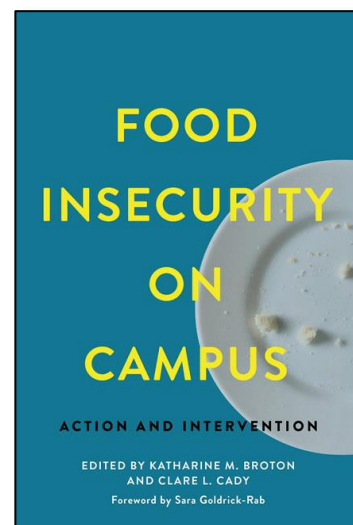
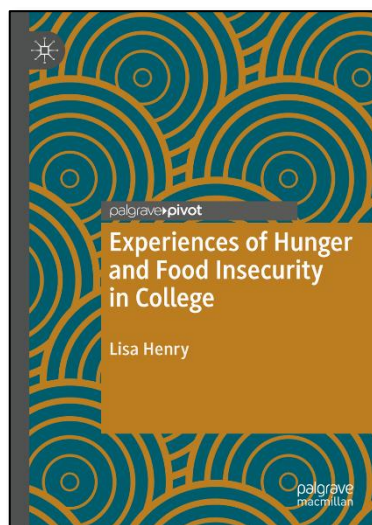


Food insecurity on the college campus

Reviews by Mark B. Lapping *
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Reviews of:

Experiences of Hunger and Food Insecurity in College, by Lisa Henry. (2020). Palgrave Pivot. Available as hardcover and ebook; 148 pages. Publisher's website: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31818-5>



Food Insecurity on Campus: Action and Intervention, edited by Katherine M. Broton & Clare L. Cady. (2020). Johns Hopkins University Press. Available as paperback and ebook; 312 pages. Publisher's website: <https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/food-insecurity-campus>

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It is often said that one's college years are “the best years of your life.” For a growing number of students facing food insecurity, these years may be anything but. These two very different books provide useful counterpoints on campus food insecurity, a growing phenomenon only made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Henry's volume uses an ethnographic approach of interviewing over 90

students who use the food pantry at her university, the University of North Texas, Denton. Broton and Cady focus on essays and case studies of what a number of institutions are doing to address the issue of campus food insecurity. Together they provide both a balanced treatment of the subject and some remarkably interesting insights and strategies that other college communities can utilize.

Estimates vary, but approximately a third of all students at four-year institutions are food insecure, while the percentage is even higher at community colleges. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a gulf between white students and students of color, with the latter evidencing substantially higher rates of insecurity. As Broton and Cady note, students “of color, LGBTQ+ students, former foster youth, first-generation college students, those from low-

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Lapping served the University of Southern Maine twice as its Provost/VPAA (1994–2000 and 2006–2009) and as executive director of the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, where he taught courses in community planning and development, food policy and planning, and rural development. He founded the Maine Food Strategy and is the author, co-author, or editor of nine books.

income families, and those with prior experiences of food insecurity are more likely to report food insecurity challenges during college than their more advantaged peers” (p. 18). As a group these students tend to be tenacious in pursuit of their educations, pursue employment while going to school—though many of the jobs that sustained them have vanished during the pandemic—to make ends meet, and often will sacrifice food for other necessities, like housing. To meet their hunger needs all too many substitute poor-quality fast foods for healthy eating to satiate their hunger. They all appear to juggle competing life demands, and many fail to avail themselves of campus food pantries and other institutional supports out of a sense of shame. It is also not uncommon for food-insecure college students to have been homeless at some point in their lives, faced eviction, and struggled with ever-increasing school costs.

With the support and encouragement of the university’s student affairs division, funding from the university, and participation of both undergraduate and graduate students, Henry conducted over 90 interviews with students who used the University of North Texas food pantry. What comes across in her assessments is the grit and determination of these students to succeed in their studies. Facing numerous obstacles, including feelings of shame, marginality, and both mental and physical stresses, the drive of these students is nothing short of amazing. The willingness on the part of

the university to openly and broadly discuss and take action on student food insecurity went a long way toward destigmatizing and addressing some of these problems. Although the context and demographics of students at the University of North Texas no doubt differs from those at other institutions, her findings suggest a universality of experience and is consistent, too, with much of the literature that exists. We learn, too, just how effective the university’s efforts have been to take on this problem.

I know of no other book as comprehensive as the Broton and Cady volume. Many of the essays, some of which discuss in detail the most effective strategies to address campus food insecurity, are penned by national leaders in the field. The chapter on the Milwaukee Area Technical College system and its response constitutes one of the more intriguing and effective approaches. If one could sum up what makes for an effective approach, it seems that research on the local situation coupled with an institutional leadership that stimulates open discussion of the problem, harnessing student activism together with institutional tangibles such as program space, the willingness to marshal resources from on- and off-campus entities—including federal programs like SNAP, and a commitment to destigmatize those who are food insecure, are essential. If one seeks any one volume on this growing problem, *Food Insecurity on Campus* should likely be it. 