

INTRODUCTION

The Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC) team was privileged to engage your campus, Reedley Community College, in our study of three college/university-based campus food insecurity efforts. The purpose of this study was to capture the voices of students served by the pantry, pantry staff, and campus administrators about their experiences with food insecurity and the role of the campus in mitigating these challenges. Unfortunately, our team was not able to visit the campus, and engage with the students and administrators directly due to the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the CEC team was able to obtain these important perspectives via an online survey and a phone interview with Reedley campus administrators. The following profile summarizes the information gathered to inform and bolster future efforts to reduce food insecurity.

PARTICIPANTS

The online listening session survey engaged 37 Reedley College participants; the majority were students who had accessed the pantry in the last year. Most of the participants lived with others in their home and a large majority lived with children. Less than half of the participants had visited the pantry in the past 30 days and a similar proportion accessed off-campus food services in the past 12 months. Thirty-four percent of participants currently receive SNAP. About half were full-time students at Reedley and over half held a job in addition to their academic work

Reedley Community College	
	<u>37 respondents</u>
	Listening Session Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 student pantry users • 2 students/future pantry users • 4 students interested in food services • 1 pantry staff • 4 other respondents
	Average Age 23 years
	Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% Female; 24% Male
	Race/Ethnicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% Hispanic/Latino; 32% White; 8% American Indian or Alaska Native; 3% Black; 41% Other
	Description of Households <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% lived with others (range = 2-9 people) • 81% lived with children (range = 1-6 children)
	Participation in Charitable Food Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% had received free food from the campus pantry in the past 30 days • 50% had received free food from another source in the past 12 months • 34% currently receive SNAP
	Education & Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47% were full-time students, 24% were part-time students • 56% currently had employment, 15% of students worked more than 20 hours per week

PANTRY FINDINGS

The following section explores the primary themes that emerged from student, pantry staff, and campus administrator commentary. Four broad categories of campus pantry findings emerged:

- 1. **Pantry Successes** represent strengths of the campus pantry or campus food services that promoted effectiveness in addressing food insecurity.
- 2. **Opportunities for Pantry Growth** highlight potential opportunities the campus might consider leveraging to increase their impact. Concepts like partnerships and potential synergies with other campus services are discussed in this category.
- 3. **External Pantry Challenges** are external threats or prevalent issues that impact the success of the campus food services.
- 4. **Areas for Pantry Improvement** are ideas for how the campus pantry might improve their efforts. Topics in this category include suggestions related to potential modifications of campus services to better address campus needs.



PANTRY SUCCESSES

Pantry Operations	Offerings	Marketing
Students indicated that they were satisfied with the Tiger Pantry’s accessibility (e.g., hours of operations) and cleanliness.	Students reported that the wide variety of available food was a strength of the pantry.	Students shared that the Tiger Pantry was well advertised.

In addition, campus administrator commentary corroborated these findings, stating that the pantry accessibility and pantry marketing were effective attributes.

“We have our main pantry and then we have, I think we’re up to six different snack pantries around campus...we’re open every day from 9:00 to 4:00, to just really try to make ourselves available to students throughout the entire day.”

“We’ve also done a lot of outreach, a lot of promoting it, just really getting it out there. A lot of students didn’t even know we had a pantry. I think when we rolled out the snack pantry, or the grab-and-go snack sites, that was a good opportunity for students to know like, ‘Hey, this stuff is coming from the pantry. Are you aware?’ We’ve set up little info tables around campus. Any opportunities that we have to connect with new students and let them know that this is available for them.”

Moreover, Reedley campus administrators identified additional strengths of the Tiger Pantry, offering advice for other campuses seeking to adopt a similar campus pantry model. Specifically, the campus administrators urged other campuses to: (1) research best practices employed across the county to guide the approach to addressing student food insecurity, (2) form a committee with diverse voices seeking support from campus leadership, and (3) collect and leverage student data to get leadership buy-in.

“We have some data to substantiate our requests. Again, it doesn’t seem like it’s just a pie in the sky idea, but it’s based on student voice and student need and you build that support.”

“We look at best practices and other models of what other colleges are doing. That Hope Center has definitely for us become a real valuable resource with regards to learning what best practices are and emerging trends related to these food and housing insecurities.”



“I think another good source of our ideas for the local campus has been the Equity and Basic Needs subcommittee. We have over 23 members on that committee, and it consists of the faculty and administrators and staff. They always have great ideas. It’s great because it helps us develop a local response. And these are folks that have regular interactions and are very connected with the students...These are folks help us keep a pulse of what’s going on with the students. If you’re able to build a team of stakeholders that is composed of on- and off-campus partners, that’s going to help get administration’s attention, but really build those alliances so that when you go to administration it’s not only a program or a person doing the ask, you can go and you can say, it’s all of us doing the ask.”

Reedley campus administrators also noted that they engaged in additional campus services to supplement the campus pantry effort. Specifically, robust CalFresh (SNAP) enrollment initiatives and wrap-around houselessness services (e.g., hygiene kits, on-campus showers) helped make Reedley’s services more responsive to their student needs.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR PANTRY GROWTH

Forging additional partnerships	Leveraging political and social trends	Conducting more outreach
Students indicated that forging new partnerships with local markets and on-campus groups would increase the ability of the pantry to serve students.	Students suggested staying abreast of political and social trends, such as changes to CalFresh (SNAP) policies.	Students shared that continuing to market and advertise the pantry would expand the reach of the services.

Furthermore, insights from the campus administrators indicated that the food pantry must continue to maintain their strong partnerships with organizations external to the Reedley campus, such as the Central California Food Bank, local farmers, the department of social services, and other community organizations (e.g., churches, Rotary Club). The administrators also mentioned opportunities to forge new partnerships with local grocery stores and the on-campus dining services: *“I am working with the manager of our food services because we are trying to advance the campus’ efforts to be able to accept EBT cards on campus.”*



EXTERNAL PANTRY CHALLENGES

Outside conditions	Changes to student and campus life	Transportation issues
At the time of the survey, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic loomed large. As such, students viewed outside conditions, such as the pandemic as potential threats to the food pantry.	Students feared that changes to student and campus life would be problematic for the food pantry. Again, the closure of the Reedley campus, due to COVID-19, likely influenced this response.	Students reported that access to the campus and the pantry was a threat they faced.



AREAS FOR PANTRY IMPROVEMENT

Expired Foods	Marketing	Stigma	Even more accessibility
Students indicated that the pantry occasionally had food that was past its prime or expired.	Although outreach was cited as a pantry strength previously, the pantry should continue to advertise their services.	Students feared that stigma would prevent some students from using the pantry's services.	Students shared that the pantry could offer even more hours of operation.

The campus administrator interview commentary highlighted some additional areas to focus Tiger Pantry improvement efforts. Specifically, the campus administrators indicated a need for more space and sustainable funding sources.

"It's just all space driven. They're doing space utilization summaries right now. We'll see if that happens, but it is definitely on his radar to get this to a larger setting."

"That's a lot of money that we're able to allocate for students' needs. If we ever do lose those, we're in a different situation.... Because, again, that's not an ongoing funding source."

Furthermore, Reedley campus administrators acknowledged that while they had data on the needs of their students, they were facing challenges with determining how to address these needs: *"I think something like 73%... a really high percentage of our students indicated that they were experiencing food insecurities or had experienced food insecurities while they were in school. So just having data to substantiate the need. Of course, we have anecdotal information about student need. But realizing just how big the need is, I think, is a huge challenge for us. Then how do we work to meet or address those needs."*



REEDLEY CAMPUS CHALLENGES & SUPPORTS

Another area of interest in our exploration of these campuses was to understand the challenges and barriers faced by students that may impede their educational goals, as well as the supports available in their lives. At Reedley College, students reported five core challenges and barriers.

Challenges	Student Responses
Financial Challenges (10 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I have financial barriers that make my educational goals hard to achieve. An example is even if a book is \$20.00 that's \$20.00 I don't have." • "Paying cost of living." • "Not having enough income."
Mental Health (3 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Stress due to situations." • "Anxiety."
Lack of Time (4 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Working and being a full time student don't give me enough time to do homework ...I'm always busy." • "Being a full time student and having to work make things a lot harder. It feels overwhelming."
Responsibilities as a Caretaker (4 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I have 4 children to take care of then I also work while going to school." • "We are the main source of income in our house and support four little girls and his mother and sometimes their needs cost more than we have available."
Food Insecurity (1 mention)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Being at school on an empty stomach."

The campus administrators from Reedley expanded upon these challenges, mentioning several prominent issues faced by Reedley students. The administrators shared that many students are plagued by financial instability and the need to provide for their families: *“Because we are rural, we have a lot of seasonal farm laborer workers. For some reason, if someone gets hurt, they’re leaving school a lot quicker to be able to help support the family. That’s a big attrition thing for us.”*

Students also offered a glimpse into the key supports present in their lives that enhance their ability to reach their educational goals. Reedley students relied heavily on family, academic instructors, friends, and co-workers for emotional support. Furthermore, students accessed counseling services, charitable food services, and other campus services to support their goals.

Support	Student Responses
Family Support (19 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My wife and kids.” • “My family and my future husband and kids.” • “My family really helps and motivates me to keep going.”
Academic Instructors (6 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My instructors at Reedley College.” • “My teacher, she guides me to understand different ways and skills that I have achieved.” • “My instructors are my main motivational support.”
Friends & Coworkers (3 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Coworkers and friends.” • “People I love.”
Counseling Services (3 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Counselors.”
Food Services (3 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Whatever food assistance I can get.” • “Having the pantry at school is so convenient especially when you are at school all day and in need of a snack.” • “Local community food drive/food bank.”
Other Campus Services (3 mentions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I visit the math center when I am able to gain assistance.” • “DSP&S [Disabled Student Programs & Services] program.”



IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Giving the timing of our online survey with Reedley students and staff, we included a question to probe about the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting their lives. In response to the question **“How is COVID-19 (Corona Virus) affecting your food availability and access to food services?”**, Reedley students and pantry staff expressed the following core challenges, organized by themes.

Food Shortages (Primarily due to over-buying)

- “Food availability lessens with everyone panic shopping and there’s nothing left for those on a budget or who are struggling.”
- “It is affecting my family and I in the sense that everyone panicked quickly and was taking as much food as possible. Due to that, we panicked and looked to see what was left, especially since we are in Lent and are only able to eat certain things.”
- “Considering everyone is treating this like a zombie apocalypse, there is hardly food in the stores. Therefore, the pantry being closed makes it difficult to get food altogether.”
- “It has affected food because a lot of people are getting the food and they are not leaving some for other people to get some food at all.”

Limited Access to Food or Food Pantry

- *“This COVID-19 hit my family hard because both my kids are out of school and I have to limit everything to try and make it all last for this shelter in place order.”*
- *“I am unable to go to the pantry for my health concerns. I had to get quite some food to stay at home. Due to my high risk situation. But now I can’t go to the food pantry like I would every day.”*
- *“I’m unable to go to the food pantry now when I used to go every day to feed my family. I’m having to buy food but I am now considering trying other food pantries.”*

Transportation Challenges

- *“I’m a student who depends on bus transportation to get to school. I live in the neighboring town and unfortunately they had stopped transportation to the college during these times therefore I cannot access the food pantry.”*

Financial Challenges

- *“For most of us there’s no work and no work means no money so it’s hard to provide and buy stuff. Also people are panicking and over buying stuff and that leaves a lot of us without stuff.”*

Houselessness

- *“We were gonna be homeless so we have no fridge just an ice chest were using...due to Corona Virus the law said we can’t be evicted but we were gonna leave anyway...but my sister fortunately helped my mom with one month of rent but we gotta leave in May.”*