

FOOD SECURITY SURVEY OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN UTAH

2021 UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY REPORT



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The survey design was a collaborative multi-institution effort from participating schools. Committee members include Melissa Hall (Center for Hope), Yesenia Quintana (Weber State University), Alexis Bucknam (United Way of Salt Lake), Amber Hendrickson (Utah Valley University), Cassandra Backman (Weber State University), Alex Cragun (Utahns Against Hunger), Katharine French-Fuller (Weber State University), Mike Braak (Salt Lake Community College), Nelda Ault (Utah State University), Kara Bachman-Einfeldt (Utah State University), Sarah Elizabeth Levitt (University of Utah), Christina Turpin (Huntsman Cancer Institute), Elizabeth Duszak (University of Utah), and Maria Caballero (Davis Technical College). The committee met regularly and provided input and knowledge from their respective fields. The researchers are especially thankful to committee members for their time and expertise on a fast-paced and sensitive project.

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Funding for this project was made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in partnership with the American Cancer Society's (ACS) health equity work. This project proposal was developed by Gagan Kaur, former ACS employee, and Dr. Melissa Yack Hall, Senior Community Engagement Researcher at the Center for Health Outcomes and Population Equity at Huntsman Cancer Institute and the University of Utah. After receiving notice of funding, the co-chairs, along with Morgan Marietti, Health Systems Manager for ACS, narrowed down the focus to food security on Utah's postsecondary campuses. The co-chairs assembled a project team, which included Alex Cragun, Food Security Advocate for Utahns Against Hunger (UAH) and Alexis Bucknam, Senior Network Director for United Way of Salt Lake. The project team participated in multiple planning and learning sessions sponsored by ACS's health equity team, and conducted various meetings with organizations and individuals working on food security across the state.

During these meetings and through research, the project team realized there was a lack of baseline data in regards to basic needs of postsecondary students. The project team, along with several of the organizations and individuals they met with over the course of this project, conducted a statewide survey to help collect baseline data for individual campuses and the state of Utah collectively. Along with the survey, the project team also arranged for UAH to host two workshops with the Basic Needs student group that meets regularly.

The project team approached the Utah Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) group to obtain interest in and approval to conduct the survey. The SSAO group provided feedback and approval to move the project forward. The project team then approached Weber State University's Community Research Extension (CRE) leadership, including Dr. Katharine French-Fuller and Yesenia Quintana, about contracting their services to develop, conduct and analyze a comprehensive state-wide survey of the 16 Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) campuses, along with creating final reports.

The survey was developed in alignment with other resources to ensure the questions were complementary to other basic needs work being done across Utah and included questions and information from the USDA Household Food Security Survey and the PRAPARE assessment. The survey was developed and reviewed by the CRE and a task force of representatives from some of the campuses. It was piloted with students from some of the campuses.

The survey was conducted over six weeks in the fall semester of 2021, during the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. This final report was shared with the campuses, project team members and USHE in February 2022. Each campus also received an individual campus or collective Technical College report as well.

INTRODUCTION TO FOOD INSECURITY

Nationally, food insecurity amongst higher education students has been increasingly noted as a problem, now exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other national studies around higher education students and food insecurity have demonstrated that college students are at high risk for being food insecure (Goldrick-Rab, et. al., 2019). Food security is defined by the USDA as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Food insecurity is a result of financial resource constraint, meaning that a household cannot afford food (Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, 2000). Being food insecure might not always mean going hungry, but it does mean that an individual is forced to change what they eat—often to less nutritious, cheaper food. Despite its importance, data regarding food security and higher education students in Utah is almost non-existent. Utah institutions have not taken part in other national surveys of food security, and each institution collects different data regarding food security issues (Goldrick-Rab, et. al.).

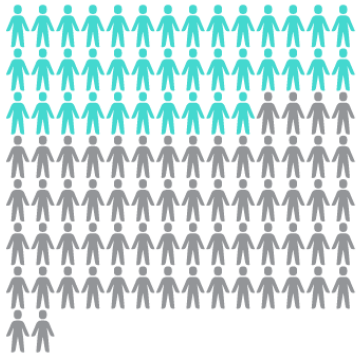
Having a better understanding of food security issues of higher education students is important for a variety of reasons. First, it means that university and college officials can better help get students to graduation and promote student success. Food insecurity can affect students’ academic performance and increase the likelihood a student may drop out or take longer to complete their degree (Wolfson, et. al., 2021; Leung, et. al 2021; Breuning, et. al. 2020). It can hinder students from engaging in High Impact Practices (like internships) as they are occupied with taking care of their basic needs, such as housing (Jesch, et. al, 2021). Often times food insecurity issues impact students who already have lower retention rates (first-generation, low-income, ethnic minority, and gender nonconforming) (Bruening, et. al.; Phillips and McDaniel 2018; Payne-Sturges, et. al. 2018). As more parenting students enroll in higher education, issues of food insecurity also affect more children and other dependents (GAO report).

Second, beyond higher education, a strong understanding of food security issues among higher education populations provides statewide data on the food security challenges in a variety of demographic groups, in both rural and urban settings. These data allow government and organizations to align the necessary interventions to help students.

And third, this understanding provides important evidence that those struggling with food are also struggling with other symptoms of poverty and social determinants of health like transportation, housing, health care, and interpersonal violence (Crutchfield et. al, 2020). Those experiencing food insecurity also experienced poorer mental and physical health, including higher rates of hypertension, obesity, depression, diabetes, and anxiety (Hammer, DeWalt, and Berkowitz 2021; Seligman, Laraia, and Kushel 2010; Leung, et. al; Gunderson and Ziliak 2019; Meza, et.al 2019). In order to better meet the needs of students and help promote student success, campuses need to have a better understanding of which students are facing food insecurity, why, and how educational institutions can work with other organizations to help address the intersecting social determinants of health that aggravate food security issues.

Food Insecurity at Utah State University

Key Findings

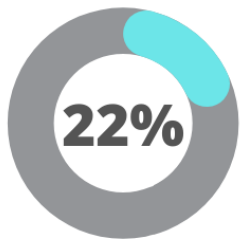


37.5%

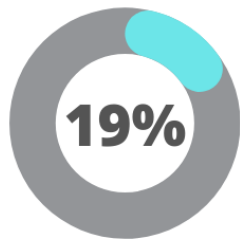
of Utah State University students were food insecure within the past year. Twenty percent of Utah State University students experienced very low food security.



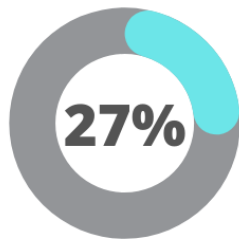
Food insecure students struggle with other basic needs



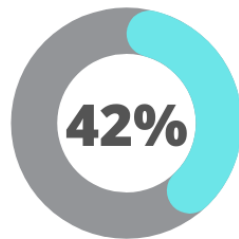
Rent/Mortgage



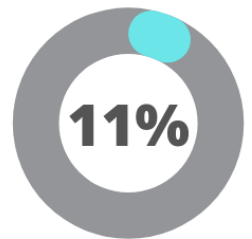
Utilities



Clothing



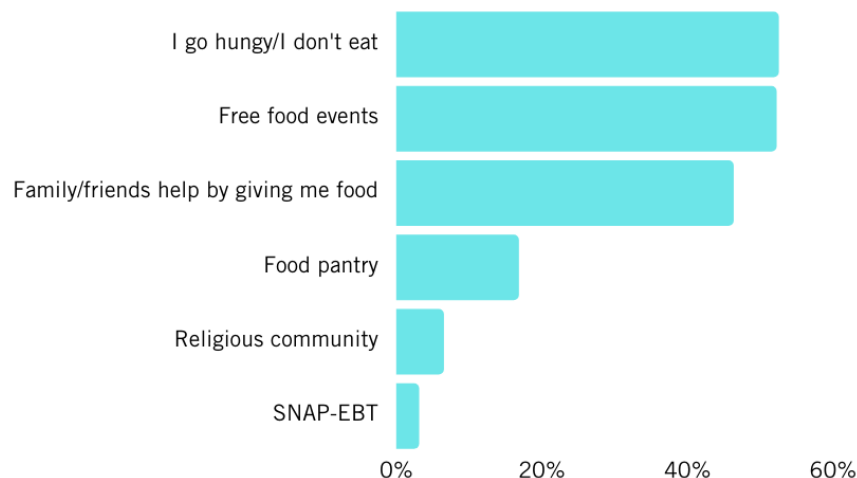
Medicine/Health Care



Phone

Most food insecure students skip meals when hungry.

How do you cope with not having enough or the right foods to eat?



55.9%

of USU students who are 'very much' stressed are food insecure.



66.7%

of USU students who reported 'poor' health are food insecure.

EXTENT AND SEVERITY OF FOOD INSECURITY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture measures food security along a four-point scale ranging from high food security to very low food security. The *Guide to Food Security* describes the different levels as follows:

Food Secure	
High food security	No reported indications of food access problems or limitations.
Marginal food security	One or two reported indications – typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
Food Insecure	
Low food security	Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
Very low food security	Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

There were 896 Utah State University students who participated in the survey. At Utah State University, 37.5% of students reported experiencing food insecurity within the past year. Twenty percent of Utah State University students experienced very low food security. Utah State University students have experienced slightly lower rates of food insecurity compared to the rest of Utah students.

Table 1. Food Security Level of Respondents

Food Security	Utah State University	State of Utah
High Food Security	37.8%	40.0%
Marginal Food Security	24.7%	21.2%
Low Food Security	17.3%	17.7%
Very Low Food Security	20.2%	21.1%

USDA Household Survey Question Breakdown

All participants began the survey by answering the questions in the first stage of the USDA Household Food Security Module.

Table 2. USDA Household Food Security Module, Household Stage One

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	DK/ refuse
I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more.	5.8%	31.7%	62.3%	0.2%
The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.	4.0%	22.2%	73.2%	0.6%
I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	15.5%	39.3%	44.2%	1.0%

Respondents who answered 'often true' or 'sometimes true' to any question in household stage one continued to adult stage two. There were 552 respondents who received the questions in adult stage two.

Table 3. USDA Household Food Security Module, Adult Stage Two

In the past 12 months, did (were) you ever...?	Yes	No	DK/refuse
Cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food	48.9%	45.7%	5.4%
Eat less than you let you should because there wasn't enough money for food	50.7%	46.4%	2.9%
Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food	36.6%	60.5%	2.9%
Lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food	17.2%	69.0%	13.8%

Respondents who answered 'yes' to any of the questions in adult stage two continued to adult stage three. There were 347 respondents in adult stage three.

Table 4. USDA Household Food Security Module, Adult Stage Three

In the past 12 months, did you ever...?	Yes	No	DK/refuse	
Not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food	11.8%	85.6%	2.6%	
	Almost every month	Some months but not every month	In 1 or 2 months only	DK/Refuse
How often did this happen?	22.0%	43.9%	29.3%	4.9%

Respondents with children under 18 years old received additional questions around food insecurity. There were 108 respondents with children.

Table 5. USDA Household Food Security Module Child Stage One

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	DK/ refuse
I relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed my children because I was running out of money to buy food.	5.6%	18.5%	75.9%	0.0%
I couldn't feed my children a balanced meal because I couldn't afford that.	3.7%	14.8%	81.5%	0.0%
My children were not eating enough because I just couldn't afford enough food.	0.9%	4.6%	94.4%	0.0%

Respondents with children who answered 'often true' or 'sometimes true' to any question continued onto child stage two. Thirty-two respondents received the questions in child stage two.

Table 6. USDA Household Food Security Module Child Stage Two

In the past 12 months...	Yes	No	DK/refuse
Did you ever cut the size of your child(ren)'s meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	9.4%	90.6%	0.0%
Were the child(ren) ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?	12.5%	84.4%	3.1%
Did any of the child(ren) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Did you ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	6.3%	93.8%	0.0%

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO FOOD INSECURITY AND ITS IMPACT

Housing

Table 7. Current housing situation

What is your housing situation today?	n	%
I have housing	866	96.8%
I DO NOT have housing (staying with others, in a hotel, in a shelter, living outside on the street, in a car, or in a park)	22	2.5%
Prefer not to answer	7	0.8%

- Of the students who do have housing, **36.1%** are food insecure. While there are few students who lack housing, **81.8%** of these are food insecure.

Table 8. Worried about losing housing

Are you worried about losing your housing?	n	%
Yes	67	7.9%
No	767	91.0%
Prefer not to answer	9	1.1%

- Of the students who have housing but are worried about losing their housing, **70.1%** are food insecure. Of students who are not worried about losing their housing, **33.0%** are food insecure.

Table 9. Living arrangements during the academic year

Where do you live during the academic year (August through May)?	n	%
On-campus	198	23.5%
Off-campus	645	76.5%

- Of students who live off-campus, **37.2%** are food insecure. Of students who live on-campus, **34.3%** are on-campus.

Table 10. Living situation during the academic year

Whom do you live with during the academic year (August through May)?	n	%
Roommates (non-family members)	456	54.1%
My family of origin (father, mother, aunt, uncle, siblings, grandparents, foster parents, etc.)	124	14.7%
My child(ren)	20	2.4%
My partner (no children)	181	21.5%
My partner and child(ren)	89	10.6%
By myself	43	5.1%

- This question was a multiple selection question.
- Food insecurity is more prevalent among students who live with roommates (**41.7%**), who live with children (**60.0%**), and those who live alone (**39.5%**).
- Among those who live with their family of origin, **34.7%** are food insecure, while **24.7%** of those who live with their partner and children are food insecure.
- Among students who live with their partner and no children, **32.0%** are food insecure.

Table 11. Meal plans

Do you have a meal plan through the university/college?	n	%
Yes	121	14.0%
No	717	83.0%
Prefer not to answer	2	0.2%
Not applicable	24	2.8%

- Of students who have a meal plan, 36.4% are food insecure. Of students who do not have a meal plan, 38.4% are food insecure.

Table 12. Primary caregiver

Are you the primary caregiver for any of the following persons?	n	%
Child/ren	103	11.9%
Parents/grandparents	9	1.0%
Siblings	10	1.2%
Other	11	1.3%
None	749	86.3%

- This question was a multiple selection question.
- Food insecurity is very high among students who are primary caregivers for their siblings (**50.0%**).
- Of students who are primary caregivers of their own children, **29.1%** are food insecure.
- Of students who are primary caregivers of their parents and/or grandparents, **33.3%** are food insecure.
- Of students who are not primary caregivers, **38.5%** are food insecure.

Other Basic Needs

Table 13. Inability to afford basic needs

Have you or any family members you live with been unable to get or pay for any of the following when it was really needed?	Overall	Food secure	Food insecure
Food	14.6%	3.8%	27.8%
Rent/Mortgage	15.1%	9.7%	21.7%
Utilities (electric, gas, internet, water, or sewer, trash, etc.)	10.6%	3.5%	19.2%
Phone	6.3%	2.3%	11.0%
Medicine or health care (dental, mental health, vision, or physical health)	29.1%	18.8%	41.6%
Childcare	2.7%	2.6%	2.8%
Clothing	15.0%	5.3%	26.7%
Other	3.4%	2.6%	4.3%
Prefer not to answer	30.4%	32.8%	27.4%
None	21.5%	36.1%	3.9%

- Among those who are food insecure, **41.6%** could not afford medicine or healthcare when it was really needed.
- Under the ‘other’ category, most listed car repairs, car payments, and gas as ‘unable to get when really needed.’

Health

Table 14. Medical home

Do you have a designated primary care provider or some place you usually go when you need medical advice or care?	n	%
Yes	575	66.6%
No	267	30.9%
Prefer not to answer	21	2.4%

- Of students without a medical home, **42.7%** are food insecure. Of students with a medical home, **35.1%** are food insecure.

Table 15. Food affordability with medical conditions

Do you have any medical conditions that make it difficult for you to afford the foods you can eat?	n	%
Yes	70	8.1%
No	789	91.3%
Prefer not to answer	5	0.6%

- Students with medical conditions that can make it difficult to afford acceptable foods are much more likely to be food insecure (**70.0%**) compared to students who do not have a medical condition (**34.6%**).

Table 16. Transportation

Has lack of transportation kept you from medical appointments, meetings, work, or from getting things needed for daily living?	n	%
Yes	81	9.4%
No	776	89.8%
Prefer not to answer	7	0.8%

- Students who lack reliable transportation are more likely to be food insecure (**59.3%**) compared to students with reliable transportation (**35.4%**).

Table 17. General health status

Would you say that in general your health is ...?	n	%
Excellent	94	10.5%
Very Good	472	52.7%
Fair	302	33.7%
Poor	27	3.0%

- Food insecurity is more prevalent among students who report 'fair' (**50.3%**) or 'poor' (**66.7%**) health compared to those who report 'excellent' (**17.0%**) or 'very good' (**31.6%**) health.

Social and Emotional Health

Table 18. Social interactions

How often do you see or talk to people that you care about and feel close to?	n	%
Less than once a week	54	6.3%
1-2 times a week	187	21.6%
3-5 times a week	231	26.7%
5 or more times a week	392	45.4%

- Students who see or talk to people that they care more than 5 times a week, **32.5%** are food insecure.
- Among students who see or talk to people that they care about 3-5 times a week, **32.4%** are food insecure.
- Among students who see or talk to people that they care about 1-2 times per week, **50.3%** are food insecure.
- Among students who see or talk to people that they care about less than once a week, **53.7%** are food insecure.

Table 19. Physically and emotionally safe

Do you feel physically and emotionally safe where you currently live?	n	%
Yes	765	88.5%
No	21	2.4%
Unsure	71	8.2%
Prefer not to answer	7	0.8%

- Among students who are not safe at home, **57.1%** are food insecure. Among students who are unsure of their safety, **63.4%** are food insecure. Among students who are safe at home, **34.6%** are food insecure.

Table 20. Fear of partner

In the past year, have you been afraid of your partner or ex-partner?	n	%
Yes	43	5.0%
No	794	92.0%
Unsure	14	1.6%
Prefer not to answer	12	1.4%

- Students who fear their partner or ex-partner are more likely to be food insecure (**67.4%**) compared to students who do not fear their partners (**35.5%**).

Table 21. Stress levels

How stressed are you?	n	%
Not at all	16	1.9%
A little bit	138	16.0%
Somewhat	229	26.5%
Quite a bit	284	32.9%
Very much	195	22.6%

- Among students who are ‘very much’ stressed, **55.9%** are food insecure compared to ‘quite a bit’ (**44.0%**), ‘somewhat’ (**25.8%**), ‘a little bit’ (**18.1%**), and ‘not at all’ (**31.3%**).

Employment, Income, and Financial Aid

Table 22. Current work situation

What is your current work situation?	n	%
Unemployed but seeking work	94	10.9%
Unemployed and not seeking work (student or caregiver)	173	20.0%
Temporary work (working for 1 year or less)	40	4.6%
Part-time (less than 40 hours per week)	478	55.4%
Full-time (40+ hours per week)	122	14.1%
Prefer not to answer	10	1.2%

- This is a multiple selection question.
- Among students who work full-time, **34.4%** are food insecure, compared to the **40.4%** food insecure students who work part-time.
- Among students who are unemployed and not looking for work, **26.6%** are food insecure.
- Among students who are unemployed but looking for work, **53.2%** are food insecure.

Table 23. Work location

Where do you work?	n	%
On-campus employment	174	29.2%
Off-campus employment	356	59.7%
Both	62	10.4%
Prefer not to answer	4	0.7%

- Of students who work on-campus, **35.1%** are food insecure. Among students who work off-campus, **39.6%** are food insecure.

Table 24. Tax dependent

In the past year, did any one claim you as a dependent for tax purposes?	n	%
Yes	267	31.6%
No	507	60.0%
DK/prefer not to answer	71	8.4%

- Students who are not dependents are as likely to be food insecure (**37.9%**) compared to students who are dependents (**37.5%**).

Table 25. Financial aid

Do you receive financial aid?	n	%
Yes	684	80.9%
No	151	17.9%
Prefer not to answer	10	1.2%

- Of students who received financial aid are more likely to be food insecure (**37.9%**) compared to students who did not receive financial aid (**35.1%**).

Table 26. Household income

During the past year, what was the total combined income for you and the family members you live with?	n	%
Less than \$10,000/year	149	17.7%
\$10,000-\$19,999/year	139	16.5%
\$20,000-\$29,999/year	73	8.7%
\$30,000-\$39,999/year	59	7.0%
\$40,000-\$49,999/year	47	5.6%
\$50,000-\$59,999/year	43	5.1%
\$60,000-\$69,999/year	25	3.0%
\$70,000+/year	183	21.7%
Prefer not to answer	125	14.8%

- Not surprisingly, students with lower incomes are more likely to be food insecure.
- Among students who had an income lower than \$10,000 a year, **58.4%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$10,000 and \$19,999, **46.0%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$20,000 and \$29,999, **34.2%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$30,000 and \$39,999, **45.8%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$40,000 and \$49,999, **40.4%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$50,000 and \$59,999, **39.5%** were food insecure.
- Among students who had an income between \$60,000 and \$69,999, **20.0%** were food insecure.
- Students who have a total income of \$70k+ a year have the lowest rate of food insecurity, **16.4%**.

Academics

Table 27. Academic performance

Has lack of food affected your academic performance?	n	%
Not at all	399	46.2%
A little bit	177	20.5%
Somewhat	95	11.0%
Quite a bit	11	1.3%
Very much	5	0.6%
Prefer not to answer	3	0.3%
Not applicable	174	20.1%

- Of students who responded that lack of food has impacted their academics ‘very much,’ **80.0%** are food insecure.
- Of students who responded that lack of food has impacted their academics ‘quite a bit,’ **81.8%** are food insecure.
- Of students who responded that lack of food has impacted their academics ‘somewhat,’ **78.9%** are food insecure.
- Of students who responded that lack of food has impacted their academics ‘a little bit,’ **62.7%** are food insecure.
- Of students who responded that lack of food has impacted their academics ‘not at all,’ **28.3%** are food insecure.

Table 28. GPA

What is your GPA?	Overall	Food secure	Food insecure
Mean	3.60	3.65	3.52
Standard Deviation	0.47	0.46	0.46

- Students who are food insecure have lower GPAs compared to food secure students.

Coping Mechanisms

Table 29. Coping with food insecurity

How do you cope with not having enough or the right foods to eat?	Overall	Food secure	Food insecure
Food pantry	11.1%	7.6%	16.8%
Family/friends help by giving me food	30.8%	21.5%	46.3%
SNAP-EBT benefits	2.1%	1.5%	3.1%
WIC benefits	1.5%	2.1%	0.6%
Assistance from my religious community	4.2%	2.8%	6.5%
I attend free food events	34.6%	24.1%	52.2%
I go hungry/I don't eat	26.7%	11.2%	52.5%
Other	2.6%	0.9%	5.3%
Not applicable	42.4%	62.1%	9.6%

- **Nearly half** of food insecure students rely on family and friends for food, events with free food, and/or don't eat when hungry.

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Utah State University submitted four questions for their student body to consider.

Table 30. USU Campus

Please select which USU campus you attend:	n	%
Logan Campus	728	86.1%
Blanding campus	8	0.9%
Other	110	13.0%

Table 31. Awareness about the SNAC Pantry

Did you know what SNAC was?	Logan Campus Students	Blanding Campus Students
Yes, and I have used it in the last 12 months	12.6%	0.0%
Yes, I used it more than 12 months ago	5.7%	0.0%
Yes, but I have never used it	43.7%	25.0%
No, I did not know what SNAC was	38.0%	75.0%

Note: This question was only asked of Logan Campus students.

Table 31.1 Barriers to using SNAC Pantry

Are there any barriers that prevent you from using SNAC? Check all that apply:	Logan Campus	Blanding Campus
I don't know how to use SNAC	41.6%	50.0%
One-hour fulfillment time is inconvenient	6.5%	0.0%
Culturally appropriate food is not available	0.1%	0.0%
Special dietary restrictions due to medical reasons and the pantry does not carry the food I need	1.1%	0.0%
I do not like the food available in the pantry	2.4%	0.0%
Location is inconvenient	5.6%	25.0%
Pantry opens too late	2.0%	0.0%
Pantry closes too early	5.5%	0.0%
I am embarrassed to use the pantry	19.3%	0.0%
It is difficult to carry the food back home	7.3%	0.0%
SNAC staff are unfriendly	0.3%	0.0%
None	42.5%	25.0%