encourage families to seek out the support they need (Cavaliere, Drew, and Martin 2021). In one study, volunteers at a food bank felt justified in yelling at clients or judging their decisions with other volunteers (Kicinski 2012), which can create a hostile environment for pantry users. However, as will be discussed on both the social safety net section and in the theoretical foundations, a shift toward the neoliberal ideology encourages shaming of welfare recipients or those who need support because those individuals are violating the principles of making it “on their own.” Food banks and pantries must work against the stream to ensure that their volunteers and staff are treating clients with respect of their decision-making and preferences.

Respecting client preferences and abilities may sound easy, but there are many potential pitfalls. Food banks may try to expedite processes by streamlining services. However, giving food out in pre-sorted bags may result in families not eating all the provided food; a recent study suggested that if individuals do not like the food they are given or do not know how to prepare it, they will not eat it or will give it others in their lives (Pritt, Stoddard-Dare, DeRigne, and Hodge
2018). This is further complicated by the fact that food banks are being pressured to ensure healthy outcomes for participants; some are altering their operations and strategies in order to do so (Handforth, Hennink, and Schwartz 2013). At the very least, there is a push for more fresh food, including fruits and veggies (Handforth, Hennink, and Schwartz 2013; Wetherill, White, and Seligman 2019).

A study of food bank executives identified challenges that food banks face to delivering nutritious foods, including the scarcity of food and the need to take any donated items (Wetherill, White, and Seligman 2019). Additionally, it is important to stress moderation for foods and not try to take away the independence of families to make choices about food in their homes (Wetherill, White, and Seligman 2019). However, those organizations who were highly focused on nutrition also tended to be well-versed with data on the health outcomes of their clients (Wetherill, White, and Seligman 2019). Of course, research on the healthy food options at food banks (Wetherill, White, and Seligman 2019) beg the question of whose responsibility it is to ensure public health outcomes.

There is research to show that families who experience food insecurity also have difficulty obtaining other household supplies as well, including such things as detergent, soap, and shampoo (Fiese, Koester, and Waxman 2014; Feeding America 2013; Pritt, Stoddard-Dare, DeRigne, and Hodge 2018). As mentioned above, SNAP and WIC benefits do not allow recipients to spend money on these types of items. When families are unable to afford household goods, they express feeling personal degradation as well as stress and worry; they also report using public facilities or stealing from public bathrooms (Fiese, Koester, and Waxman 2014). They may also be unable to properly clean kitchen supplies without dish soap (Pritt, Stoddard-Dare, DeRigne, and Hodge 2018). Another study found that food pantry clients have greater
difficulties in accessing kitchen supplies, which can result in a decreased ability to prepare food
given by food pantries and food banks (Pritt, Stoddard-Dare, DeRigne, and Hodge 2018). In a
recent study asking urban food pantry recipients about their access to kitchen items, less than
two-thirds of the participants could access a freezer at home (Pritt, Stoddard-Dare, DeRigne, and
Hodge 2018).

Studies related directly to campus pantry use are extremely limited due to their relatively
new entrance to college campuses. One mixed-methods study at the University of Florida found
that although 70% of students in their sample knew about the pantry, only 15% had used the
resources from the pantry (El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018). However, of those who
are using the pantry, roughly one-third indicated that they are using it as their primary or source
of groceries and food (El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018). Those who did not use the
pantry indicated that social stigma, lack of information, a feeling of “taking resources away from
others who need it more,” and the hours of operation were the primary barriers to pantry use (El
Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018). Another study at a medium-sized public institution
found that only 9% of students indicated using a food pantry to supplement their food supply
(Ferrara Waity, Huelskamp, and Russell 2020). In fact, 62% of these students were unaware of
food pantries in the area and 70% would not feel comfortable going to a pantry (Ferrara Waity,
Huelskamp, and Russell 2020). At a New York community college, only 17% of students
reported using the campus food pantry (Ilieva, Ahmed, and Yan, 2019).

Some scholars suggest that campus food pantries alone are not enough to make an impact
on food insecurity, asserting that, “not a single study has examined the effectiveness of food
pantries at decreasing food insecurity on postsecondary education institutions” (Bruening, Argo,
Payne-Sturges, and Laska 2017: 1788). This study hopes to gain insight into the student
experience of using a food pantry and the impact that is has on their college experience and to shed some light on what additional access to food and resources means to college students at a large, public, four-year institution.

*Unconventional Solutions*

In terms of addressing issues of food insecurity, there are a number of approaches that the literature suggests could be fruitful, some of which are contradictory. King (2017) suggests that issues of food access should be addressed at the neighborhood level to improve access for social support and cohesion. His study found that participation in SNAP without social support did not reduce food insecurity (King 2017). However, other scholars suggest that community-based approaches can neglect individual needs and barriers to access, including resident mobility (Shannon 2016; Shannon 2017; Ver Ploeg, Dutko, and Breneman 2015).

One solution for food deserts and promoting food access that emerged in the literature was the idea of mobile food markets, which are designed to bring fresh produce into food insecure communities (Caramaschi, 2017; Gary-Webb, Bear, Mendez, Schiff, and Anthony 2018; Robinson, Weissman, Adair, Poteiger, and Villanueva, 2016; Widener, Metcalf, and Bar-Yam, 2012; Zepeda, Reznickova, and Lohr, 2014). These markets typically operate in public spaces, such as parking lots, community centers, libraries or other high traffic areas within a community (Caramaschi, 2017; Robinson et al 2016). One study (Caramaschi 2017) found that bringing produce into communities increased vegetable consumption among adults. Another study (Gary-Webb, Bear, Mendez, Schiff, and Anthony 2018) found an eighteen percent increase in vegetable consumption thanks to mobile food units. Zepeda, Reznickova, and Lohr (2014)
also found an increase in consumption of fruits and vegetables, although not to the recommend level of the national recommendations.

Unfortunately, not all studies show completely positive outcomes. A recent study pointed out the logistical and sustainability issues related to mobile food markets, primarily that many of them are not financially secure (Robinson et al 2016). That is, they do not break even financially and rely upon external funding sources to make ends meet (Robinson et al 2016). The markets are also “limited in their capacity to address disparities in food access as a result of a necessary focus on revenue generation” (Robinson et al 2016: 889). Additionally, a recent study (Zepeda, Reznickova, and Lohr 2014) found a number of constraints to the successful functioning of the mobile markets. These constraints include affordability of the produce, lack of convenience, concerns about trust within the community, and a lack of marketing to let people know about the market’s existence (Zepeda, Reznickova, and Lohr 2014). If mobile food markets are to be viable solutions to issues of food security, they will need to figure out ways to address those constraints as well as the financial ones.

Unconventional solutions are not often found on college campuses, although they may exist in communities close to campus in some cases. Overall, non-profit organizations do their best to support communities in need. However, there is criticism that some organizations end up putting the onus back on working families instead of addressing the underlying issues (Jindra and Jindra 2016). Although the organizations’ focus on relationship-building is well-intended, it often has the unintended consequence of requiring that clients navigate broken systems (Jindra and Jindra 2016). As a result, families and individuals are stuck with limited government assistance and private programs that are sometimes limiting and stigmatizing. In the absence of a
social safety net and reasonable living wage, there are few viable solutions to the issue of food insecurity for those living in the United States.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study opens with a broad overview of food insecurity. The biggest question, however, remains unanswered. Why are people in the United States food insecure? More importantly, why are some people more likely to be food insecure than others and why does the United States not have adequate systems in place to support food insecure households? Those questions do not have easy answers, but they can begin to be explained by grounding the work in a theoretical understanding of the systems that are at play in the United States contributing to the continuation of poverty and food insecurity. This chapter provides an overview of those frameworks and the next chapter will elaborate on the welfare policies that are deeply intertwined with those worldviews. These theories and understandings will serve to guide this study, its methods, and the understandings of the outcomes.

Rise in Neoliberalism

Although neoliberalism has been critiqued for being ambiguous and overused (Venugopal 2015), it nonetheless serves as a useful framework for understanding the current economic system and policy backdrop that influences not only food insecurity, but economic inequality generally. Neoliberalism is understood broadly to refer to the economic and social policies since the 1970s, which have greatly limited the government intervention that dominated in the period after World War II and encouraged a shift toward privatization and individual responsibility (Sowels 2020; Nkansah-Amankra, Agbanu, and Miller 2013; Kane 2018; Toft 2020). Sowels (2020) identifies the specific policies:

The deregulation of markets; the shift away from fiscal policy as a tool for managing demand and supporting employment in favor of monetary policy aimed primarily at achieving price stability; the privatization and contracting out of public services; steep tax
cuts for top income earners and the shift to regressive taxation (like VAT and sales taxes); ongoing cuts in corporation tax and the financing of public deficits through the sale of bonds to private and institutional investors; the pursuit of international trade liberalization; domestic and international capital market liberalization, and more generally the financialization of economic activity (i.e. the expansion of financial services and the transformation of assets into securities and financial instruments); as well as the deliberate weakening of trade union power, through anti-union legislation and cuts in numbers of tenured public sector workers. (p. 9)

In that long laundry list, there are a few very significant changes to note: privatizing public services (which includes schools and prisons), tax cuts for high income earners, and a weakening of trade union power. These three factors have shifted the economic priorities for the United States in the past fifty years. Additional neoliberal policy changes include a move away from rent control, diminished income assistance, and a defunding of public education (Palley 2020). A noteworthy impact of neoliberal policies is the encouragement of an “every person for themselves” mentality, which is demonstrated through individual retirement funds instead of government pensions and “school choice” options that include private schools and charter schools (Palley 2020). When people within a society view social goods as individual responsibilities, it creates an environment where the common good is no longer a priority.

In the United States, tax cuts under Reagan promoted the idea of “trickle-down” economics, where tax cuts for those in the wealthiest tax brackets would stimulate a better economy for all (Sowels 2020, Palley 2020; Nkansah-Amankra, Agbanu, and Miller 2013). Neoliberalism provides an important underpinning for understanding the present conceptions and perceptions of the welfare state, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Palley (2020) argues that the welfare state is in danger of being undermined by neoliberal principles, which includes reducing benefits, requiring means testing for support, shifting any support to the private market and away from public dollars, and using labor taxes instead of capital taxes to
fund benefits. Importantly, the move toward privatization has been prominent since the 1970s, which includes the prison system, Social Security benefits, and schools (Palley 2020).

One of the most prominent neoliberal policy changes in recent history was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) under the Clinton administration, which implemented work requirements and time limits to programs that had previously not required such stipulations (Palley 2020; Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019; Nkansah-Amankra, Agbanu, and Miller 2013; Kane 2018; Toft 2020; Whittle, Palar, Ranadive, Turan, Kushel, and Weiser 2017; Dave, Corman, Kalil, Schwartz-Soicher, and Reichman 2021). As its name suggests, the act emphasized individual responsibility, with the underlying assumption that those in poverty were not making good decisions and should therefore take more accountability for their own lives within the free market (Kane 2018). The measures also required a significant amount of tracking and documentation, both on behalf of the federal and state agencies and on behalf of the individual (Whittle, et al. 2017). One of the outcomes of this legislation was increased child poverty (Nkansah-Amankra, Agbanu, and Miller 2013).

What is additionally troubling about this piece of legislation is that it shifted the responsibility for social services to the private sector, specifically non-profit organizations, asking them to step in and provide charitable aid (Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019; Kane 2018). Under the Bush administration, the call for support of charitable aid was targeted specifically at religious organizations, in an effort to decentralize and privatize welfare (Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019). As such, much of the support being offered to those without financial means is offered through institutions that serve a religious purpose. Therefore, such services may be offered with religious messages or requirements (Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019) and may
make individuals with marginalized identities, such as the LGBTQ+ community, feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in those spaces (Russomanno and Jabson Tree 2020).

When it comes to food insecurity on college campuses, colleges have become increasingly aware of the impacts of food insecurity on their campuses. True to the neoliberal approach, colleges have been left to their own devices to respond to food insecurity among their students, with very little state or federal support. To address the issue, the College and University Food Bank Alliance was formed in 2012 with 13 members; it now has a membership of 545 institutions (Ferrara Waity, Huelskamp, and Russell 2020), with over 640 college food pantries registered (El Zein, Mathews, House, and Shelnutt 2018). According to a study by Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016), out of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, students identify that having a pantry or services located on-campus can reduce time and transportation needs, in addition to fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion on campus. This is especially true when the service is advertised to all students, not just marginalized students (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016). Important, however, there has been little to no support from state or federal government to address the issue, and it is instead left up to every individual campus to determine their response.

Overall, the ideology of neoliberalism has largely taken over the approach to the social safety net in the United States. Instead of the government supporting policies that benefit low-income and working-class individuals, the onus of responsibility has been shifted to each individual, even when there are not sufficient resources for individual success. The next chapter will explore welfare reform and the state of the social safety net as it relates to the theory of neoliberalism in addition to the other theories explored in this chapter.
Critical Race Theory

As has been mentioned in several places previously in this work, food insecurity does not exist in a vacuum. It is happening in tandem with many other social issues, such as housing instability, health disparities, unemployment, and the achievement gap, as well as occurring within an established social system. Scholars in the area of critical race theory (CRT) point out the ways in which the system in the United States of America inherently benefits folks with white skin while simultaneously impeding the success of those perceived to have black and brown skin. The basic tenets of CRT include understanding racism to be present in all everyday interactions, race as a result of social construction, and a general criticism of the current systems and structures in place that continue to perpetuate racist outcomes (Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

Several examples of racial disparities have already been given throughout the review of food insecurity, including unequal impacts of the pandemic on African-American communities. It is important to look deeper than that, however. The next section will interrogate welfare reform and the social safety net through the lens of neoliberalism, critical race theory, feminist theory, and intersectionality because the current state of the social safety net in the United States in deeply rooted in perceptions of who in this country should have access to certain things. One psychology study (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016) found that race plays an important role in determining the “deserving” status of welfare recipients. According to their survey results, “when individuals think about welfare recipients, they tend to imagine an African American who appears, to naive observers, to be relatively lazy and incompetent” (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016: 98). In the same study, they found that when folks associated welfare being provided to minorities, there was less support for the policies.
Food insecurity is deeply intertwined with the social systems in the United States and those systems must be examined as both correlational and causational to food insecurity in the United States. As will be discussed in the section on intersectionality, it is not sufficient to isolate race as a single variable because individuals do not hold one sole identity. Women have largely been held responsible for food preparation throughout history and so their role and responsibility in food insecurity may look different than that of their male peers, which also may look different based on racial and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to try to understand the holistic experience of those needing food assistance. How does food assistance, specifically in the form of additional food items, disrupt the social systems at play? Or, perhaps a better question: does food assistance disrupt the systems at play? Although this study is in the context of college students, they still live their lives under the influence of these systems.

Feminist Theory

Similar to critical race theory, feminist theory asks the researcher to question the systems at play in regard to the concept of gender as a social construct and institutions as reinforcing that construct. Several prominent sociological scholars contributed to the modern understanding of feminist theory. Sandra Bem (1993) documented the ways in which institutions constrain women, while Judith Lorber (1995) discussed gender as a social institution, differentiating it from its supposed roots in biology. Both authors note the importance of making institutions visible and acknowledging the impacts of gender. Even before these two authors published their works, Dorothy Smith (1987) emphasized the importance of examining the institutions impacting one’s lived experience. Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2000) was concerned with the underrepresentation of black women within the field and the lack of research around their unique
struggles and experiences with society. This type of intersectional approach will be discussed in
the next section, but the important piece to note is that feminist theory requires the researcher to
look at the underlying systems that lead to inequality between men and women’s experiences.

When it comes to food related activities, historically, food preparation and the
responsibilities of meal-planning have disproportionately fallen on women (Hochschild 1989;
DeVault 1991). DeVault (1991), in her work Feeding the Family, goes into great depth about the
ways that women take on the caring work of feeding families, which includes working around
food preferences and ensuring that everyone in the household has enough to eat. Arlie
Hochschild (1989), in her work in The Second Shift, similarly details the ways in which women
are largely responsible for both their work outside the home in the workforce and the bulk of the
work inside the home as well, making for a “double shift” of work. For these reasons, it is
important to view food insecurity through a lens of understanding gender and the ways that it
may impact one’s experience with food insecurity differently.

Additionally, the idea of the “feminization of poverty” has come to light in the past few
decades, which refers to “the condition in which the percentage of females living in poverty
relative to the composition of females in the population, is disproportionately higher than that of
males, and consistently so over time” (Ezeala-Harrison 2010, p. 149). A recent article
(Overstreet, Rosenthal, Case, Bullock, Reppond, Truong, and Singh 2020) discusses the
feminization of homelessness as well, a system in which women are at greater risk of intimate
partner violence, with very little support systems, public or private, to fill in the gaps of income
and housing when such relationships dissolve. Housing instability is closely correlated with food
insecurity, as both stem from lack of financial means (Desmond and Gershenson 2016). Food
insecurity, too, impacts women more heavily; scholars have argued that despite this knowledge,
policy measures approach solutions to food-insecurity without a lens for gender (Sachs and Patel-Campillo 2014).

Because food insecurity is rooted deeply in economic inequality, the role of women in advocating for a living wage should also not be overlooked. Melissa Snarr (2011) examines the role of feminism in advocacy organizations, noting that their involvement is largely overlooked, but vitally important. She notes that, “the lack of structural support – health care, child care, retirement, and so on – for these women demands ‘sacrifices’ for organizing low-wage workers” (Snarr 2011, p. 76). When it comes to advocating for a living wage, the organizations are overwhelmingly women, which is striking given that these same women are then also largely responsible for the feeding of their families as well (Snarr 2011; DeVault 1991).

In these ways, and many others, women are systemically placed at a disadvantage, experiencing higher poverty rates than their male peers. The lens of feminist theory will be applied to ensure that women’s experiences are not overlooked or glossed over throughout this research process. In some ways, it makes sense to center women’s experiences, as they are often at the forefront of experiencing the brunt of the impact related to food insecurity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to mean including people’s holistic identities in studies and research, as opposed to focusing exclusively on ideas of objectivity and neutrality that dominated the field for so long. The issue with objectivity and neutrality is that they naturally beg the question, “Whose world?” For a long time, the world of sociology was dominated by and understood through the lens of white men. Intersectionality seeks to change the narrative and include more diverse voices in the field, as well as provide a
theoretical and methodological approach that is more representative of those with marginalized identities (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016).

As such, then, intersectionality invites scholars to view people as complex beings with multiple identities that impact their lived experiences. A white, cisgender, gay man will have a different lived experience in certain spaces than a white, cisgender, straight man, although both men might have similar experiences in other spaces. Context matters, as does identity and perception. This study attempts to gain a better understanding of those lived experiences, while taking into account the underlying systems that constrain or allow action to be taken. Throughout the research process, it is incredibly important to honor the perspectives of those involved in the research and to ensure that their voices are heard.

A good application of intersectionality applies in the case of the feminization of poverty. Although it is true that women as a group experience higher levels of poverty relative to their male counterparts, Black women as a subgroup experience relatively higher poverty rates than white women do (Ezeala-Harrison 2010). A Black woman experiencing food insecurity might have a very different experience than a white woman as a result. Food insecurity itself has been noted to “disproportionately affect vulnerable and low-income adults” (Patterson, Russomanno, Teferra, and Jabson Tree 2020, p. 1; see also Sachs and Patel-Campillo 2014). In a recent study (Patterson, Russomanno, Teferra, and Jabson Tree 2020), researchers found that sexual minority women of all backgrounds experienced higher food insecurity rates than their heterosexual counterparts; Black sexual minority women were at even greater increased risk because of the added components of heterosexism and racism that they may experience.

Intersectionality, then, is a combination of feminist theory, critical race theory, and many other identity-based theories to provide a lens through which identities can be viewed together as
one, instead of divided. Qualitative research is one way to ensure that those lenses come through; it allows the researcher to frame questions and conversations in a way that centers identity as part of the lived experience while also challenging systems of oppression by reminding the researcher that it does not have to be this way. Intersectionality is a fundamental theory for this kind of work and will be referenced often throughout.

Theoretical Integration and Application: Welfare Reform

If the world worked according to only one theory, sociologists would be happy researchers! Unfortunately, the reason theories exist is because the world is a complex and confusing place, with many systems and structures working together and against one another at the same time. For that reason, it takes a combination of theories to make some social phenomena make sense. In the case of food insecurity, this study takes an intersectional approach that combines many of the theoretical ideas in order to understand the lived experiences of those accessing food assistance and experiencing low food security on a daily basis. The next chapter shows what it can look like to integrate the theoretical understandings to explore a related social issue: welfare reform.
CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING WELFARE REFORM AND THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Because many families experiencing food insecurity are also experiencing financial hardships generally, it is important to explore what resources are available to families and how those resources have changed over time. Food insecurity is just one negative ramification of poverty, and it is intimately related to how families can access other resources, such as housing and childcare. It will become apparent very quickly that the welfare state has changed vastly in the last decades, which impacts families living below the poverty line. Throughout this chapter, those changes are explored through the various theories from the last chapter. The theories are integrated to help frame the changes and impacts of the degradation of the social safety net.

The original history of welfare programs started after the Great Depression with the Social Security Act, Unemployment, and Aid to Dependent Children, a program specifically for parents experiencing hardship (Moffitt 2015). An important backdrop to the original welfare programs is that they were largely focused on single mothers raising children (Moffitt 2015). Aid to Dependent Children was modified by Congress in 1962 to become Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and then changed to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families in 1996 (Moffitt 2015). Importantly, as can be seen by the titles, all of these programs focus on children and families and primarily existed to support women with children. The feminist frame is important in noting this, as the responsibilities here were falling largely on females.

The change to TANF was a large part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which was passed in 1996 by Bill Clinton and written largely by the Republican majority in Congress (Wilson 2017; Potts 2016). One of the largest pieces of bill, aside from the work requirements, was the imposition of time limits for
individuals receiving aid (Danziger, Danziger, Seefeldt, and Shaefer 2016; Wagmiller, Lee, and Su 2020). TANF also moved from being an entitlement program, available to anyone who qualified, to having strict regulations and a maximum cap of recipients; this change resulted in a drastic reduction of welfare caseloads (Wagmiller, Lee, and Su 2020).

The implementation of TANF also resulted in shifting the fund distribution. Although the funds are still allocated from the federal government, they are distributed to states as block grants, giving the states a significant amount of leeway in how they allocate such funds their citizens (Wagmiller, Lee, and Su 2020). This process of redistributing control to the states is referred to as devolution of policy (Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019). As part of the policy devolution, states were given the freedom to enforce time restrictions within federal guidelines; as a result, there are discrepancies between states, resulting in 50% of African Americans being subject to shorter time cut-offs than the national requirement, compared to 39% of whites (Hurd 2002). Concerningly, welfare benefits have been found to be distributed unequally along racial lines, with black recipients receiving less discretionary support than their white counterparts (Hurd 2002). Individuals with language barriers may face additional difficulties obtaining and keeping benefits (Hurd 2002).

At this point, it is important to pause and consider both neoliberalism and critical race theory frameworks in understanding welfare reform. As TANF began to change the way welfare was available and distributed, there was a simultaneous effort to individualize services (by giving each state the ability and responsibility to issue benefits) as well as an implementation of racist systems and infrastructures that largely left black folks behind in the allocation of funds. Throughout the rest of the chapter, the neoliberal and critical race frames become more prominent as states and citizens weigh in on the welfare reform debate.
After the changes were made to welfare support in 1996, many women were kicked off the welfare rolls, which resulted in them having very little income (Seefeldt and Sandstrom 2015). Seefeldt and Sandstrom (2015) studied the tactics these women employed in order to make ends meet; at any given time, about 10% of former welfare earners become disconnected from aid, earning a median annual income of $535. The women relied largely on disability income if possible, cohabitating with someone who was working, relying on a former partner or child parent, doubling up with another household, or living with family members (Seefeldt and Sandstrom 2015). TANF has been criticized for not doing enough to support families in poverty, which is due in part to a lack of working wage; one set of authors lament that fact that 40.8% of working single mothers do not earn enough to escape poverty (Danziger, Danziger, Seefeldt, and Shaefer 2016). The adaptation of TANF also allowed the states to impose restrictions or limit the benefits for families/mothers with newborn children; the goal was to encourage personal responsibility among individuals to not get pregnant while in poverty (Romero and Agénor 2018). However, a recent study showed that many families are not made aware of the benefits change they will experience if they have additional children; the statistics show that the provision has not had a large impact on childbirth numbers (Romero and Agénor 2018).

Access to welfare and the social safety net is limited in other ways as well. Padilla, Scott, and Lopez (2014) document the difficulties that farmworkers have in accessing safety net programs, including unemployment, workers’ compensation, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps). The majority of migrant farmworkers in their study did not receive any public assistance (Padilla, Scott, and Lopez 2014). Of course, many migrant farmworkers are undocumented, which automatically limits their ability to access to programs, as many, if not all, federal and state welfare and safety net programs.
programs require proof of citizenship to access. The study found that “controlling for all other variables, documented immigrants, regardless of years in the United States, did not differ from U.S.-born farmworkers in terms of access to social insurance programs” (Padilla, Scott, and Lopez 2014 p. 163). Undocumented immigrants face unique challenges to accessing resources, which likely results in a reliance on non-profit agencies for support.

One big result of the implementation of the PRWORA was a shift away from cash support and instead to in-kind support for specific issues, which could include SNAP benefits, housing assistance, or childcare assistance (Wagmiller, Lee, and Su 2020; Parolin and Luigjes 2019). As Wagmiller and associates (2020) point out, however, cash assistance is sometimes vital to families who need flexibility to pay for unexpected expenses or needs. The gains in supplemental support do not entirely make up for lost cash assistance; one study showed that families who lost $50 in TANF assistance could gain back between $17 and $32 in assistance between SNAP and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Parolin, and Luigjes 2019). However, that amount still leaves a gap of anywhere from $18 to $33 that cannot be recouped and not all families will qualify for SSI.

Again, the neoliberal frame is of vital importance here. It was deemed that individuals needed to take more responsibility, while at the same time the states wanted to dictate how individuals could access resources. Instead of giving cash assistance, the assistance became incredibly specific, so as to exert as much control as possible over recipients. The changes to welfare in 1996 had other negative impacts as well. In an attempt to compel low-income individuals to work, the reform bill discouraged individuals from going to school (Nguyen 2001). Instead, it required individuals to have low-income wage jobs and did not allow school to count towards the number of work hours required to keep the benefits (Nguyen 2001). As such,
SNAP benefits are largely inaccessible for college students, because they do not meet the work requirements of twenty hours a week (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016; Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019). Individual states, however, have implemented policies that are intended to support students pursuing their education; for instance, in Maine, up to 2,000 individuals at a time can qualify for support to finish school and move into better paying jobs (Nguyen 2001). In this way, some states are able to use the decentralization to their advantage to provide for their residents, but it also creates an imbalance between state benefits.

Policy devolution has consequences on the equality and equity of such programs: largely, that access is not available to all who need it and some states do not spend all of the allocated money available (Bruch, Meyers, and Gornick 2018). The Aid to Dependent Families and Children program was a federal entitlement program; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families was turned over to the states to administer through a block grant (Bruch, Meyers, and Gornick 2018). A recent study of state-administered benefits found “highly unequal access and benefits provided through the same programs in different states” (Bruch, Meyers, and Gornick 2018, p. 22). That same study calculated that the average benefits differ by as much as $1,000 per family on an annual basis, which is a substantial amount (Bruch, Meyers, and Gornick 2018). Further, states are only reaching half to two-thirds of those families who qualify for assistance, especially in cash assistance program (Bruch, Meyers, and Gornick 2018).

Unequal access to benefits is especially concerning given the current demographics surrounding the working poor. Although racial/ethnic minorities make up forty-one percent of working families nationally, they account for over sixty percent of low-income households (Jarosz and Mather 2018). Furthermore, many non-profit organizations were not meeting the needs of black Americans in the early 20th century; as such, African Americans started their own
community operations but were largely shunned by the non-profit community (Reisch 2008). The racist history of poverty and lack of support for families of color is where the critical race framework can provide some clarity on what is happening. Due to the institutions that were established (and re-established) following welfare reform, the ramifications on working class families of color were greater than for other population groups in the United States.

Further exacerbating the issue, Moffitt (2015) points out that the 1996 PRWORA did not necessarily reduce all welfare spending, but rather redistributed the priorities and those eligible. Individuals with disabilities and the elderly receive more funds, proportionately, than before the passing of the PRWORA (Moffitt 2015). Additionally, there has been a shift away from providing assistance to those below 50% of the poverty line and instead providing additional assistance to those between 50% and 200% (Moffitt 2015). Moffitt (2015) argues that this shift could be due, in part, to the ideology around the “deserving poor.” The idea of deserving poor harkens back neoliberalism and the idea that every individual should provide for themselves.

Because of the fear of individuals exploiting the system, the United States’ safety nets and welfare programs often involve what some authors refer to as welfare ordeals, which are aspects such as requiring excessive paperwork, interviews, and job searching while on unemployment (Blumkin, Margalioth, and Sadka 2014). Most welfare programs rely on stigma to encourage those receiving benefits to become self-sufficient (Blumkin, Margalioth, and Sadka 2014). Blumkin, Margalioth, and Sadka (2014) suggest that stigma may discourage fraudulent behavior, however they rightly express concerns that it may prevent individuals in true need from applying.

Research shows that many individual people in the United States have also bought into the narrative of individual responsibility. Focus groups in Maine found that middle-class
professionals echo many neoliberal ideals, including the idea that individuals in poverty need to work harder to get ahead (Kane 2018). One psychological study (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016) found that race plays an important role in determining the “deserving” status of welfare recipients. According to their survey results, “when individuals think about welfare recipients, they tend to imagine an African American who appears, to naive observers, to be relatively lazy and incompetent” (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016: 98). In the same study they found that when folks associated welfare being provided to minorities, there was less support for the policies (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, and Cooley 2016).

It is unclear how, or if, the recent pandemic will change the public opinion toward the social safety net. Since the 1980s, the approach to welfare and the social safety net has been a neoliberal one, with responsibility diffused back to the individual. A study as recent as April 2020 (Barry, Han, Presskreischer, Anderson, and McGinty) shows that the majority of Americans are in favor of some safety net features, including a 77% support rate for two weeks paid sick leave and 58% in favor of an increased minimum wage. However, less than half of respondents favored a universal basic income or single payer health system and there was limited support for publicly funded sick or family leave. With the limited safety net currently in the United States, the rates of food insecurity will likely only increase.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the research questions about the lived experiences of accessing needed resources through a college food pantry, a study using qualitative interviews was the best fit to gaining a better sociological understanding of the impacts. The study design was based on grounded theory approaches, allowing for flexibility in the interview process and the development of knowledge by letting the data speak for itself, as opposed to coming in with pre-conceived notions about the topic (Charmaz 2014). Of course, by virtue of conducting a literature review and creating interview questions, this is not a true grounded theory study; however, the grounded theory approach allows the interviewer to concentrate on fully hearing the experiences of the participants while simultaneously constructing meaning out of the emerging data (Charmaz 2014). This chapter goes into more detail on the research analysis process, but first outlines the context of the study, situated on the campus of the University of Central Florida, followed by a detailed description of the methods used to gather the appropriate data to answer the research questions.

The College Context and Knights Pantry

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is a large, public, four-year institution in the southeastern United States, with an undergraduate student population of over 60,000 students. The institution has connections with local two-year colleges to provide two-year graduates with direct admission to the university, admitting roughly the same number of transfer students each year as it enrolls first year college students. The graduate student population includes master’s and doctoral degree-seeking students in addition to medical professionals and accounts for approximately 10,000 students, bringing the total campus population to 70,406 (UCF 2021). In
2021, the institution’s total racial demographics for all 70,000 enrolled students indicate enrollment percentages of 45% white, 27% Hispanic/Latino, 10% Black, and 6% Asian; the gender demographics are skewed female, with almost 6,000 more female undergraduate students enrolled than males (UCF 2021). The average age of a UCF student is 23.6, although that average is slightly lower for undergraduates at 22.4 and higher for graduate students at 31.0 (UCF 2021). The vast majority of students at the institution (91%) are from the state of Florida.

Tuition and fees for a full-time in-state undergraduate are listed around $24,000 a year, including housing, books, and transportation; the tuition on its own is around $6,500 for a full academic year (UCF 2021). Approximately 80% of students enrolled at UCF receive some form of financial aid, which typically means grants, scholarships, loans, and/or work study employment (UCF 2021). As a comparison, the University of Florida (n.d.) states that over 70% of their student body receives financial aid, while 96% of students at nearby Rollins College (n.d.) have some financial aid. University of Florida’s expenses are comparable to UCF’s, at an estimated $21,000, while Rollins is much more expensive, with tuition and housing alone coming in at over $75,000.

University of Central Florida’s main campus is located on the east side of Orlando, where University Avenue ends at the campus entrance. Unlike urban campuses, the University of Central Florida is tucked into a relatively isolated part of the city, far from downtown and the theme parks. Instead of bustling city streets, UCF opts for a sprawling campus surrounded by over 1,400 acres of land around the perimeter of campus. Driving to downtown from the college will take eighteen minutes using the toll roads (thirty minutes without); driving to the theme parks adds another ten minutes or so. Although the closest grocery store to UCF is a two-minute drive, it takes over twenty minutes to walk there from the center of campus. Alafaya Trail, a
highly trafficked, four lane road, runs north-south alongside the west end of campus where University connects from the west, effectively cutting the main campus off from the establishments across the street. Students certainly do venture across Alafaya, but the campus seems designed to keep students contained within the boundaries of the main campus infrastructure.

When it comes to student resources, a campus as large as UCF does not disappoint. An abundance of resources is available to students, including health services, counseling, and legal services in addition to typical academic services, such as tutoring and involvement opportunities. One of those resources is the Knights Pantry, a food pantry spearheaded by students in 2009 as part of a campus leadership program. Under the guidance of a staff director, the pantry is run primarily by student managers and volunteers, who coordinate everything from donation drives to sorting food to volunteer recruitment. The Knights Pantry is currently strategically placed in a less-trafficked area on campus to provide anonymity and privacy to students.

The location of the Knights Pantry is in an area called Ferrell Commons. Across the street from the Recreation and Wellness Center, Ferrell Commons is also home to several academic programs, including LEAD Scholars and Student Accessibility Services, in addition to the Pride Commons and the All Knight Study space. The Libra community, a collection of roughly seven residence halls, is situated directly behind the Knights Pantry, and Parking Garage B sits kitty-corner from Ferrell Commons, offering an easy parking spot when the garage is not too crowded. Unlike the Student Union, which sits almost precisely in the middle of the circular campus, the Knights Pantry is on the southeastern side of campus, which means that any apartments or housing on the northwestern side have a fifteen minute walk or more to get there. However, the
location is ideal, not only because of the privacy afforded to students, but because the building has a loading dock to receive donations, which also provides privacy to donors if they so desire.

When it comes to using the Knights Pantry, current students must show their student ID and fill out a form to document the items received. There are no income requirements, and it is not a need-based service, meaning that students do not need to justify their need for services. Up to five food items per day are provided per student; the items can include three shelf-stable items, one frozen item, and one refrigerated item. While the items available may differ based on the day, students may select the items that they wish to procure. Students can take an unlimited amount of fresh bread when it is in stock. The pantry also provides other items when in supply, which might include household goods, toiletries, school supplies, small appliances, and dress clothes. There is typically no limit on the non-food items.

Between 2013 and 2019, the pantry averaged 1,700 visits by students per month who selected items to take with them. The numbers had been steadily growing every year, with a total of 11,295 visits in 2013; by the end of 2019, the pantry had seen a whopping 42,425 students come through the doors in different visits from January to December. During the peak months of 2019 (January, February, September, October, November), the Knights Pantry was seeing over 4,000 visitors a month. These numbers indicate the raw number of student visits, meaning that it includes a student who comes five times a week as five different visits, as opposed to being an unduplicated number recording individual students served.

COVID-19 impacted the number of students the pantry could serve, due to the campus being closed for an extended period of time. The Knights Pantry saw the number of visits plummet down to just over 300 in April of 2020 and sustained monthly numbers under 1,000 until the campus came back to life in August of 2021. From January 2022 to June 2022, the
pantry was back to averaging 2,600 visits per month, for a total of over 15,000 visits. Calculating the numbers on a daily basis, the pantry currently averages just over 100 visitors per day during the peak months, with a slight dip in the summer months. Although the Pantry does receive some financial support from the University, such as work study employees and a small budget which allows for some purchasing of food, the majority of their food items come from direct business partnerships, such as grocery stores, and individual donations.

Data Collection

To gain an understanding of the ways in which Knights Pantry impacts students on campus, qualitative interviews were determined to be the best way to gather such information. For a study of this nature, the goal was to conduct thirty interviews to ensure saturation of data. In total, twenty-eight interviews were completed, and data saturation was reached. In order to concentrate the interview on questions related to the pantry, a pre-interview survey was created to collect demographic information prior to the interview (Appendix C). Interviews were scheduled for one hour time slots to provide adequate time for participants to share their thoughts.

Recruitment

Participant recruitment began in late March 2022, after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board for the study (Appendix A). The Knights Pantry agreed to post the study flyer on their social media pages as well as hand out small flyers (Appendix B) to students who attended events or visited the pantry. Small flyers were distributed in person to students at campus events and in the Student Union. The flyer was also sent to various UCF departments for
distribution to students of interest, as well as to organizations such as the Knights of Distinction, UCF Lead Scholars, and Volunteer UCF. An email was also sent out to current and former Knights Pantry volunteers.

The flyers and social media posts contained a QR code as well as a quick link for interested students to sign up for a time to interview using Sign-Up Genius. Interview times were offered during weeknights and weekends. Sign-Up Genius automatically notifies the researcher of new sign-ups. When a student signed up, they received a personalized email from the researcher, thanking them for taking time for the study, sharing the explanation of research, and providing a link to the pre-interview survey, with the request that it be finished prior to the interview. The researcher also sent a calendar invitation to the student with the day and time of the interview and a link for a private Zoom chat. Participants were offered the option to interview in person if preferred.

In order to be eligible to participate in the study, individuals needed to be a current UCF student and have used the pantry at least once during their time at UCF. As such, the study was not limited to undergraduate students, as the purpose was to understand the impact of the food pantry on any enrolled student who needed support, regardless of their class standing. The sociology graduate program was able to provide financial support in the form of Amazon gift cards which were distributed to each individual interviewee after completion of both the survey and the interview. The gift card incentive was included on the recruitment flyer. Each student who fully participated was compensated with a $10 gift card for their time.

Initial recruitment primarily relied on the Knights Pantry staff to post social media and hand out flyers during the day. Recruitment in the spring 2022 semester resulted in twelve interviews by June, all of whom signed up through the link. The process picked back up in
earnest in August and September. A high number of participants were recruited from an email sent to all sociology students and an email sent to Knights Pantry volunteers. In-person recruiting by the researcher took place five times in the fall, with a few on weekends and a few on weeknights after 4:00. Flyers were distributed to students as they exited the pantry, along with a short spiel about the study. Two male participants chose to sign up on the spot, but dozens of flyers were distributed. Participants were not asked to disclose how they heard about the study.

Pre-Interview Survey

Students were asked to complete a pre-interview survey (Appendix C) before the interview. The pre-interview survey was designed to collect demographic information about the participant prior to the interview. It served two purposes: 1) to save valuable interview time for questions about their experience with the food pantry and 2) to help the researcher tailor some interview questions based on the pre-interview responses. For example, the pre-interview survey asks about student experience with food stamps/SNAP benefits. If a student said they have never applied for SNAP, the interview questions about government support will be more focused on whether the student knows about the resources, whereas if the student indicates they have applied for and/or received SNAP, the questions were more about their experience with that program.

The survey also inquired about the participant’s food security using the USDA short-form scale, which gives a broad overview of the food security status of students using the pantry. In practice, a few participants did not fill out the survey before the interview but completed it afterward, which made it difficult to tailor the interview questions. However, students were required to complete both the survey and the interview to be compensated with the gift card, so
there are no instances of a student not completing the survey. The full list of questions in the survey can be found in Appendix C.

*Interviews*

During the sign-up process, interested students were offered the option of participating in the study virtually through a Zoom interview or meeting in person on campus. All participants elected to interview through the digital platform. As such, all interviews were conducted on UCF’s Zoom platform, using the private room feature to ensure complete privacy for participants. The researcher conducted the interviews from her home office with the door shut as an additional measure of privacy to hear participants’ stories. All interviews were conducted between April 2022 and September 2022.

Although the interviews were scheduled for one-hour blocks, most interviews lasted 25-45 minutes. Participants were informed that the interview would be audio recorded; no video recordings were taken. The website Otter.ai was used for the audio recording and transcription. Otter.ai is an online transcription service which uses AI technology to automatically transcribe the words being said in real time. Once the recording is saved, the researcher can listen through it to make changes and edits to the transcription to fully reflect the conversation. Due to space and time limits on the free version, the researcher chose to upgrade Otter.ai to the monthly subscription for full access during the time the interviews were being conducted.

The interview questions were semi-structured using the protocol found in Appendix D. Probing questions were asked when participants did not elaborate, and a few additional questions were added through the iterative analysis process. Regardless, all interviews followed the basic original interview structure.
Sample and Sample Size

Although the original interview goal was thirty students, a variety of factors impacted the researcher’s ability to fully meet that goal. The timeline proved challenging, due to the summer break. Recruitment of students over the summer, even at a big campus like UCF, was difficult. Post-COVID, most summer classes were offered virtually, providing students with little incentive to visit campus. There was very little engagement from students on social media and email during that time as well. Therefore, most interviews were conducted in April and May and then again in August and September. The end of September brought a hurricane to campus, which took students away from the campus for over a week.

In the end, twenty-eight interviews were conducted for this study and those students shared a wide variety of stories and experiences. When reviewing the interviews, data saturation was reached, meaning that no new themes and codes were arising in the later interviews. As such, it was determined that twenty-eight interviews was a sufficient sample size to achieve the goal of the study. When it comes to determining if the sample is representative of the pantry population, there are also challenges. The Knights Pantry does not keep a running list of the individuals who use the pantry, as they strive to protect student privacy and allow students to use the pantry anonymously. As such, it is difficult to know the demographics of the students who use the pantry to know if the sample acquired in the study is an accurate reflection of the overall students who use it.

The sample is a convenience sample, given that students voluntarily opted to participate in the study. Out of the twenty-eight students interviewed, twenty-four of them are female. There is research to show that females are more likely to volunteer in general (Gage and Thapa 2012), so that number may simply be a result of response bias. An effort was made to recruit more
males to participate with the in-person recruiting at the pantry, which resulted in the two male participants. The total participant demographics are discussed in the next chapter, but the student participants came from a variety of backgrounds in regard to race and ethnicity, major, and age.

As previously mentioned, the pantry does not keep a list of emails of the students who use their services. They do, however, have a list of active and prior pantry volunteers. The recruitment email went out to the list, which resulted in quite a few interviews of students who utilize the pantry, but also serve as volunteers. The sample size does include a small skew towards volunteers at the pantry who also use the services. In this sample, volunteers consist of roughly half the respondents, which is not representative of the population using the pantry at large. That being said, the pantry is open to anyone on campus, regardless of need, and so any student who has used the pantry was eligible to participate and share the impact of the pantry on their lives. Individuals who only volunteered and had not used the pantry services were not included in the sample. This particular situation is discussed more in the limitations section, but it is also an important piece to note about the current sample.

Data Analysis

The analysis process was ongoing throughout the study’s timeframe. This work used methods from the grounded theory approach, such as broad, open-ended questions, memo-writing, initial coding, focused coding, and concluding with the emergence of themes from the data (Charmaz 2014). Data analysis starts with the interviews themselves, which were transcribed using Otter.ai. The researcher listened back through each interview at a slower pace in order to ensure that each transcript was as accurate as possible. The second (and sometimes third) listen allowed the researcher to hear pauses and tone that may have been lost during the
initial interview. Because only audio recordings were saved, the researcher was unable to look at facial expressions or reflect on nonverbal cues.

After each transcription was finalized, the transcript was downloaded to a secure folder to be coded. The researcher chose to code by hand instead of using a qualitative software, such as NVivo, primarily because the researcher was already familiar with the process by hand and was less familiar with the software available and because hand coding allows the researcher to become intimately familiar with the data. Initial codes were constructed through a line-by-line analysis process, with the researcher using short words and phrases to capture each line of text. For instance, one question asked participants about the emotions they experience when using the pantry. Their responses were then coded using one- or two-word phrases to indicate the feelings, such as “empowering,” “guilty,” or “excited.” This process is consistent with what is recommended by grounded theory practice (Charmaz 2014) and qualitative coding manuals generally (Saldaña 2021).

During this initial coding process, some data were added to spreadsheets or the participant’s pre-survey information. For instance, participants were asked in the interview about their current employment status and how much they currently work. This data was more relevant to demographics than to the story-telling aspect of their experience, so a column was added to the survey Excel file to denote that experience. Similarly, participants were asked what kinds of food they typically chose to select at the pantry. That data was compiled into a separate tab on the spreadsheet, in order to paint a picture of the different types of items obtained and to see if certain items were more heavily consumed than others.

The study design included an iterative approach to the analysis. As such, the initial coding was conducted shortly after the completion of each interview, although at times two or
three interviews would be coded during the same session by the researcher, especially if interviews were conducted in close proximity to each other. Analyzing the interviews as they were conducted in an iterative way allowed the researcher to adapt more constructive questions to the interview process. As the interview process continued, the researcher added a few questions to the interview protocol, including an important follow-up question about SNAP/government assistance. After hearing a few students flatly answer that they had not applied for SNAP, the researcher began probing into whether they had considered it and why they had not applied, which yielded important answers that relate back to the theoretical considerations of neoliberalism and the disappearing social safety net.

The iterative process also provided space for the researcher to reflect on the interview techniques themselves. For instance, in one interview, the researcher and participant really connected on several college experiences. In an effort to build rapport, the researcher excitedly jumped up into the conversation; however, this excitement led to an excess of crosstalk, which made transcribing difficult and also made the coding process challenging due to the interruptive nature of that part of the interview. Additionally, the purpose of the interview is to hear the participant’s story! Upon hearing that interaction, the researcher re-committed to being more aware of those verbal interactions and being more intentional about rapport building that did not compromise the integrity of the transcript or the participant’s voice being heard.

Memo-writing was an equally integral part of the process as the researcher reflected on the interviews in multiple ways: the stories being told, their own interpretation of the stories, and the ways in which the students were sharing their stories. Memos are an important way for the researcher to clarify and think critically about the data during the process and were also used when constructing the final themes and theoretical understandings that emerge as part of the
study (Charmaz 2014; Saldaña 2021). Initially, memos were written after each interview, but it gradually evolved to be more of a brainstorming space for the researcher to reflect on various aspects of the research. Saldaña (2021) in his book on qualitative methods provides suggestions on how analytic memos can be used, including “a descriptive summary of the data, how you personally relate to the participants and/or the phenomenon…what you find intriguing, surprising, or disturbing, and future directions for the study” (p. 69).

For example, after the fourth interview was conducted, a memo was written reflecting on the importance of the unique nature of the Knights Pantry, in that it is open to everyone regardless of need, which likely means that the experiences of participants will be more diverse than a traditional food pantry that restricts access based on income. Later in the memo document, during the initial coding phase, the researcher notes that there are several codes surfacing related to “healthy” food choices, but participants are using the term vaguely without defining what it means. This reflection prompted the interviewer to ask future participants to explain what they meant by that term. These types of reflections and “aha” moments are part of what makes the iterative process so necessary.

Once multiple interviews were conducted, the researcher turned to focused coding, that is, grouping codes together into themes and starting to see patterns emerge. As the interview process continued, the initial coding of new interviews was conducted first, followed by memo-writing and then focused coding. Microsoft OneNote was utilized to keep the researcher organized in theming the various codes.

Part of the iterative process of analysis included a thorough review of the literature about halfway through the interviews. Due to the academic calendar, many students were off-campus in the summer and interview recruitment hit a dry spell in July. The researcher took that
opportunity to review the current literature and theoretical underpinnings in relation to the emerging themes and codes from the first twelve interviews. One piece that came up during the review was the question about applying for SNAP benefits, which is related to the social safety net chapter. Several students in the first few interviews simply said, “no” and then the interview moved on. However, one or two students shared the barriers to why they did not apply or had not received it. As such, the researcher added a follow-up prompt (“Would you ever consider applying?”) to that question to explore more of the story behind student use of the federal safety net. Such efforts were rewarded with more insight into that experience.

As the interviews continued into the fall, the process of interviewing, transcribing, and coding continued. Patterns began to emerge related to two central ideas: the student experience at the pantry and the impact of the pantry on students. Both ideas were central to the research question. The first section explores the ways that students make sense of their experience and reconcile the emotions that might come up when accessing a resource like the pantry. Impact was the other big piece of the question, and students spoke quite highly of that impact. At that point, it was simply a matter of turning the data into a format that could be easily digested by readers, which involved pulling relevant quotes and sharing information about the participants themselves, while being cautious to protect their identities.

Part of the process of protecting identities with a smaller sample meant not naming participants and only giving pertinent information about their identities as part of the results. Participants were not given pseudonyms, as the purpose of the study was to present overarching themes from one-time interviews, as opposed to a more ethnographic approach of long-term engagement with participants. However, student identities are still important to this work and so information about student identity is shared when meaningful to the results.
CHAPTER SIX: STUDENT USE OF THE KNIGHTS PANTRY

Who uses the Knights Pantry? What do they experience when they use the services the pantry offers? This chapter explores the characteristics of the twenty-eight participants in this study – their backgrounds, food insecurity levels, how they came to find the pantry, and how often they use it – and the experiences they have had as clients of the pantry – what kinds of items they select, the emotions they experience, and the way they perceive staff and student volunteers. The pantry is open to anyone on campus, regardless of income or need, and the participants reflect that structure; some students have very low food security, while others use the pantry because they feel that food might go to waste if not taken. Some students heard about the pantry because they wanted to volunteer, while others found a badly needed resource during a time when finances were (or continue to remain) tight. Overwhelmingly, however, visitors to the pantry had positive experiences with the Knights Pantry.

Participants in the Study

The twenty-eight students who shared their stories about the Knights Pantry come from a broad variety of backgrounds, with their own set of lived experiences. In terms of racial diversity, the study recruited a variety of students from different racial backgrounds. Students were allowed to select as many racial categories as they felt described their identity; any student who selected more than one race was categorized as multi-racial, a category that UCF does not include in their demographic figures. One student selected Southeast Asian as their identity; due to the small sample, that student was combined into a category with other Asians and Asian-Americans.
Because the pantry does not track student data with student use, it is impossible to know if this sample is representative of the student population who regularly accesses the pantry services. However, based on the population of UCF, there was a much larger percentage of Asian or Asian American students who utilize the pantry in this study compared to their population of 6% on campus and a smaller amount of White/Caucasian students who use it compared to their campus population of 45%.

Unfortunately, as mentioned in the methods chapter, the data was skewed in terms of gender representation, with the vast majority of students identifying as female. Again, it is hard to know if that is representative of who typically uses the pantry or if that is due to more women being willing to participate in the study. Most students were of the traditional college age, with only two students in the study over the age of 26 and three students in post-graduate programs (two doctoral students and one master’s level student). The mean student age is 21.07 with a standard deviation of 2.28. When it came to students working while in school, the spread was relatively even. Nine students did not have currently have a job, although three were interested in or looking for work. Eight of the students were working twenty hours a week or more, although it is important to note that on-campus work is usually limited to twenty hours a week. Table 1 includes all relevant demographics of the participants from their survey responses.

The percent of students who indicated receiving financial aid in this study was almost seventy percent, which is a full ten percent lower than the UCF average. The nine students who are not receiving financial aid have very little in common, however. Three of them are volunteers with high food security, but out of the remaining six, five have low or very low food security and none of the nine students are receiving any SNAP benefits. About half of them are working less
than five hours a week, while the other half are working more than twenty. The racial
demographics of that group were diverse as well, with every subgroup represented.

Table 1: Basic Demographic Information of Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx/ Latina/Latino or Chicanx/Chicana/Chicano</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian/Other Asian/Asian American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial – Selected multiple racial identities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hours Working Per Week</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Aid</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of this study is related to the impact of food banks, so the food security
levels of students was inventoried as part of the initial pre-survey. As shown in Table 2, food
security levels are displayed, both in a total number for all participants and by demographic. All
other categories had at least two respondents and were fully included in the breakdown. Note that
food insecurity is displayed in this table by the participant’s food security level, meaning that if
an individual has low food security, that means that they have high food insecurity, meaning that
the pantry’s resources may be relieving food insecurity on a regular basis. Likewise, high food security means that a participant is likely not facing high levels of food insecurity.

Table 2: Food Insecurity Rates in Sample by Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very low food security</th>
<th>Low food security</th>
<th>High food security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Sample</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>25 (7)</td>
<td>39 (11)</td>
<td>36 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>33 (1)</td>
<td>66 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian/Other Asian/Asian American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25 (2)</td>
<td>75 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx/Latina/Latino or Chicanx/Chicana/Chicano</td>
<td>43 (3)</td>
<td>43 (3)</td>
<td>14 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>43 (3)</td>
<td>28 (2)</td>
<td>28 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21 (5)</td>
<td>37 (9)</td>
<td>42 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>100 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>14 (3)</td>
<td>38 (8)</td>
<td>48 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>60 (3)</td>
<td>40 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>50 (1)</td>
<td>50 (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hours Working Per Week</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>16 (2)</td>
<td>42 (5)</td>
<td>42 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-19</td>
<td>25 (2)</td>
<td>25 (2)</td>
<td>50 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>37 (3)</td>
<td>50 (4)</td>
<td>13 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number shown is a percentage, with the n in parentheses.

The spread of food security levels is fairly even, although a majority of the participants in the study are facing some level of food insecurity on a regular basis according to the USDA’s short form inventory for determining food insecurity. The older students (ages 23 and up) seem to experience food insecurity more so than younger students, although over half of students under age 22 were experiencing food insecurity as well. Of the eight students working over twenty hours a week, only one had high food security.

When it comes to student majors, there was a relatively broad spread, although they were mainly focused in hard sciences (biomedical sciences (4), health sciences (4), biology (4)) and
social sciences/humanities (psychology (3), mental health counseling, social work, economics, political science, international relations, and English), with a handful of students in other majors, such as event management (2), electrical engineering, advertising, hospitality, legal studies, and game design. UCF offers a plethora of majors, and the spread was too large to be able to see any trends between food insecurity levels and student major choices.

Listed in Table 3 are the living arrangements described by participants as part of the pre-survey, presented in both raw numbers and by percentage. Although several students lived in on-campus resident halls, every person indicated that they had access to a full kitchen and cooking supplies. There may be residence halls on campus that do not have such amenities, but access to being able to cook and prepare food was not an issue for the population in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Living</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus Housing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Relatives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus Residence Hall</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although none of the participants indicated being primary caregivers in the pre-interview survey, there were seven students who did indicated in the interview that they feel some sense of responsibility for the others around them. Several of them mentioned their family, with #4, #5, #11, #15 and #17 all mentioning their parents or siblings. However, their answers indicated that the responsibility was limited – it was more focused on being worried about others, as opposed to being fully responsible for their care.

Other important demographic information mentioned in the interviews included information about food access outside of the Knights Pantry. Six students shared in their interviews that they had accessed other community-based food pantries outside of the Knights
Pantry. Those experiences varied widely, with one participant recounting visiting soup kitchens as a child, while another remembered being turned away by community pantries: “they basically said no, you aren't poor enough…another pantry was like yeah, we would like to help you but we can't because we have too many people coming in.” A third participant recalled being wary about expired food at other pantries: “They're saying that you can eat stuff past the date on the thing, but I don't know if that's true or not.” Out of all the participants, eight indicated having previous received SNAP benefits; those experiences are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Finally, an important demographic noted in the methods section, but worth noting again, is the fact that twelve of the participants had volunteered with the pantry. Of those twelve, eight of them found the pantry because of the volunteer opportunity, rather than because they had a need for food services. All of the participants in this study had used the pantry’s services to acquire food or household items, regardless of how they discovered the pantry. Not all Knights Pantry volunteers choose to use the services. Two students reached out to see if they could participate in the study even though they had never taken any items from the pantry; they were politely declined from the study, as they did not meet the participation criteria.

As the pantry is open to anyone on campus, the experiences of Knights Pantry volunteers who also use the pantry are valuable, even though the impact did differ a bit for those students. For instance, nine of the twelve volunteers had high food security, accounting for all but one of the study participants with high food security. Nine of the twelve were receiving financial aid, although none of the volunteers had ever received SNAP benefits. All the volunteers were female, which is unsurprising, given the overall sample, but the racial identities of the volunteers were diverse, with each racial group represented. All of the volunteers were undergraduate
students, seven of whom worked under fifteen hours a week, which is notable, as the hours worked weekly in the overall study population was more spread out.

Discovering the Pantry

How did these particular students know about the Knights Pantry? What brought this diverse group of students through the doors? For the most part, students discovered the pantry in one of three ways: by way of volunteering at the pantry, from referrals, or from orientation. The methods of discovery are discussed in order from the most common to the least common, starting with volunteering.

Volunteering

Eight participants shared that volunteering was their entrance to using the pantry. One participant shared their story:

I was like, oh, there's this great thing called the Knight's Pantry. I had no idea what it was but I was like, looking for an opportunity to get to know people, just like find places on campus. So I just applied to volunteer there. And that really showed me that there was like, "Oh, this exists." But I honestly wouldn't have gone there without like, forcing myself to volunteer and things like that. I would have never gone there without it.

Another participant actually heard about the pantry through orientation but then began to volunteer: “I didn't know where it was located at until like I started volunteering and getting, you know, community service hours from, you know, places in the pantry.”

Other students began volunteering because of major or course requirements. One was in the LEAD Scholars program and shared, “we need service hours, and you can get service hours through the pantry.” Another had a similar experience with the LEAD Scholars program: “So I
initially kind of just went into it because like for volunteer hours I needed to fulfill for a class.”

One student’s plans to go into the health industry resulted in her advisor giving her advice:

So I had an advising appointment with my, like Health Science Advisor talking about - because I want to go into Optometry. So for that, like volunteering is very like important, like for applications. She was like, Oh, the Knights Pantry is a great place you can volunteer at, so I applied to volunteer there and I actually started volunteering before I started using the pantry.

For some students, volunteering gave them insight into the pantry that made them feel comfortable using the services. One student shared:

And then they would say they [pantry volunteers] were like, ‘you know, they do have a surplus of food. If you - you don't need to feel like you don't have enough food or you just, you don't, you can't afford to buy something, you don't need to feel that way. They have a surplus of food and things are gonna go bad if people don't take them.' And that's when I felt comfortable starting to go and I would only go - I only tried to go every so often when I didn't have lunch or I didn't bring a snack with me. And I was like, You know what, I just, I really don't want to spend $14 on some lunch in the cafeteria.”

Another expressed similar sentiments, saying, “Trust me. I've been in the back. There's enough for everyone. If you need something, go get it.” In that same vein, one shared, “A lot of items will like expire too. So I'm just like, it's better to just have like everyone come take things then like have these items go to waste.” Those students who volunteer are concerned with food waste, with one student saying, “Once I started volunteering, I realized it's not like super scarce, like food is not scarce. Like we have tons of stuff in the back. And it's enough - more than enough for everybody.”

Being a volunteer can also mitigate some feelings shame or guilt that can manifest as barriers and discussed in the next section. One student said:

The thing is…working as a volunteer - like before, if I had known about the Knights pantry, I probably would have felt guilty about going in and like taking stuff from people who might actually need it. But actually volunteering there, I know the amount of like goods they get and I know how often like things get thrown out, if it's expired or like how
often things are replaced. So I don't feel bad about like taking stuff either from there which is really good.

Referrals

Nine participants referenced that friends, peers, or UCF staff members first told them about the pantry as a resource. Several of them, in fact, went with someone to the pantry for the first time. One student relayed that she had met someone during class and “she took me there [to the Knights Pantry] one day and then I just kept going ever since because like free food.” Another shared that her friend said “‘we can get snacks over there.’ So I think we went and got a granola bar and then grabbed a couple things.” One student shared her emotional story of using the pantry for the first time:

I literally just told someone I was hungry. And I didn't even know that it existed, and I'm so glad that it does. And so they just walked me over there because I was - I was super embarrassed. Like I was crying the first time that I went in there. I just felt really like, had this like little internal crisis of like, what did I do to need to like, seek this kind of support? Like, is there someone that needs it more than me?

Orientation

Seven participants indicated that they learned of the pantry through their college orientation process. One stated, “I had heard of Knight's pantry because I know that like at the orientation tour, they give a little spiel about Knights pantry so I was aware that it was there.” Another had a similar experience: “I believe it was like a resource during like freshman orientation that they all like recommended we check out and then I did like come to the pantry and found like, interesting stuff.” A different student remembered “when I came for orientation, they asked that everyone bring like two canned goods for our Knights Pantry. And that's how I first learned about it.” Although some students found out through verbal communication, one
student recounted they “saw it because they give you those little brochure flyer things with all of like UCF resources on it and I think I saw it from there.”

Even if students did not think they would need the pantry, some stored away the information for later. One student shared:

When I first came, I think I remember hearing about it a little bit during orientation. And that kind of always stuck with me because I knew that I was going to be financially independent upon coming to like college. So I always like, was trying to look for resources. So like that might like, changes and like the sense of which like, it wasn't just something that was there for me. I just kind of like was also seeking something out in case of like an emergency. So yeah, that's - I just kind of like knew that it was there since orientation, but then I continued to like, remember it. So like, I put like a thing on my like little whiteboard in my room. That was like, Knights Pantry, open this time to this time.

Another student reported a similar experience of storing knowledge away for later: “I always knew the pantry was on campus, because I just remember hearing it at orientation.” Although typically a lot of information is given out during orientation programs, it seems that the information about the Knights Pantry sunk in for quite a few of the study participants.

**Other Ways of Entry**

There were a few other means of entry to the pantry that were less common. Two students heard about the pantry through social media, with one stating, “I found out about the Knights pantry through Instagram, initially, and they said - I'm pretty sure like I read in the caption they were like, you know, any student with a student id, like with a valid, valid ID, is welcome to come by and get food. You don't have to be like somebody in need.” One student explored the campus on their own and discovered it, although it was closed at the time. The vast majority of participants, however, began to use the pantry because of advice from someone else, learning about it at orientation, or serving as a volunteer there.
Barriers to Access

Although all the students in the study found the Knights Pantry and were able to use the resources on a regular basis, many did experience challenges in one way or another. Some of the challenges were more internal, such as feeling shame or that they are not needy enough, while others were related to the geographic location of the pantry. It is important to note, however, that many of the students articulated that they did not perceive any of the barriers to be intentional, and many voiced that they were unsure how the pantry would mitigate them. Regardless of intent, the various barriers that students shared are an important aspect of their overall experience using the Knight’s Pantry.

Internalized Barriers – Feeling Not Needy Enough

Of all the study participants, almost half (13) expressed having feelings that they “shouldn’t” be using the pantry; they identified these feelings as being internal to themselves and not a result of external interactions. The next section that discusses their experiences at the pantry delves into more detail, but in general, participants felt welcomed at the pantry. It was their internal emotions that presented as a barrier to using the pantry’s services. Sometimes, these feelings manifested in a student struggling to come to the pantry for the first time. One Latina student with low food security said:

Took me a couple of weeks and a lot of convincing from my friend that told me about the pantry originally. Because like I said, I was telling her about like, what I was nervous about and why I had my reservations about going, but she ended up going in with me the first time and it was really nice…. Just the fear of judgment [kept me away].

That particular student was not the only student who went with someone else their first time. Another Latina student with low food security shared their story of the first time they came to the pantry:
But like, I kind of didn't really consider myself like, you know, like, I just felt like oh, maybe like it's, it's for people who are more in need or for people who like, are in like, more you know, just, just have more of a lack of resources than I, I consider myself to be, so I hadn't really liked gone or anything until the boyfriend I had at the time. He actually would go quite often. And he mentioned to me like, oh, like why don't you come with me? So I went and that was kind of like, my first experience.

The sense of shame could be pronounced, with a Latina student with high food security expressing, “But when I, you know, used to go in there when I was not volunteering, I did feel a sense of shame, even though I knew that this is a resource that's open to everyone, they're not - they don't shame people or anything along those lines. It was like a very ingrained thing within me of like, having a sense of shame of asking for, you know, a quote, unquote, handout.” Guilt and shame presented together as well, with a multiracial student with very low food security stating, “I was like, I felt bad because I was like, ‘Well, I'm not homeless. I shouldn't be using this.’ And there was a lot of shame and guilt there. But I've kept using it because it really did help. It really did make a difference in my finances.”

The sentiments of “not feeling needy enough” were present throughout the participant responses. Some had partners or friends who could assuage those feelings, like this white student with low food security: “I still feel a little bit strange about it because I'm not in like the most dire situation I could be. But I think my partner just reminded me you know, like, just because it's not, you know life or death food situation, you are still struggling you know, and any help we can get is good.” Others manage those feelings by using the pantry in a specific way. One white student with high food security goes to the pantry less frequently, sharing, “I'd say every two to three weeks maybe, maybe that. I try to not - like I said, I try to not go crazy often because I know that I'm not at that level of food insecurity where I need to go all the time and take from others.”
Some students deal with that feeling by managing the way they actually use the services. An Asian student with low food security restricts themselves to taking only the items necessary saying:

I think I just tried to like remind myself that as much as it is free, it's also for everyone on campus. So I feel like that really showed me like 'okay, like you have the ability just get what you need and don't get anything else.' That really just like that was a thing that like kept me trying to go there just so that I didn't feel like I was taking away anything from anyone just helping myself whenever I needed it really.

Finally, an Asian student with high food security stated selecting certain items as a way to manage those feelings: “maybe I'd take the baked goods still but you know, I probably wouldn't take like the Kraft mac and cheese or like anything that's like canned just because I would feel like there's definitely people who need that more than I do.”

Although each student experienced this barrier a little bit differently, to some extent, they still experienced hesitation or negative emotions as part of their experience accessing the services. Although several participants did not mention these feelings, it is still possible that those individuals have those feelings and simply did not bring them to light in their interviews. Regardless, this finding points out some of the challenges that exist in supporting students to access resources when they may not feel that the resource is meant for them.

Geographic Location of the Pantry

The other barrier that presented itself among a majority of students (17) was the geographic location of the pantry. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the pantry is located in the heart of campus, across from the Recreation and Wellness Center. However, the UCF campus is large and so the location is not as central as the Student Union and for students who live on the “other side” of campus, it can be a twenty-minute walk for them to reach the pantry. One shared:
Um, it was a bit far - I lived in Lake Claire. And it's kind of far from where I lived. So especially like, having to go from one side of campus all the way to Ferrell commons, and then carry back like cans, or like heavy groceries kind of gets like challenging because it's like, super hot or it's raining or if I'm on like a skateboard, it's like - it's just kind of hard to balance with that.

Another said, “I live on like the complete opposite end of campus. So like trying to find it - it's really well hidden.” A different student expressed almost the exact same sentiments: “I live in Towers, which is like, I don't know if you've been on UCF campus, but it's like, on the other side, and actually knowing where the pantry was, like it's kind of hidden, like in a corner of like the campus so I didn't really know it was where it was.”

One student called the location an inconvenience rather than a barrier, saying, “there's no barriers, just the inconvenience that it's kind of far away from, like the classroom buildings, but otherwise no real inconvenience.” On the flip side, the only reason that another student uses the pantry is because she is volunteering there saying:

Um, I guess like, the only barrier would be like either, like the walk to Knights Pantry is pretty long for me because I live on like, one end of the campus. It's like approximately like a twenty-minute walk. So like if I was closer to my dorm, I probably wouldn't make the decision to like go to the pantry but like, like, if I was ever in the area like after class, I would definitely make a stop by.

For that student, who has high food security, the distance to the pantry would not merit the walk required to access unless they were already in the area.

It can also be difficult to locate when unfamiliar with campus. After discovering the pantry, most students were relatively happy with the placement, but it did present a small barrier to their use at times. One student stated, “I didn't know well the campus yet. So when they said Ferrell Commons, I was like, okay, and I was like, in the same point that where I started so.” Another had similar issues with locating it: “To be honest, it was hard to get like - hard to go by myself - like first time I took my friend. But then, once you get used to the place, then I can go
myself you know. Because I was lost like on campus. It's a big, big campus. So sometimes I got lost. I don't know where to go.”

For students who live close to the pantry, however, it makes the experience easy. One student said, “I lived close, like I lived like right across the street from the pantry. So it was really convenient for me, and I didn't want to like spend money on groceries because like I hadn't even had like a job until like October when I came to campus.” Another shared similar thoughts, saying, “I think it's a great spot because like it's right next to the gym, and it's like near like, where a good amount of classes take place.” That student did recognize that it might be a challenge for some folks: “It's just that people live like, like on the opposite end, like tower, what is it called, like Libra I think, no not Libra, there's another one that's like, the Honors College is like a housing. It's kind of far away from that.”

Also, once students moved off campus, access to the pantry was restricted to times that they were already on campus and sometimes the items they could take were restricted as well. One student said:

Last year, I lived on campus, so I was able to just like walk there but this year because like I'm off campus, sometimes it's hard to like, find time to like take the shuttle to go to the pantry. So like I have to kind of go while I'm at school. And it's just like because like when you're in classes, some things you can't like really take, like cold items you can't really take. So this year I've been more like, only been able to take like dry items.”

Another stated, “right now I'm at home but I used it while I was on campus.”

Students were not necessarily in favor of moving the pantry’s location. Despite living on the opposite side of campus from the pantry, one student said, “I wouldn't necessarily change the location, just like, on orientation, for example, you know, showing students like, this is where it's at. You know, probably like some signs to point towards it.” Another said the pantry should not moved and added, “I think the location is also really good because it's right - it's right near
everything - the dining hall, and then also the what's it called the Knight's Study. I think that's a really good place because like so many students go there.” That student did add, however, that more awareness of the location would be beneficial.

Other students reflected on the fact that the pantry specifically chose their location to protect students who desired privacy while using the service. One said, “The location is definitely a bit of a walk no matter where you are on campus. But I think it's appropriate especially since you have some kids who are a little bit embarrassed that they have to now go to the pantry. Yeah, it stinks but it makes the most sense.” Another student added to that sentiment, stating, “they like kind of tuck it away so that people don't feel like embarrassed or ashamed to go to the pantry because like you shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed.”

Overall, the sentiments about the location of the pantry were fairly mixed. Some students expressed that a second location would be beneficial for those students whose housing was located on the opposite side of the campus. To some extent, the location will never be able to satisfy everyone. Regardless, location was a theme that came up as a slight barrier to accessing the pantry’s resources and so is worth exploring.

*Other Sentiments from Students*

Even when students did not have difficulty finding the pantry, several of them still wanted to raise awareness about its location. One lamented the fact that “a lot of the students don't even know where it is.” Another wanted the university to be more involved in promoting the pantry saying, “I wish UCF is as a whole would talk more about pantry. I wish we saw UCF.edu posting about pantry and updates on that.” One student discussed the idea of giving students better directions, saying, “Maybe if it was like, better like advertised or like marketed to
the public. Like, people knew it was near the gym. Like maybe more people would come instead of like knowing it's like Ferrell Commons…but like no one really knows where that is.”

Despite some of the challenges that students identified facing, eight of the participants stated that they did not face any barriers at all. A participant summed it up: “I wouldn't say I experienced any barriers, it's actually really accessible because it's on campus. So even if you know, you don't have a car or whatever, it's really accessible, which I really like.” Overall, students did face some minor barriers to accessing the pantry’s services, such as overcoming their own internalized guilt or shame and finding the location, but once they found it, the barriers disappeared. The next section discusses the student experience while at the Knights Pantry, which was overwhelmingly positive.

Experience at the Knights Pantry

The participants in the study heard about the Knights Pantry in a variety of ways and may or may not have faced barriers to getting there. Once there, however, their experience at the Pantry also varied. This section is divided into two parts; the first part explores the participants’ interactions with staff members at the pantry and their general experience using the service. The second section delves into the wide variety of emotions that students faced while using it. Sometimes those emotions changed over time – the feelings during the first time might morph as they grow more comfortable. Very little research has been done of the lived experiences of individuals accessing food pantries, so this section sheds light on the ways in which the students in this study recount their perspectives on using the Knights Pantry.
Using the Pantry and Experiences with Staff Members

Many students raved about their experience with the pantry. The phrases “kind,” “nice,” and “welcoming” came up over and over again from almost every participant. Here are just a few examples: “Overall, they've been kind and welcoming the whole time, and they've helped me a ton, and they've helped more people even more, so they're really awesome;” “I think it's just the staff who's always like, happy to help like nobody ever really has an attitude and then like, all the staff are like friendly as well;” “I was really like relieved because the staff there, they were so nice and they would like answer my questions and stuff. And I liked it because no one was like really on top of me, like I can kind of just browse myself;” “The staff are always you know, friendly. They greet you;” “Everyone's just very nice. They're kind. So it's a very relaxed environment. You don't have to worry about anything;” “The people are really really nice. Everyone's very like it's like a very like together community like, "Hey, do you know where this is? Yeah, it's right there, it's right here, I'll show you, come here, come here, right here;"” “I feel very welcomed, like everyone is like, no matter what day, what time everyone's super welcoming, they're always wanting people to come in.”

The examples of students feeling welcomed went on, with over twenty of them using very similar verbiage to describe the atmosphere. Another theme that came up was students feeling that the space was judgement free. One student summed it up: “I think it's a very judgmental freezone like, even like staff and like students. They don't really give me like judgmental vibes. Like I think it's very welcoming.” Another expressed similar ideas, saying, “Everyone there that's been staff are like volunteers has been really helpful and they are also like - it's like a judgment free zone.”
Only one student expressed feeling that the staff were inattentive, stating that if felt like “You're just bothering them. You know, like they didn't like I don't know, like, they could have been doing something else if you were not there.” Given the small size of the sample in the study, and the fact that over ten students were currently volunteers, it is certainly possible that other students felt the same way as that student. It is also possible that the student was visiting the pantry for her first time when someone was having a bad day. Regardless, her experience should not be discounted.

*Emotional Experiences*

Students were asked to describe the emotions they feel when they use the pantry. Responses differed vastly between students. Unlike their experience at the pantry, where most students conveyed that the staff and students in the pantry were kind and welcoming, their internal emotions told a much more nuanced story. The codes that emerged for emotions were condensed into themes to better tell the overarching story, but it is important to note that no two students described their emotions in the same way.

Given the barriers that students discussed related to their emotions, it should be unsurprising that a few (six) students brought up *shame/guilt/embarrassment* as part of their emotional state. A multiracial student with very low food security recounted “I sort of experienced it [embarrassment] you know, it's obvious when you're walking through campus with a giant bag of food that you just came from the pantry. Eventually I got over it. I just didn't care anymore.” That statement makes it clear that the feelings did mitigate over time. A nonbinary Latino/a student with very low food security had to reconcile her identity with her use of the pantry:
Sometimes, like, embarrassment, maybe and shame...Maybe because my family like so we're Hispanic. And we've kind of always had this like, idea that like, oh, we'd hustle for our own stuff. We can't like rely on other people. Like we can't let other people know that we're like, not doing the best so maybe it's - it's some of that.

That student was not the only participant grappling with identity related to the use of the pantry.

A multiracial student with very low food security relayed a similar sentiment based on her Italian roots:

I think the guilt piece is like a personal thing, but I also think like it's a I think it's a cultural thing. Me and my housemate are both Italian and there's that like, don't, like, you shouldn't take handouts, piece of that culture. That I know a lot of other cultures share. So I think it might be a cultural thing of like, "'No, we shouldn't go there because I'm taking away from other people. And it would bring shame onto my family if I took something that was free.'

For two students, it felt like the pantry was a resource they might not deserve. An Asian student with low food security shared “I felt like not deserving of it almost because I was just like, I feel like other people can use it more than I could and like, I was just like, I like I have the ability to go but it's just like, it's more like financially harder for me, but I was like, I didn't deserve it.” A white student with low food security shared a similar emotional struggle, saying, “I kind of felt like maybe I'm not the most in need, and maybe I should be saving it for the people who truly are.” These feelings were shared in response to direct questions about their emotions using the pantry.

A related emotion was folks feeling generally nervous about the process of using the pantry. An Asian student with low food security stated, “sometimes I would feel like nervous to go in there. Because I didn't understand like the process of getting the stuff.” A multiracial student with high food security conveyed similar ideas: “When I was like first starting out, like I was very like intimidated, like I would - if I had questions, like I would be too scared to ask the question. So I just like wouldn't get the item that I was curious about.” However, those emotions
tended to fade over time, with this Asian student with high food security relaying the process: “the first time I walked into the pantry, I was almost like, confused and overwhelmed at how much was like going on in the little pantry. But I think with like each visit, it just got more comfortable to just walk in and like go and look around and take stuff and then go.” Three students discussed similar emotions, feeling more comfortable visiting the pantry, with one white student with high food security going so far as to say, “It was a really comforting and calm environment.”

Students also relayed feeling supported by the pantry. One nonbinary Latino/a student with very low food security expressed that “it's always that, that feeling that okay, they got my back. I got um, I don't got to worry so much. They take that burden off, you know.” An Asian student with high food security said “I feel very supported. Yeah. Because I feel that they care about the student life. Yeah, not just, not just only studying, yeah, but also eating and living.” That student was referring to UCF as a whole, feeling that the college cares about their well-being in addition to them as a student.

Other students felt surprised, especially when visiting the pantry for the first time. One Latina student with low food security said, “I was expecting it to look like, like a Goodwill for food. But when I walked in, I was really pleasantly surprised.” An Asian student’s surprise stemmed from the fact that UCF was providing a food resource at all: “I was kind of surprised because this is my first time I saw like, there's a department or organization that giving out free food for students in college, because I asked my friends from other universities and they don't have [Knights Pantry]. So I feel really special at UCF.” She had high food security but felt that the campus providing such a resource implied care and concern for the well-being of students.
One Asian student with high food security actually felt a combination of many of the previous emotions, saying;

Surprised but also like, very happy and content with the fact that a resource like this existed for like, someone like me, who doesn't really have, like, I don't like have any means of transportation. Like I don't have like a car or anything for me to get groceries like off campus. So like being able to have something on campus that I could pretty easily access was just like comforting.

Student issues accessing groceries are discussed in Chapter Seven, but this quote begins to show the impact that the pantry has on students and how that impact also impacts their emotions. Many students who use the pantry expressed feeling grateful/thankful for the resource, experiencing relief upon arrival. One Latina student with low food security shared, “I really like going to pantry, definitely a lot of gratitude for that being there. I just think it's, it’s definitely is a great resource for students.” A nonbinary Latino/a with very low food security expressed similar thoughts, “always thankful that I can at least grab something from there for food, to make food for the next day and whatnot.” Three additional students all used the term grateful in their responses.

When it came to relief, a multiracial student with very low food security summed it up, “There's a relief, I think above all else like, that umbrellas all the other emotions.” Another put it succinctly, “A sigh of relief. Always relief.” A multiracial student with very low food security student told a story about the way it impacts her emotions:

There is like that sense of relief of like, like excitement and relief like, I just realized this morning that I ran out of like sandwich bread. And I was like, ugh, I'm gonna have to store and get sandwich bread and that sucks, and I don't want to do that. And, and, you know, regardless it costs money. It's like the gas money to go to Walmart and then get the bread... but then I walked in and just so happened today they had all this, all this bread, like the bakery section was like overflowing and I took like three loaves of bread and I like freeze two of them and I have one out. So it's that like, relief of I don't have to drive all the way to Walmart, especially with gas prices the way they are right now.
Finally, for some students, it was feelings of **happiness** and **excitement**. Two students love seeing what items might be available, with one Asian student with high food security saying, “Every time I go there, it's kind of exciting because everyone there - at least that's like a regular is like "oh what'd they get in today that's new" because it's like not a regular stock of like every, every like item.” One multiracial student with high food security simply said, “I'm happy to get my groceries for the week.” Another was not quite sure how to sum up their emotions, but ended up saying, “There's always like, almost like, I would say I'm not sure if happiness is the right word. Glad, maybe.”

Aside from the emotions above, several other emotions were expressed by individual participants as well. Those included feeling awkward, content, sad when there wasn’t enough food, and empowered. Two students also expressed feeling that the pantry was a safe space for them to come to receive support. The emotions that students experienced while accessing the pantry are an important aspect of the pantry experience and one that has not previously been explored.

**Student Use of Pantry Resources**

Once students access the pantry, they do choose to utilize it pantry in different ways. Students shared their stories of access and use. The frequency of use is depicted in the table below. The majority of students (over 50%) access the pantry’s food services at least once a week. Please note that not every participant responded to this question in the interview, so the numbers will not total the number of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Times a Week</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once A Week  6  24
Once Every Two/Three Weeks  1  4
Once/Twice a Month  2  8
Two – Three Times a Semester  1  4
It Varies or New to the Pantry  4  16

The stories behind the reasons for access varied widely. For some students, accessing the pantry’s services as often as possible was vital: “I go as often as I as I can. And usually I max out like the like, you know, you get like five, whatever food items.” For others, it was a sense of convenience that brought them to the pantry frequency: “I had - I remember I had a class every Monday. That was like, right next to it, is leadership. So I know for a fact I went like at least every Monday, but maybe like, twice a week.” For many, the pantry trip largely depended whether they were on campus already, with one saying, “To be honest, I don't go like for only pantry. No. If I have class, I can pass by; if I don't have class, I don't need to like go directly to them [the pantry].” For some students, the need was not great enough to warrant frequent trips: “I try to not go crazy often because I know that I'm not at that level of food insecurity where I need to go all the time and take from others…. I go, yeah, probably every once to two weeks or whatever, when I'm like okay, I'm running low on lunch.” Two students indicated that they used to visit the pantry more often when they lived on campus, with one student (who now uses it once or twice a month) sharing, “Yes, there was a time where I used it once a week, sometimes twice a week. But now it's just a lot less.” This experience ties back to the barrier of location, although it should be noted that this barrier would be very challenging to overcome, given that on-campus is the only placement that makes sense.

In addition to how often the pantry is used, the question of what students select is equally important to understanding who students are and how they use the pantry. The items selected by
students is displayed in Table 5 in descending order, with the most referenced items first. This list includes categories of items based on student responses. Items were categorized based on like items; for example, the canned goods/soup section included items like cream of chicken soup as well as canned green beans. The full list that includes a breakdown of each item in the category, can be found in Appendix E. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive list of all foods available or accessed through the pantry – this is the list of foods that students remembered as important to them when asked to recount the items they typically take from the pantry or what types of items they usually select. In other words, these are food items that students recall as important or meaningful to their experience using the Knights Pantry.

Table 5: Items Participants Select at the Pantry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item Selected</th>
<th>Number of Times Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Snacks”</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread/Pastries</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned Goods/Soup</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiletries</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Goods</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta/Macaroni</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Supplies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Items</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students mentioned that their use of the pantry varied based on what they needed. Some students indicated that they would stop by the pantry for one of the snacks mentioned – such as chips, crackers, or granola bars. Other students used the pantry resources as part of their meal
prepping practices, while some students were excited when home goods items came in. By far, the most important piece for students were the food items, however.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the participants in the study and how they experience the Knights Pantry. The entry point to the pantry varied, with students finding the pantry through volunteer opportunities, word of mouth, and orientation information. Some students faced barriers to using the pantry, such as internalized guilt/shame or simply not knowing where it was. Students experience myriad emotions in the pantry, but most students had an overall positive experience using the services the pantry provides. Some food items, such as bread, canned goods, and snack items rose to the top as items that many students prioritize selecting and mean enough for them to recount in an interview. After gaining a better understanding of the student experience, the question become how much difference do those food items make to students? Does it truly impact their finances, their studies, or their food insecurity? Chapter Seven attempts to answer those questions and provides the findings related to student impact.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPACT OF THE KNIGHTS PANTRY

After exploring the experience that students have visiting the pantry, it comes down to the overall impact of the Knights Pantry. What difference does five food items a day make for students? The answer is complicated, but what is clear is that most students perceive the pantry as being a game changer for their college careers. A majority of students see the pantry as a resource that supports their finances and their level of food security. In some cases, access to food even impacts their studies and ability to perform in class. In addition, the pantry tends to have a ripple effect, with the resources benefitting even those outside of UCF’s borders. Those impacts are explored in detail below.

Financial Impact

Financial impact was the most discussed impact of the pantry. In the interviews, students were asked, “How would you say the Knights Pantry has impacted you?” to which the most common response was related to finances. The degree of impact varied largely from student to student, with some students expressing an arguably life-changing impact and other students saving a few dollars. Several themes emerged from the data and are discussed in more detail.

Saving Money

The most common impact that students mentioned was simply being able to save money. For one multiracial student, who has high food security, it was a marginal difference: “It's not like a big financial kind of difference. It's definitely you know, like, every penny does count.” Another student, who also has high food security, expressed something similar: “I would say like it has helped me a little bit but like not like extremely.”
Students with low or very low food security felt the impact more intensely. A Black student with very low food security discussed how they were able to use the pantry: “Because I would have spent like I don't know, $200 on groceries a week or at least $100. So it saved me a lot. I kind of like, had like a mix of buying like food um, maybe like once a week and then using the pantry.” Another student with low food security valued the savings, “It has helped me greatly because in terms of like, money wise, I can manage a little bit better because of that.” and a fellow student with low food security agreed, saying, “I think that it's helped me save money.”

One white, male student with low food security stated, “The food pantry in the UCF helps me a lot because it's helped me like, save money since everything became expensive and stuff.”

Several students discussed the ways that they could spend money elsewhere, such as entertainment and restaurants. One participant with low food security said, “I don't have to go out and buy things that I would spend my money on regularly and I could save that money for like entertainment now if I wanted to go to like icon park or travel.” In a similar vein, another shared, “I remember that some of the money, I used to - I used to buy like takeout food, too during that time. So I think the money that I saved from that, I would buy that food. And then I would like eat that for like three or four days.” Even though one female, Asian student has high food security, she still stated that “The pantry has helped out with my grocery bill. I could use the money elsewhere and like other aspects of my life, so yeah, I definitely think it's helped me financially.” Whether students were using the savings to put away for a rainy day or to spend on other activities, it was clear that many students felt the financial impacts of the Knights Pantry.
Easing Financial Stress

For ten of the students, they discussed a variety of ways that accessing the Knights Pantry eases their financial stress. Five students noted that access to the Pantry’s resources allowed them to pay other pays, mitigating the need to trade bills that is often seen in the food insecurity literature (Beam, 2020; Gundersen, Engelhard, and Hake 2017; Knowles, Rabinowich, Ettinger De Cuba, Cutts, and Chilton 2016). One multiracial student, experiencing very low food security said, “Before, I really, I had to make tough financial decisions about like, ‘Well, where is this extra money going? Is it going to pay bills or is it to going into food?’ But now I don't have to make that hard decision anymore.” Another multiracial student, who is also experiencing very low food security, had a similar experience: “For a while, like I was struggling to just pay the rent. Um, so being able to throw the $200, $300 on that instead so it wasn't so cumbersome was a big help. I didn't have to worry about you know where that money was just going to come from now.”

For a different multiracial student, who experiences very low food security, accessing the resources at Knights Pantry meant that money was freed up for other expenses, such as gas:

I was walking, like I have a car; I was walking [to campus]. I couldn't afford gas. And it was a 48 minute walk, and it didn't have - like a quarter mile of it didn't have any sidewalks. And so like Knight's pantry, I could afford gas now - I could afford half tanks of gas bi-weekly and it's so, so meaningful to me.

A Latina student, who has low food security, had a similar experience related to accessing gas for her car: “It's definitely eased a lot of my stress. I remember having to go to the gas station and put like $10 in my car because I have to save the rest for groceries but I'm running out of gas but I need groceries. So it was it was a lot of conflict. But Knights Pantry definitely helped with that.”
One white student, who experiences low food security, expressed how the pantry makes a difference on a graduate student budget:

It really does help just to know that I can go there and grab some of the staples that we really need in the house. It helps lower our grocery bill, a little bit of that stress. You know, that kind of burden on our paychecks, especially as I mentioned, with prices going up and everything and it's just - it's nice to have around on a campus.

For another multiracial student, who has high food security, she finds that she can trade the money saved for different kinds of items:

I think a lot of my grocery costs has gone towards more like rice or like pasta or like dry foods like that. And the pantry always has like regular stock with those type of items, so I've been able to like cut down on those costs and then use more of my money to get more like nutritional items, like I can like get whole wheat bread instead of like just white bread or I can get fresh veggies instead of having to just use like the plain frozen ones all the time.

One Latina student reflected that, without the pantry, she would struggle financially:

If I had to - like if I were to spend the money like on groceries like to kind of like level out with... how much food I am able to eat because of my pantry? I don't think I would be able to pay for rent for example, like, like a part of my rent when it's like, it would just be hard. I would be stressful, like pay for other things.

In addition to the ten students who talked directly about the eased financial burden, several additional students expressed the financial impact that would occur if the pantry were no longer on campus. One nonbinary Latino/a student shared:

I gotta go back to reevaluate like my budget and whatnot. Like no more canned, canned soups, I gotta add that to the budget now. Because I know for a fact that, that the Knights Pantry has an abundance of like canned soups and canned chicken and a can - a can of canned chicken is like almost five bucks. You know? So I'm just glad that I'm able to get that for free at the Knight pantry and not have to spend five bucks just for that.

An Asian student reflected on how their spending might change without the pantry, “I feel like my spending would go up by a lot and that would probably like - which like it probably
it would only be affected like $20 each trip but I feel like for me that would add up really quickly.” A third student concurred, saying simply, “I would be financially impacted.”

**SNAP Benefits**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is an additional way that students could receive financial relief when experiencing food insecurity. As part of the interview process, participants were asked about their experience with any government assistance programs, including SNAP. Five of the students, all with high food security, had never considered applying for the program. Four students were international students and therefore would not qualify, regardless of need (three of those students had low or very low food security). Five students ruled themselves out because they would not meet the requirements. One said, “at the time that I was going to apply, they said that they made it to where you had to work part time, which like considering like, how many hours I work [3-10 per week] it's like not part time.” Three additional students expressed that they were not knowledgeable enough about the process to feel comfortable trying to apply. One student did apply but was rejected: “I think because I didn't meet, meet a requirement. So, they denied me food stamps.”

Overall, most students were ineligible for one reason or another, regardless of their financial need. However, four students, all of whom were experiencing low or very low food security at the time of the interview, had received SNAP benefits as an adult. One was working full-time as well as a student when she received the benefits. Two of the students had received benefits and lost them; for one student, that loss is part of what spurred them to visit the Knights Pantry: “After a bit though, I didn't qualify, so that's when I started using Knights Pantry.” Only
one student was currently receiving federal benefits and that was through the WIC program. She had previously been denied for SNAP.

Impact on Food Security

The second most-discussed impact among students was the pantry’s impact on their food security, both in a psychological sense and in the physical sense. Four students discussed the safety and comfort they feel having access to the pantry. One Asian student with low food security succinctly expressed, “it helped me feel like - that I didn't have to be without food.” A Latina student with low food security further expressed those sentiments, saying, “…There's just greater access to comfort and access to - with comfort, I mean, like particularly like during the COVID year like it really was, it was a great relief to be able to get foods in that way.” For another Latina student with very low food security, it was important that the pantry was there no matter what:

It makes us feel supported by somebody else. It is like that tool, but that maybe you don't always need but that you know it's there, it just gives you like, I don't know, relief. Because you know, like if anything happens, it's there. If you need anything it's gonna be there for you.

One multiracial student, who experiences low food security, was the final participant who discussed the idea of psychological comfort and summed it up by sharing how she views the pantry contributing to her feelings on safety:

It makes me feel a lot safer. Like I don't ever feel like I have to like, like I did not like a moment that I'm like, ‘Oh my gosh, like I have nothing to eat' because I know that if I really was like in situation that I needed something, I could always go to Knights Pantry and get some spaghetti, some pasta sauce. and eat some spaghetti for the night.

Some students experienced the pantry not as a back-up plan or a comfort but as a necessity to prevent hunger. One multiracial student with very low food security bluntly stated,
“I wouldn't have been able to eat a lot of times without it. Especially since I wasn't able to get food resources elsewhere. Um yeah. I probably would have gone hungry.” In a pensive response, a nonbinary Latino/a student with very low food security replied, “Let's see...haven't had to go to sleep without food for once, so. Glad I'm able to eat now.” When asked about how it would be if the pantry wasn’t on campus, one Latina student, looking startled, replied, “Genuinely no idea. I couldn't even imagine. I probably would go more than a few days without eating.” She had low food security.

For other students, the impact was not nearly as profound, but was palpable nonetheless. One Asian student with high food security responded, “From the food that I take from Knight's Pantry, I can, like cook a whole meal for a day. So I can - yeah, they have a positive impact.” Despite having high food security, one Asian participant still uses the pantry to ensure meals throughout the week, sharing, “I definitely meal plan, like if I’m like, ‘Oh, they tend to get frozen meats on Friday,’ like I will go check out what meat they have...I use the pantry in like my main meals as well as like supplemental snacks.” Another multiracial student, who also has high food security, responded that without the pantry, “I would eat like less food, or like I would get my groceries less because like, I don't have a car.”

For one Latina student with low food security, the pantry provided both the psychological safety and mitigation of hunger. She shared the impact on her:

It's helped so much because again, losing the SNAP benefits, it was really scary for me. Not being able to get that financial support from my family because they couldn't provide it, was also very scary. So having that there, knowing that if I didn't have food here at home, I could go to the pantry and I could get that food. I wouldn't go hungry.

An important aspect of increased food security is that fact that many students faced barriers to accessing the grocery store, which made their access to food limited. Students
discussed how having the pantry on campus alleviated many of those barriers to food access and allowed them to have access to food more regularly. One shared that the pantry supports her in gaining food security, noting “I don’t have a car.” In addition to that student, eight other students mentioned transportation as an issue to getting groceries, and the pantry as a much-needed solution for that problem. Of the nine students who mentioned transportation, eight of them did not have a car. The eighth student shared a story about how her car could not be used at a certain time of the school year, which led to issues to food access. Transportation as a barrier to food was not on the list of interview questions and was solely brought up by participants. The Knights Pantry served to alleviate that barrier for most participants.

When asked about the impact of the pantry, one Asian student with high food security stated, “definitely positively because of my barrier of like inconvenience of transportation…It allowed me to like not have to wait until like the next day or like the next grocery day that the shuttle would go to get food.” For some, access to the pantry provided both the comfort and safety as well as the food security that did not exist previously due to transportation. Another Asian with high food security shared, “I don't have like a car or anything for me to get groceries like off campus. So like being able to have something on campus that I could pretty easily access was just like comforting.”

UCF does offer a shuttle service to the grocery store on a weekly basis, but for some, their class schedules made it prohibitive to use. One Asian student with low food security shared, “I didn't have the like ability really to get to like a grocery store that often. I know they provided like a shuttle every Tuesday, but that was my busiest day at school. So I never really had the time to use that shuttle.” Another had a different struggle, noting that it required planning ahead:
“They only have like a shuttle that goes to the grocery store, like once a week. So then like, I'd have to like wait until the next like X amount of days until I can go.”

A white student with high food security had the same struggle but for a different reason. She relies on her friends and boyfriend for rides to the store and can therefore only go when they are going. She reflected on that experience, “I just have to make sure that I plan ahead and then I think ahead. That's honestly pretty hard for me.” A white, male student with low food security also relied on friends for rides and said, “I don't want to - I don't want to…to force people to do something they don't want to do. Because everyone is busy, you know, so I don't want them to be focused with me. Because they have their own life, with their own work, their own everything.”

Both of those participants were happy to be able to access the pantry because it provided a sense of independence that was otherwise missing.

Impact on Studies

The question about impact on studies was asked to students directly, as none of them brought it up as their initial thoughts related to impact. The impact on their studies is not quite as tangible as the first two impacts on finances and food security. Instead, students pointed to ideas about less stress and more energy leading to more engagement in the coursework. None of the students in this study identified a direct relationship between the access to food and better grades or staying in a class. They did, however, recount some compelling stories about the way that food access helps them to concentrate and be better students.

When it came to hunger prevention in class, one Asian student, who has high food security, talked about going to the pantry between classes to get a microwavable meal and said, “it definitely helps me like not be hungry not be distracted by like that during class as well.” A
Black, male student with low food security shared a story of a time when he was hungry on campus and it impacted his performance: “I went to do a test once and I was hungry at UCF. Like I ran over to school and drove to school, and I was late, so I just was like, no food. And the whole time, all I could think about was having something to eat.” He went on to say, “So being able to have food available, especially that like little snack section where you can just grab like some granola bars and stuff [is] very, very helpful to just have a meal so that you can focus on doing your best at school.”

It was more common, however, for students to discuss the fact that access to the pantry allowed them to be less distracted in class. When asked about her studies related to the pantry, a multiracial student with low food security immediately responded, “I'm not stressed out about food and stuff. So I can just be like, ‘Let me just get this done.’” An Asian student with low food security shared great detail about how the Knights Pantry helps her focus:

That really helped me like focus on my classes because I wouldn't have to worry about ‘okay, do I have food for my next meal? Do I have the ability to go out and eat or do I have enough dining dollars to like buy myself something to just like, keep myself like full for the next few hours?’ So I felt like I - like also, like food is very connected to me like study wise because I'm like always snacking on something when I'm doing a lot of studying. So like, if I have food around me, I feel like more content like I feel like I'm doing okay.

A white male student with low food security talked about how the pantry allows him to stay on campus longer; “it helped me like focus in class because…I don't have to - have to go back home and see what to eat and stuff.” An Asian student with high food security discussed the lack of distraction because of the pantry resources, saying “It's just like one less worry that I have in my head so I can really put like more of my focus on like academics or extracurriculars.”

Finally, five participants shared that the pantry has given them a noticeable increase in energy levels. A Black student with low food security shared that she takes the bus to the
downtown campus: “When I have food in my system, it doesn't drain me out as much as when I weren't to have any food in my system...I usually - I stopped by the pantry before I go to the bus.” An Asian student with high food security shared that the pantry gives her access to high energy foods, like eggs and bread, saying, “That also plays into me being able to study so I like also want enough food like while I'm studying just so I don't have to spend time like going out to get food or just again like feeling not focused.”

One nonbinary Latino/a participant, who has very low food security, shared a particularly powerful personal experience about the way that the pantry impacts their mood and abilities to function:

With the regular food I've been eating now, I'm more energized. To focus more. I'm able to get up now out of bed, because before, I would always just stay in bed and, you know, be in a depressive state where like, I don't have no food in me. I don't want to get up. You know, I don't want to do anything. I'm not motivated enough, but I noticed that with this change, in this new semester, I am able to do so much more now. And with the, with the pantry, you know, the - I go there once a week and pick up, you know, what I need. I'm not stressed out with my food issues anymore - like they're still not great, but I'm not, I'm not deep in the depth, the pit of, you know, hunger that I was before and I'm, I'm just able to, you know, I'm glad that I'm moving now. I move now because of them. I'm not not what's that I forgot what's that word of like, like a standstill? You know?

A Latina student with low food security expressed feeling a combination of feeling more energy and being less distracted in class, sharing:

With what I usually eat, it, it's hard to get the energy that I need for the day, but when I have the right food that I do get from Knights pantry, it helps me get more energized. And it also again, helps minimize the stress of - because I used to sit in class thinking, like in the back of my head, like I'll be focusing in class but in the back of my head, there's always that ‘what am I going to eat today? Like how am I going to go grocery shopping?’

Overall, fifteen students discussed one of these impacts on their experience in the classroom and with studies as a result of their access to the Knights Pantry.
Other Individual Impacts

In addition to the impact in the areas of financial, food security, and studies, a small number of students addressed other impacts that they experience as a result of their pantry use.

**Access to hygiene products** came up among two students, with one saying, “They are very good at providing like basic necessities, like they have hygiene products there. They have, you know, clothes there.” Another student laments that personal hygiene products cost money in the first place, saying, “I feel like feminine products should be free. And so the pantry offers that. So I'm typically getting the feminine products for free, which I like that.”

Three students discussed the ways that the pantry affords them more healthy food choices. One said, “I can like budget myself better to like eat more nutritionally - nutritiously, at the end of the day.” Another communicated, “It just helped make sure that I can not only eat healthier, but I can always have something to eat and bring to school too.” Finally, the third student shared that not having access to the pantry’s resources would send her down a dangerous path:

I would definitely be like, trying to like really plan to a tee my eating which I feel like would send me down a rabbit hole of like, possibly disorderly eating…and like feeling lesser than and also just like not performing as well in school, because I don't have like the proper sustenance and like nutrients to perform like regular cognitive functions like from day to day. I wouldn't be able to like exercise as much as I do because I also don't have the fuel. So then like in turn I'd also be like physically unhealthy. And I would also…I guess like take an Uber or something to the grocery store, which is also costing more and more inconvenient for other people and myself.

There was only one participant who discussed that the pantry allows her more time, energy, and money to **socialize**, noting,

I'm not so preoccupied with, "I need this certain amount of money to go grocery shopping" because I know that I have those groceries there that I can get if I need them. So if anybody's ever like 'oh, let's go out and do this. Let's let's go out to eat at this place.'
There's still - it's definitely, it's almost that muscle memory of like, 'mmm, I don't know, I should save money.' But I have a lot more leeway with what I'm choosing to do.

The final individual impact that came up for students involved only students who also volunteer at the pantry. Five of the volunteers talked about how volunteering had an impact on them in various ways. One shared, “I think it's made me a lot more open to asking like for help from like other, like, if you're like if they're offering the help, I'm more open to ask for help.” Another discussed the social connections she has made, stating, “I think it's, first of all, just like introduced me to so many more people who are like, passionate about bringing resources like the pantry offers to students.” The impact on volunteers was not a main focus of the study, but for those who both volunteered and used the pantry, they seemed to benefit in more ways than one.

Ripples Effects of the Pantry

Although most of the impact discussed in this chapter is focused on the student using the pantry, there were quite a few responses that indicated the ripple effect of the pantry’s resources. For instance, some students used the pantry’s resource to help feed their parents or others outside of the UCF community. One student discussed feeling partially responsible for her sister, sharing, “I have been to the pantry like a couple of times, so whenever I go for me, I go for her too, I'll like, just like be like, okay, instead of one, I'll just take two like, cookies, I'll just take two of them and, you know, do that.” Another will provide for the family of her significant other: “Sometimes when I grab frozen meats, I grab them for my significant other's family, because they frequent pantries a lot… whenever there was frozen salmon or fish, I would take it home and he would take it to his mom and his mom would like it.” One student lives at home with his family, where everyone tries to chip in. Sometimes he cannot do as much with finances, but
states “At least I can go and say hey, I brought home some extra food so that we can do something nice.”

One participant shared a story about how people might use the pantry to impact more than just themselves:

I remember standing in line with a girl during Spirit Splash, and she would go there [to the Pantry] for her and her roommate, but she was only using her card, like only her UCF ID to get food, and that's just because her roommate, I think she was immunocompromised or she was disabled…So she was the only one going in, but the school is technically feeding two people.

Further, a few participants talked at length about the ripple effects on the campus community as a whole. The participants who also volunteer at the pantry had the most to say about it. One noted:

It's definitely making a difference, just for the people that I - just for the people that I sometimes interact with…It definitely makes a difference for some people who don't have the access to food consistently, especially for those who live on campus and who don't have cars, because it can be harder, especially if you don't have a meal plan.

Another participant shared the impact that she sees the pantry having on international students: “I would say like the biggest impact I think the pantry has is like for international students, actually, people don't talk about this enough, but like when international students come here and they don't have any support, like in the country, or like they have like limited financial support as well.” One student also shared the impact she sees it have, “Whether you go or not, it's impacted a lot of students. And people rely on that pantry a lot.” Overall, students overwhelmingly agreed that the pantry has a positive impact on the campus population, with one summing it up: “The pantry is like really helpful to students.”
Minimal Impact

It must be acknowledged that not all participants in the study had low food security rates. Further, not all students were in an economic position where they strictly needed a resource like the Knights Pantry. Several students were in economic situations where they would be okay without the pantry. One student, a volunteer with high food security, was asked about what would happen if the pantry closed and shared, “personally speaking, I wouldn't be much affected because I'm fortunate enough to not face food insecurity.” Another participant was in a similar situation, saying, “It probably would not impact my access to food as, as much as it might for other people. Because, because I can - for me, it's - I can always go to Walmart. It's not like - it's not like I don't have the financial ability to.” A third volunteer with high food security indicated that the pantry did not have a financial impact on her, but also said, “it would affect a lot of people in ways that we probably wouldn't even be like aware of.”

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the different ways that students are impacted by the Knights Pantry, answering the primary research question. Yes, the pantry has an impact on students, and it appears to mitigate at least some of the detrimental impacts of food insecurity, especially for those students who have the lowest food security rates. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter. Previous studies (Long, et al 2019) have cited the difficulties in exploring the impacts of food pantries, so this study serves as a starting point for gaining more understanding into the impacts of such services.
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the student experience at a college food pantry and the impact of that pantry on student lives. Very few, if any, studies have been done on the intervention of a food pantry and how it impacts those it intends to serve. This concluding chapter situates the results of the study in the current literature and highlights the theoretical and practical implications for both the field of sociology and for food bank practitioners. Additionally, limitations and future research recommendations are provided, along with a reflection by the researcher.

Important Findings and Analysis

Being a college student might protect individuals from the risk of housing instability that often accompanies food insecurity (King 2018), as all twenty-eight students in the study reported having a stable place to live, although several did share concerns about the rising rent prices in Orlando. Further, all students reported having access to a kitchen, including refrigeration and cooking supplies, which diminished concerns about students not having access to prepare food (Schweid 2016; Smith, Butterfass, and Richards 2010). All the students in this study lived in a space with access to a kitchen and cooking devices. That said, there are certainly residence halls at UCF and on other campuses that do not have kitchen access, even though students in those spaces may still be experiencing food insecurity. The impacts of not having the ability to prepare their own food could not be explored in this study, but should still be taken into consideration for future inquiries.

Similar to the general population who “trade off” on paying bills (Beam 20202; Gunderson, Engelhard, and Hake 2017; Knowles, et. al 2016), students in this study also reported the practice prior to using the pantry, with several explicitly noting that the pantry
mitigated the need for them to trade off on bills. The impact on finances was the most tangible among students and the one that came up the most when they were asked about the impact. The fact that accessing five items per day allowed students to be able to afford gas to get to campus when they previously could not or to redistribute money to other needed expenses underpins the difference this resource makes for students. The pantry also mitigated concerns around proximity to grocery stores and transportation (LeDoux and Vojnovic 2013; Shannon 2016), as students no longer needed to make travel plans to a secondary destination to receive food items.

Although the research on food insecurity in college students showed a serious impact on academic work (Dubick, Mathews, and Cady 2016; Ilieva, Ahmed, and Yan, 2019; Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, and Arria 2018), the impact of the pantry on academics was arguably the one that students struggled the most to articulate. Impact on academics never came up as the initial response to the pantry and some students struggled to see the connection, even when explicitly asked. For those who did, the impact was more about energy level and attentiveness than it was about missing/dropping out of class or affording textbooks. Several students did say that they were less distracted by hunger in class (Beam 2020), a factor they contributed to the food pantry’s resources. More research is needed on the impacts of the food pantry on student academics.

Several students reported that the pantry allowed them to not skip meals, an important finding, as previous literature showed that families in low-income situations end up not eating at mealtimes (Devine, et. al 2006). Because none of the participants in the current study were caretakers, some of the literature around family stress and decision-making (Devine, et. al 2006) is not relevant for this particular group of college students. However, with a full fifth of the student population over age twenty-five, there are undoubtedly students with families on campus
who struggle with food insecurity and simply did not participate in this particular study. Future studies could concentrate on this demographic to see if the pantry mitigates the need for meal-skipping and bill trade-off for families. Additional future research could focus on the impact of children of college students, as the current study renders the literature on the impact on children irrelevant at this time (Burke, et. al 2016; Fram, et al. 2011; Gundersen and Ziliak 2015; Rosemond, et. al 2019).

As this study focused on self-reported student experiences with the pantry, there is no way to gauge the health impact; future studies could focus on a design that explores if the pantry mitigates some of the negative health issues as hypertension and mental health (Gundersen and Ziliak 2015). However, there are some important implications to consider when it comes to the food security of students. Roughly a third of the students in this study had high food security, meaning that they most likely have access to food as needed on a regular basis. A few students with high food security said that the pantry resources did not make a big difference on their finances, while others with high food security could still point out the ways that access to food resources did allow for some additional money saving.

For those with low food security, however, the impact was maximized. Not only did they experience saving money, but access to the pantry took away some stress from their finances as well. With the exception of one student, all the individuals who spoke about being able to pay other bills and easing financial stress had low or very low food security. That financial outcome was reserved almost exclusively for students with low food security.

When it came to food access, the impacts of the pantry were seen across the board, in students with both high and low food security, primarily because of the issue of transportation. Many students with high food security experienced barriers to the grocery store that would have
prevented them from accessing food, whereas the pantry allows them to have easy access to food on a daily basis. The accessibility of the pantry as an on-campus resource benefitted students across the board, regardless of their food security level. However, the benefits of preventing hunger and providing comfort/psychological security were exclusively felt by students who had low or very low food security.

Overall, the impacts of the pantry were felt by most students, regardless of their food security level. Students indicated feeling the impacts of the pantry on their studies, even when they had high food security, although the impacts were felt more acutely by those with low food security. Those with low food security discussed not having to worry about not having food, whereas those with high food security discussed not needing to worry about the inconvenience of acquiring food, but both populations felt a tangible impact. The only exception are the few students with high food insecurity who indicated that the pantry did not have much of an impact, in that its existence did not necessarily make or break their lived experience.

Theoretical Implications

Neoliberalism remains an important theoretical framework in understanding the students whose emotional responses included shame and guilt for using the pantry’s services. Although the Knights Pantry has actually worked to destigmatize the use of the pantry, by opening services up to anyone and being very intentional with how they train volunteers to engage with students, some students in this study still felt an internalized sense of guilt, even when they had high food insecurity and high need for its services. There was a sense of feeling like they should not need the services. On the flip side, several students discussed the fact that they felt guilty for not being
needy enough, even when they did in fact have need. In these ways, the neoliberal frame has shaped the ways that students view themselves and the way they view the services.

The tenets of neoliberalism include an “every person for themselves” mentality (Palley 2020), which has included policy shifts in the United States, but also impacts the individuals within the country as well. Instead of feeling that a community or society should support its members, individuals instead feel that they must rely only on themselves. As such not being able to do so indicates a personal failing in some way, as opposed to a system failure. Even as the wage gap has widened and the economic system is failing low-wage workers (Jarosz and Mather 2018), which often includes college students supporting themselves, many of the students in this study felt guilty for using such a service because the neoliberal ideals that have taken hold tell them it is a personal failing and not a systemic one.

In other ways, the privatization of services is partially to blame for the reason that the University of Central Florida needs to provide this resource in the first place. Part of the neoliberal tradition has been to shift responsibility to the private sector and non-profits (Docka-Filipek and Timmer 2019; Kane 2018). Public colleges and universities are in a strange position, as they are still government entities, but they are entities whose primary responsibility is not to support the feeding of their students. Yet, as services and support has diminished, colleges realized that student success is important, not only for story-telling and positive word of mouth recruitment, but for retention and graduation rates as well. As the federal and state governments cut resources to both institutions and students, the institutions themselves have stepped up to fill in the gaps. In a rather strange way, the public education institution has become the privatized provider of support for college students, especially since much of the food and products are donated from local supermarkets and food banks. UCF, along with at least 600 other institutions
across the country, undermined neoliberal traditions of asking every person to do it themselves and instead stepped up to provide a resource available to all students.

The other theoretical frameworks that were intended to underpin the study did not show themselves in a compelling way. Critical race theory explores the ways that systemic inequalities result in unequal outcomes for people of different racial backgrounds, particularly the experience of African-American Americans. Although studies (Brown-Iannuzzi, et. al 2016; Ross and Bateman 2019; Siddiqi, et. al 2021) showed inequalities between racial groups in access to food and health for the general population, the students engaged in this study either did not have or were not willing to share negative experiences with the pantry or pantry staff. Based on the caliber of enthusiasm in most responses, it appears unlikely that students were omitting information or hiding a negative experience. Students were specifically asked if they felt that they were treated the same as others in the pantry and none of them indicated feeling any sort of discrimination or concern about their experience with the pantry staff. That being said, the Knights Pantry requires specific training for student staff and volunteers on implicit bias, appropriate attitudes, and non-judgmental behavior. It is impossible to tell the extent to which that training impacted the student experience. Further, it is also entirely possible that other students on campus do experience bias or discrimination and those students simply did not decide to participate in the study or were unaware of it. The possibility of discrimination should not be underestimated, but it was also not present in this study with these particular students.

Based on the existing body of literature, women are more likely to perceive themselves as being responsible for others, especially within the family unit (DeVault 1991; Hochschild 1989), in addition to the fact that women are more likely to live in poverty than men (Ezeala-Harrison 2010). Despite the fact that the majority of the study participants identified as female, the age
and social location of the students impacted the degree to which the impact appeared. None of the students in the study were caregivers; there did not seem to be a disproportionate responsibility for food preparation, as most of the students were not in serious relationships and were not responsible for any family members or others. Many students were responsible for their own food preparation outside of the home for the first time, which many recounted as being challenging and jarring. However, that appeared to have little, if anything, to do with their gender and more to do with their age and a transitional life period.

Although students did not directly speak about their understanding of the impact of race and gender, both underlying theories take into account structural and societal restrictions and institutions that, to some extent, direct the ways that individuals interact with the resources around them. Although this study had a small sample size, only the female students expressed feeling guilt and shame as a barrier to the pantry. That is not to say that men do not also feel those sentiments; it could be that the two men in the study did not feel comfortable expressing such feelings. The feelings of guilt and shame appeared to cross all economic and racial lines, as students who expressed such sentiments represented every racial category in the study and all three food insecurity levels. This sentiment perhaps points to the fact that individual responsibility has been pushed as the ideal standard.

It was expected that there might be some differences across race and gender lines when it came to the emotional experiences of accessing the pantry. Simply due to the number of participants, the vast majority of emotional responses belonged to women, but the emotions themselves appeared to be relatively universal. For instance, two students from different backgrounds both discussed the ways in which their family heritage impacts their emotions around shame and guilt; the feelings stemmed from different cultures, but the end outcome was
the same. Interestingly, however, the feelings of guilt and shame appeared to impact those with low food security more intensely, as the students who brought up continued feelings of guilt and shame all had low or very low food security levels. Although those with high food security experienced shame as a barrier to entering the pantry, those with low food security appeared to continue to experience those emotions even after visiting for the first time.

Similar to critical race theory, feminist theory should not be forgotten when it comes to work involving food insecurity. Perhaps for college students at the beginning of their independent lives, their identities are not playing a salient role when it comes to their food acquisition and preparation. That is not to say, however, that those pieces will not crop up later in the life or even that those experiences are not present within UCF students. It simply means that these particular students at this particular point in their lives did not express the ways in which they view their identities as playing a role in visiting the Knights Pantry. The intersectionality of students’ identities should still be at the forefront for researchers and practitioners hoping to improve student access to food.

Social Safety Net

College students largely do not qualify for SNAP benefits and other social safety net programs because their status as college students does not count as meeting the work requirement (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016; Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019). Despite the restrictions that underpin SNAP, at least two students had previously qualified, although both had lost the benefits by the time they were interviewing for the study. Many of the students in this study had tried to apply for SNAP or wanted to apply and found the process to either be too arduous or found themselves losing benefits without explanation. The
difficulty of the application and verification is most likely a use of welfare ordeals (Blumkin, Margalioth, and Sadka 2014), wherein the process is made incredibly difficult to ensure that people applying are “deserving” of the support (Moffitt 2015).

Students in this study would have benefitted greatly from additional food support from SNAP. Of the twenty-eight students surveyed, eight indicated working over twenty hours a week, which would more than satisfy the work requirements. The current SNAP system should be changed to include college students. The addition of just five additional items had a massive impact on the students, so an increase in funding for additional food has the potential to change student lives as well.

Although the majority had not received benefits, those who had low food security could especially benefit from having access to the social safety net, which has been taken away. Further, the fact that social safety nets have been rolled back across all areas of support means that students are using the pantry’s resource to support their own families and even other families. In the meantime, the Knights Pantry continues to provide the safety net for students in a way that means to minimize barriers. The pantry works hard to ensure that they are not requiring welfare ordeals (Blumkin, Margalioth, and Sadka 2014) and strive to ensure that the pantry feels welcoming and that all who visit are deserving of the services. The social safety net in the United States would function much better if it approached aid the same way.

College Food Pantries

This study provides quite a few implications for college-based food pantries. The student experience at the Knights Pantry was overwhelmingly positive, with students having positive interactions with the staff and feeling that they were welcomed in the space. The positive
atmosphere created an environment where students felt that they come without fear, with a few
students going so far as to call it a safe space. It means that students who are nervous coming the
first time choose to come back after using it, which results in students getting the resources they
need to be successful. The training that the Knights Pantry does with their volunteers should
continue and other colleges should offer similar training.

The fact that the pantry is open to everyone plays a massive role in destigmatizing the
experience. Some students even mentioned that as an incentive for going because they feel like
they can and are allowed. It is important because accessing the pantry has positive impacts across
the board. Even for students with high food security, accessing the pantry made a difference in
their student experience. For those with low food security, the pantry had massive impacts, from
students being able to afford to put gas in their car to the mitigation of the need to split bill
payments. Several students responded that if the pantry were not an option, they would go
hungry. It is not a matter of having some snacks, this is a matter of students having energy to be
able to complete their studies. This study answered the question “does access to a food bank
mitigate the negative impacts of food insecurity?” with a fairly resounding yes. Other college
food pantries should take note and colleges without food pantries should highly consider
instituting one on their campuses.

One of the few studies done on the experience at food pantries (Vissing, et al. 2017)
highlighted the preferences of clients to have their privacy respected and be treated with dignity;
it is almost inarguable that the Knights Pantry makes every effort to do so and largely succeeds.
Students reported feeling supported and valued by staff. Cavaliere, Drew, and Martin (2021)
found that a welcoming environment helps to destigmatize, which the results of this study
confirm. College food pantries in other locations should seek to emulate the same welcoming
environment. A unique aspect of being a food pantry on a college campus is that a welcoming environment can be created simply by being open to all students (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2016), an option that community food pantries cannot use. The fact that all the students in the study, even those who were food secure, spoke to the impact of the food pantry on some aspect of their lives, justifies that colleges and universities should continue with an open access policy. Multiple students commented on only taking what they need and leaving food for others, which should mitigate any concern over the services being taken advantage of.

College food pantries should also continue to offer non-food products when possible, as not only is there literature to show the need (Fiese, Koester, and Waxman 2014; Feeding America 2013; Pritt, et. al 2018), but students do use the products and appreciate their availability. The same transportation and financial barriers that prevent students from visiting grocery stores are present when it comes to household and toiletry products, so providing those items at no cost and with no limitation ensures that students will not go without.

It appears that campus food pantries may experience similar challenges across institutions. El Zein, et. al (2018) found in their study that students expressed the hours of the pantry, social stigma, and a feeling of taking resources away as primary barriers. Although students in this study expressed being satisfied with the hours, the feelings of guilt and not being needy enough were pervasive. Further, very few of the students had used a food pantry off-campus, which speaks to literature (Ferrara Waity, et. al 2020) that suggests students are not aware or comfortable using off-campus resources.
Food Pantries and Other Interventions

It is unwise to draw too many parallels between the Knights Pantry and other community-based food pantries. The population is vastly different. As students, the participants at UCF have a different focus and different responsibilities from those who are working two-three jobs and supporting families. However, the results are promising for community-based food banks as well. It appears that the access even to five items a day had a profound impact on students, impacting their finances, their studies, and their food security levels. Whether or not that same degree of impact is felt from a community-based food pantry will need to be explored on its own. However, based on the current findings, community food banks should strive for welcoming environments that destigmatize services and ensure staff and volunteer training that emphasizes friendly, warm atmospheres.

Conclusions

This study set out to find the answers to two research question: How do students utilizing Knights Pantry perceive their experiences and the impact of additional support in their lives? How does acquiring food through Knights Pantry impact their lives as both students and as individuals? Overall, the study answered these questions. The student experience using the pantry was nuanced, with students experiencing a variety of emotions and choosing to use the pantry in a variety of different ways. Those who used the pantry, regardless of need, saw an impact on their lives as college students and as people. Many of them attributed the pantry to them being able to save money. Even more, a few said that the pantry allows them to eat. It allows them to put gas in the care to drive to campus. It provides stability for their family. The impacts are huge and ripple out even outside of the UCF community itself.
College food banks make an impact on many aspects of the student experience, based on the stories and testimonies given as part of this research. The services of the Knights Pantry change student lives beyond the classroom and on campus experience. The relief that some students felt while accessing the pantry was palpable. It was a weight off their shoulders. Colleges have a unique opportunity to provide services in a way that other communities cannot. The Knights Pantry does so in the best way possible. Not only should it continue to operate at its fully capacity, but it would be in the best interest of other college campuses to strive to scale up to the level of UCF.

Limitations

First and foremost, it is vital to understand that the Knights Pantry model is not necessarily a model that is reproducible within the bounds of community pantries as they currently exist today. The Knights Pantry is uniquely situated within a closed campus community, where they can use membership in the community as the determining factor for receiving services. Aside from other college campuses, there are very few communities who can enact such stringent but fair boundaries as far as who is entitled to the services. The Knights Pantry is able to undermine the neoliberal mindset of “every person for themselves” by offering the pantry as a service for anyone who needs it. They can actively work to reduce stigma related to using the services precisely because they can allow any student on campus to use it. Community food pantries must navigate increasingly high-need communities and determine the best way to ensure that the resources are going where most needed. Unfortunately, this results in income restraints that sometimes leave out families who truly need the support. As long as access to food remains an economic privilege and not a human right, there will continue to be restricted
access to food resources, thereby reinforcing the stigma. What works at the Knights Pantry is unlikely to work in community-based food pantries because they are simply operating in different worlds.

The stories and impacts shared in this work are highly meaningful, especially as it is one of the first studies to thoroughly explore the impacts of such a service beyond determining student food insecurity. However, there are some recruitment limitations to consider. Due to the timeline of the research, the majority of the recruitment was done in April/May and August/September, with a few interviews in the summer. The timeline meant that students were either just ending or just starting a semester and the summer did not yield many new interviews. A more ideal timeline is discussed in the next section.

Further, the interview participants self-selected to participate, either because of the gift card incentive or because they felt passionate about sharing their stories. A disproportionate number of participants had also volunteered with the pantry. All said, the sample is likely not a perfect representation of the overall demographics of those who use the pantry. Similarly, the study allowed for the participation of any students who have used the pantry, which meant that the food security levels of students vastly differed as well. The impacts varied across students, likely due to differences in socioeconomic status and background of students and their “need” for the pantry.

Future Research

This study attempted to understand the perceived impacts of the food pantry on college students; in many ways, it succeeded in doing so. The results that emerged from the data showed that access to the pantry has a profound impact on the levels of food insecurity and financial
well-being for college students accessing the services. That said, there is more work to be done in the field to better understand the deeper impacts. Future study designs should consider a longitudinal approach, instead of single interviews. It would be ideal to construct a study where first-time pantry users participate in a pre-interview and then at least two follow-up interviews throughout the course of an academic year. Such a design might also allow for a more precise measurement of the impact beyond student stories. For example, it might provide richer data when comparing a student’s pre-pantry food security levels with their levels afterward. Participants might be asked to keep a food diary or some other form of documentation about what their use of the food pantry looks like.

For this preliminary study, a wide net was cast as far as study participation, with the only requirement being that a student had used the food pantry. The Knights Pantry sent out the invitation to participate to their volunteer rosters because a roster of clients using the pantry is not available. As such, a little under half of the participants had volunteered at the pantry in addition to using it. The food security levels for volunteers differed compared to the other participants. Future studies should concentrate on including only students who are experiencing food insecurity to narrow in the focus. However, because the Knights Pantry is available for any student, it is important to note that even students without food insecurity benefitted from the services, just not to the same extent as students who were experiencing food insecurity.

There is also still work to be done on the impact of community-based food pantries. Even point-in-time interviews (such as the ones done in this study) would be a good start for understanding the impact of community-based food pantries. It is clear from the results in this study that the impact is clear to food recipients. Is the same true in community-based food pantries? Does better access mitigate the negative impacts of food insecurity, especially when it
comes to children within family units? These questions remain largely unanswered, due to the vast difference between a college student and a family unit. Beginning to answer those questions might provide valuable insight for the day-to-day running of community food pantries.

Final Reflections

In any qualitative study, it is necessary for the researcher to be cognizant of their own identities and what they bring to the table when they sit down to speak with and interview others. My study involved college students, a population that I’m relatively close in age to (although that seems to change every day!) and with whom I worked closely for the first four years of my career in student affairs at a neighboring institution. As should be expected in a study about food insecurity, many of the students I spoke with were experiencing challenging circumstances. One of the biggest struggles I have, personally, in social inequalities work is that I do not have any similar experiences on which to build rapport. (Obviously that is a privilege for me to have never experienced that, but it sometimes makes me feel like a fraud or that I am exploiting people’s stories). What made it easier in this case (and partially why I chose to work with college students) is that I can relate to going to college and taking classes, as I went to college as a traditional age student, right after high school. Students seemed really willing to be open with me and shared very personal stories, which I hope I did justice to in this study. I hope that they felt supported and that their voices were heard.

Going into this study, I was really concerned about not wanting to take advantage of people and making sure the research benefitted more than just me as a PhD student. I feel that this study achieved that. A final report is being sent to the Knights Pantry, which includes data they can use to improve pantry services and infographics they can use to share the impact of the
pantry and advocate for more funds or resources. I am hopeful that the information gleaned in this study will provide information that they have been unable to collect up until this point and that it can help to guide them into the future.

When it comes to recruitment, I learned the importance of having connections to the community. Unfortunately, I did not have an “in” with the UCF students and so had very little leverage to encourage people to talk to me. That made it very difficult. People signed up to tell their stories, which, I think, is a testament to the great work that the pantry is doing, but, in some ways, I am very lucky that so many people felt compelled to share with me, a stranger they had never met. In future studies, I would like to have more of a connection with those I would be interviewing so that it would make the process easier.

After talking to over twenty-five students who have used the Knights Pantry, it is clear to me what an absolute difference such a resource makes. The Pantry does a phenomenal job ensuring that their policies are fair for students and allow for the least amount of waste, such as the unlimited policy for bread items. No two students had the same experience, which speaks to the ways in which a variety of factors in our lives shape our experiences. For some students, talking with them was really easy; we had similar backgrounds and interests, which made them willing to open up. Other students would disclose one or two sentences, leaving me to figure out how hard to push and what was really important to push on.

I do not think that most students are thinking about neoliberalism or the failing social safety net when they access the pantry. They are thinking about how they can get through the end of the week without being hungry or what makes the most sense for them to pick up while they are in the area. However, the sentiments of neoliberalism that contribute to the failing social safety net are there. Students overwhelmingly feel that they do not want to take away from others
and some even mentioned the idea of false scarcity. The idea that there is a perception of not enough to go around, even though there is enough to go around. The volunteers at the pantry were especially aware of just how much food was in the back and on the shelves and, as such, felt more comfortable to access the service because of that knowledge.

Students overcame guilt, shame, and self-imposed judgment to come to the pantry. Their experience there is what kept them feeling that they could come back and use the service as much as they needed. They felt welcomed. They felt that the college cared about them. They felt shared humanity with the volunteers. As a result, they felt the impacts in all parts of their lives. The work of the pantry is the kind that makes a difference and the kind that I strive to be a part of in some way as I finish this program.
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

March 18, 2022

Dear Courtney Howell:

On 3/18/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study, Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>The Impacts of a College Food Bank Among College Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Courtney Howell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY0004020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents Reviewed:</td>
<td>HRP 251 Form, Category: Faculty Research Approval; Howell Form 254 UPDATE3, Category: Consent Form; Howell Form 255 UPDATE3, Category: IRB Protocol; Interview Protocol.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions; Quarter Sheet Flyer Update3, Category: Recruitment Materials; Recruitment Portal Update, Category: Recruitment Materials; Social Media Posts UPDATE3, Category: Recruitment Materials; Survey Update, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2601 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Gillian Bernal
Designated Reviewer
UCF KNIGHTS PANTRY

SHARE YOUR KNIGHTS PANTRY STORY!

WHAT DOES THE KNIGHT'S PANTRY MEAN TO YOU?

SIGN UP TODAY TO SHARE YOUR STORY!
ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE THANKED WITH A $10 AMAZON GIFT CARD AFTER FULL PARTICIPATION

Interested participants can sign up via QR code. Full participation in the study includes a brief survey and an one-hour interview about the pantry. Questions or concerns? Need a different time to chat? Email courtney.howell@knights.ucf.edu in the UCF Sociology department with any inquiries!

**Participants must be 18 years of age, be a current UCF student, and have previously used the pantry at least once. This study’s purpose is to better understand the impact of access to a food pantry on college students and to hear personal stories about the impact. The information gathered in the study may be used to improve pantry services or advocate for additional services.
APPENDIX C: PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY
Your Name:

What is your major/what are you studying?

What is your current class standing (by credit hours)?
  o  Freshman
  o  Sophomore
  o  Junior
  o  Senior
  o  Master’s Level Graduate Degree
  o  Doctoral Level Doctorate Degree
  o  Certificate or License
  o  Non-degree Seeking

How many years have you been a student at UCF?

Are you currently receiving financial aid?
  o  Yes
  o  No
  o  I don’t know

Are you a transfer student?
  o  Yes
  o  No

Are you a first generation college student? That is, are you the first member of your family to attend college?
  o  Yes
  o  No
What is your age?

What best describes your current living situation?

- I live with my parents or relatives
- I live in an off-campus apartment by myself, with friends, or with roommates.
- I live on campus in a residence hall.
- I do not currently have a residence.
- Other (please specify):

How do you usually describe your race and/or ethnicity?

- White/Caucasian
- African-American or Black
- Hispanic or Latinx/Latina/Latino or Chicanx/Chicana/Chicano
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American
- Southeast Asian
- Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
- Other Asian or Asian-American
- Other (please specify):

How would you describe your gender identity?

- Female
- Male
- Nonbinary
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
Are you the parent, primary caregiver or guardian (legal or informal) of any children or adults?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever received SNAP benefits, previously known as food stamps?

- Yes
- No

For the following prompts, please indicate whether each statement is never true, sometimes true, or often true:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never True</th>
<th>Sometimes True</th>
<th>Often True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the last 12 months, I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last 12 months, the food I bought just didn’t last, I didn’t have money to get more.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last 12 months, I couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?

- Yes
- No

In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
In the last 12 months, did you and/or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?

  o Yes
  o No

[If the answer to the previous question was yes, then the following question will be asked]

How often did this happen – almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1-2 months?

  o Almost every month
  o Some months but not every month
  o Only 1-2 months
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Not all of the probing questions (a, b, c) will be asked.

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your experience so far at UCF.
   a. What brought you to UCF?
   b. What social connections have you made at UCF?
   c. What support are you receiving during your time in college?
   d. Are you working in addition to being a student? What does this look like for you?

   (How many hours, part time vs. full time, etc., gig jobs)

2. We are here today to talk about your experience with the Knights Pantry. Before we dive into the pantry, though, I’d like to talk more broadly first. Where are you currently living (or incorporate their answer from the survey as part of the question) and how would you describe your current food situation on a regular basis?
   a. What does a day of eating look like for you?
   b. How much access do you have to cook and prepare food where you live?
   c. In your current situation, are you responsible for or do you feel responsible for anyone else’s well-being, food consumption, or care?
   d. How does this compare to your food situation growing up?
   i. Have you experienced not having enough food before?
   e. Has COVID-19 impacted your access to food?

3. Are you seeking or receiving any financial support that helps with access to food?
   a. WIC, SNAP, government assistance, etc.
   b. What has that experience been like for you?

4. Have you used the services of community-based food pantries in the past?
   a. What was that experience like for you?
5. Switching gears to talk about your experience with the pantry itself, what brought you to the Knights Pantry?
   a. How did you hear about the pantry?
   b. How often do you use the pantry or do you think you will use the pantry?
   c. When did you first start using the pantry?
   d. What did you know about the Knights Pantry before you came to use it?
   e. Were there any barriers to coming to the food pantry?
   f. Do you feel that not having enough food is part of the college experience?

6. Think back to your first experience at the Knights Pantry. What was it like?
   a. What emotions did you feel when you were there?
      i. Welcoming, easy, difficult, demoralizing, stigma, etc.
      ii. Do you think you were treated the same way other students receiving the service were treated?
   b. How has your sense of belonging or inclusion on campus changed as a result of using the pantry?
   c. Have you felt any connection or solidarity with other students who use the pantry or work at the pantry?

7. How would you say the Knights Pantry has impacted you? What has that looked like for you?
   a. How does it help you to complete your education?
   b. Have you seen any differences in your studies as a result of using the food pantry?
      i. Do you find yourself able to pay better attention, attend more often (skip less), able to pay for textbooks with saved money, not dropping a class?
c. What is the primary use of the items that you receive from the pantry? Snacks, meals, toiletries, etc.

d. If the Knights Pantry ceased to exist, what do you anticipate would be potential consequences for you personally?

e. Do you find that the pantry allows you more opportunities to socialize because of better access to food?

f. Do you think the pantry is making a difference on this campus? For you or for others?

i. Are you able to pay more of your bills or take care of other financial needs because of access to the pantry?

8. Do you feel your needs are being met by the pantry?

a. Where are the current gaps in your needs?

b. Are you experiencing other financial concerns? (Housing, financial, school, etc.)

i. Should I bring up housing related to food access?

c. Is there anything you would change about the services the Knights Pantry offers?

i. Model, hours, being closed on breaks, etc.

d. What other support would be helpful from UCF or other services?

9. Is there something else you would like me to know about your experience using the Knights Pantry?

10. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
APPENDIX E: COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FOOD ITEMS SELECTED
Table 6: Food Items Selected by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Items in Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
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