Final Project Proposal
The Food Fighters
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PROBLEM

Though it may not seem like food insecurity is particularly prevalent in the collegiate world, it has become a steadily growing problem. There is already a significant amount of food insecurity among college students, and Georgia Tech is no exception. Food insecurity is defined by four aspects, and each of them relate to the college experience. The first aspect is availability, which deals with the total amount of existing food resources. Access, or the ability for a food insecure person to physically get to available food sources, is also an issue. There is the aspect of utility which deals with the ability of the food insecure person to adequately use the obtained food. Lastly, stability deals with the long term consistency of the aforementioned aspects. This collegiate population is vital to the long-term reduction of food insecurity in Metro Atlanta because college is the primary gateway through which food insecure people can escape the cycle of poverty. Students require very specific set of needs to be met during this critical point in their lives, and food often falls behind on a list of expenses. On top of the stress of academic performance, a food insecure college student might also need to think about transportation, supporting a family, and student loans. As a result, reducing difficulties related to food can potentially create a large improvement on other factors of living a normal, healthy life. Any food insecurity affects the healthy functioning of a student, but because there is little information describing what food insecurity looks like for a college student, it is difficult to develop an appropriate solution.

SIGNIFICANCE

Of Feeding America’s 46.5 million adult clients, 30.5% report making tradeoffs between education and food, and 10% of Feeding America’s clients are students (Resnikoff 2014). This implies that roughly 66% of those making a decision to continue their education chose to have food over a degree. While completely understandable, it is unacceptable that there are so many barriers to entering and staying in college. In one of the more extreme cases, 59% of students at a mid-size university in Oregon were food insecure at some point during the previous year (Lopez-Cevallos 2014). This demonstrates how people chose to get a college degree knowing they cannot pay for it. Another study shows that 39.2% of the City University of New York’s quarter of a million undergraduates had experienced food insecurity at some time in the past year (Pappano 2011). This many food insecure people creates a long-term weight on society. To solve the problem early means to reduce the amount of food aid needed over the course of a lifetime. College has become more of a necessity because only 4% of those with bachelor’s degrees were unemployed during the same year that national unemployment was at 8% (Bureau 2015). There are more people than ever who are going to college without having a legitimate plan to pay off student debt. It is extremely difficult to have a livable income on a high school diploma, especially when providing for a family. A student living off his parents said, “It’s pretty apparent that with the degree I have right now, there are not too many jobs” (Pappano 2011). Society
would benefit because it would allow a larger middle class to develop, and there would be less people living on government-funded programs. It is easy to see the connection between food insecurity and education based on the statistics above, but there is a lack of information in Metro-Atlanta. There are programs currently aiding food insecure students at Georgia Tech, but there is not a significant amount of information defining who is food insecure and why.

**STAKEHOLDERS**

The stakeholders within this problem space begin with the student body itself. Food insecure students as well as their peers will be invested in finding a way to alleviate food insecurity at Tech for reasons regarding both personal and community goals. Non-food insecure students would benefit from this project because the awareness inherently created alongside the effort would instill pride and volunteerism. Food insecure students are the most directly impacted by this problem space, and constitute the population for whom our solution would seek to provide services. The families of these students would also be invested as alleviating the food insecurity of their dependents would also lift a financial and emotional burden from them. (College 2013). Organizations that already exist at Tech such as Campus Kitchen and Klemis Kitchen would also be invested in an initiative that seeks to better understand the problem at hand. Klemis Kitchen does not currently have a means of identifying the demographics and magnitude of its client base, and would benefit from an effort to secure this information in order to provide a more stable source of food assistance to food insecure students (D. Hartley, personal communication, February 17, 2015).

Georgia Tech as a university would be a stakeholder within this problem space. The institution is committed to providing a safe, healthy environment for students to thrive, and would therefore welcome an initiative designed to even the playing field in terms of food insecurity. Georgia Tech currently has very strict standards with food preparation that makes it difficult for food waste from the university to be repurposed (G. Grimes, personal communication, February 5, 2015). This is an important fact that will need to be addressed in our project in the long term when it comes to finding stable sources of repurposed food for a solution. Georgia Tech is also very invested in tailoring its images to the projects going on within campus, and the institution would view this project would be good for developing the image of Georgia Tech as a place for innovation and service (Georgia 2015). The ACFB is a stakeholder because their mission is to reduce the incidence of food insecurity, and they have experience gathering information from its clients. Feeding America says that one in ten of their clients are students, and as ACFB is a component of Feeding America, they are very aware of the resources it takes to serve this population. ACFB thus acts as a valuable resource for knowledge in the field of distributing food, and would be interested in partnering with an initiative that would further their mission (Resnikoff 2014).

**CONTEXT**


One reason responsible for the increasing amount of food insecure college students is the fact that it’s become more common to go to college and earn a bachelor degree. Administrators report seeing rising numbers of hungry students especially at schools that enroll many students from low-income families or are the first generation to attend college (Bahrampour 2014). At the same time, tuition, rent and utilities expenses are rising. In other words, students are more likely to cut expenses on food since food seems to be the most flexible component compared with other costs. Although there is a lack of comprehensive nationwide surveys of student food insecurity, experts claim that it is rising and may be much higher than the national average for all age groups (Bahrampour 2014). The stress of a student knowing he or she might go hungry is almost as terrible as physical suffering from a lack of adequate nutrition. A fifth year student, Vaughn at George Mason University (GMU) complains that the question, “How am I going to make some money so I can go eat?” hits him all the time when he is supposed to study (Bahrampour 2014). Similarly, an 18-year-old student with three part-time jobs confided anonymously on a Facebook page called George Mason University (GMU) Confessions that “I send my parents 50 dollars every month just so that they can manage to buy groceries, I have a 5 meal per week plan and I’m like REALLY REALLY hungry all the time” (Bahrampour 2014). Most students suffering from hunger would agree that they are weakened not only by the hunger itself but also the feeling of loneliness and helplessness associated with hunger. On anonymous platforms like the one mentioned above, students have the opportunity to voice their pain without shame. But many times, students are not able to admit they are hungry. In an effort to alleviate the shame, organizations on campus dealing with food insecurity are committed to preserving the anonymity of their clients. This has understandably led to a lesser quantity of data being collected about those clients. There is little being done to learn about the problem space while maintaining the students’ anonymity.

Existing Solutions

Klemis Kitchen is the main on-campus organization that helps students with dietary needs and financial concerns as a food pantry. Students can get access to the kitchen after being approved by the Dean of Students. The supply of food is generated from the Campus Kitchen at Georgia Tech. The main issue we see as a group within Klemis Kitchen is that in order to preserve confidentiality, neither the number of students served nor the usage of food is traceable. This limited understanding of its clients prevents the kitchen services from improving its efforts. On Klemis Kitchen’s website, it states that “if the demand for Klemis Kitchen exceeds the supply from Campus Kitchen then further considerations will be made and more partnerships will be developed” (About 2015). However, if people operating the Kitchen don’t know the number of students going there, they don’t know if they need to consider increasing supply.

Carlisa, Inc is a non profit food bank founded by Lisa Thomas-McMillan who evidenced college students were going hungry when she opened a restaurant at the student center of a local
community college in Brewton, AL in 2002 (Thomas 2015). She started to contribute to the community by preparing hot meals for elderly people. However, what became her biggest concern was feeding college students. She was shocked by the fact that food insecurity among college students is a national trend. After getting permission from the college, this organization fed about 100 students per day, four days a week for free (Thomas 2015). McMillan said she would consider opening a Carlisa Inc. in Atlanta if she could get local Atlanta corporations to donate (Joiner 2014). However, the feedback she got from several students at Georgia State University discouraged her. Students said that lots of college students have an option of getting a meal plan and there must be more people who are less fortunate than college students in need of aid (Joiner 2014). This implies that the stereotype “college students are not food insecure” has penetrated even college student populations themselves. The lack of information confirming the severity of food insecurity among Atlanta colleges only contributes to the problem of awareness.

**WHY IS IT STILL A PROBLEM?**

An assortment of factors lead to the problem of food insecurity among college students. Firstly, there is a lack of awareness of the problem among other college students. As stated above, Carlisa Inc. faced negative feedback from Georgia State students because students interviewed believed that there was not a need for a food bank (Joiner 2014). Hungry students are not reaching out to on-campus organizations because of a culture of ignorance and lack of outreach. Additionally, while the anonymity of campus services such as Klemis Kitchen serve an important function in keeping students from facing the negative social stigma of being hungry, it also prevents the collection of data on the students themselves. This lack of data prevents further analysis into why these specific students are hungry and what can be done to change the root causes.

With respect to the importance of this issue, it has long been known that education is a stepping stone to leaving the cycle of food insecurity. The recent societal push for more students to attend college has placed more pressure onto poor students to attend universities (Resnikoff 2014). Because the cost of a meal plan makes up a significant portion of the cost of college, alleviating this cost would alleviate pressures placed on poorer students, and thus allow for them to more easily get through college and out of the cycle of food insecurity.

**GOAL**

Our primary goal is to understand the population of food insecure students at Georgia Tech both quantitatively and qualitatively. We want to address the food insecurity of students at Georgia Tech by increasing the use of existing programs and gathering more information within our specific problem space to better understand its characteristics while simultaneously increasing awareness of the issue of food insecurity on college campuses. By addressing the specific components of food insecurity at tech, we hope to make a long term impact on the stability of students once they graduate, allowing them to no longer make a trade off between
education and food. A better understanding of the problem space will help future organization target specific areas of need so that a student can get the most from their education, putting them in a position where they are able to consistently provide themselves with food. We aim to increase the use of Klemis Kitchen and collect data on students who are serviced by it. Then we aim to develop a more thorough picture of the problem space, so we could be able to tailor a more concise solution to fit Georgia Tech students.

OBJECTIVES

Our first objective is to expand the population served by Klemis Kitchen. Currently, there are only a couple dozen students who are using the kitchen, and that isn’t nearly enough to develop an accurate picture of the population. According to Dean Stein, the students being served by the kitchen come from a wide variety of demographics, making it hard to make correlations between certain populations and food insecurity. We intend to increase the use of the kitchen by making the kitchen’s resources more common knowledge among students and staff. There are resources on campus, such as showers, that are available to the homeless, so we intend to put up fliers around those resources to reach those people who are already in need. The fliers would include basic information about what it means to be food insecure and how to get help. It would likely refer a student to the Dean of Students, the counselling center, Stamps, or any other health center. We also recognize that the general population has a difficult time identifying themselves or others in need. We would work with existing health organizations on campus to provide helpful information on the behavior and mood a food insecure person might display. Students have expressed concern for their friends who seem to be struggling to obtain an adequate amount of food because the food insecure person is probably too ashamed to admit their need for help. Faculty and staff also have the ability to refer students to the various resources on campus given reasonable concern, but they may not know who to contact or how. We want to make it easier for concerned faculty and friends to quickly identify the problem and guide the student toward the right resources. A successful outcome would consist of a population Klemis Kitchen could realistically use a basis for understanding a unifying problem. It is nearly impossible to say exactly when enough is enough because we may never know the actual number of food insecure students at Tech, but the more people using the resources available the better. We could ask the faculty and staff if they are confident identifying and referring a food insecure student. This would help us identify problems with the referral process. It will be hard to measure the true impact of our outreach. However, Dean Stein did make it clear to us that we will have access to anecdotal evidence from students who use Klemis Kitchen, which will help us paint a clearer picture of the outcomes of our project.

After obtaining a statistically relevant population of students using Klemis Kitchen our second objective is to determine a better assessment of their needs. Data is crucial to understanding our problem statement and determining the right solution that needs to be implemented. In our initial research, we have realized, after talking to Dr. Dana Hartley, the Homeless Student Liaison, that the data that Klemis Kitchen currently possesses on who they are
serving or how many are using the facility is not enough to determine causation. In order to determine the characteristics of food insecurity at Georgia Tech, we will need to first determine the best avenue through which we can conduct this research and collect this data. This could involve working with the Georgia Tech Research Institute and Klemis Kitchen to find a way that we can do a survey of the kinds of students that are using the food pantry and what their needs are. Then we would begin to hypothesize correlations between the problem and who it affects. We are not able to directly access the data available to Dean Stein, so we would need to propose reasonable correlations to him. The proposal would also include the significance of the correlation and what it would imply in terms of reducing food insecurity. He would then crunch the numbers and either approve or deny our assumptions. If our assumptions proved accurate, we would notify Dr. Dana Hartley to begin working on a way to address the need. The success of this objective would consist of a much more thorough understanding of the cause and effect of food insecurity. This may also include information about their financial status or what kind of student they are (i.e., graduate, etc). Our primary, anticipated obstacle with this outcome is the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the policies currently in place with Klemis Kitchen, we foresee having some difficulty overcoming those obstacles in our efforts to conduct research into that problem space, but we should be able to pick a specific correlation between a certain demographic and their trouble to obtain food on a regular basis.

RESEARCH TEAM

The Food Fighters team consists of six individuals. Six student roles that are present in our team are secretary, communications, researcher, analyzer, manager/internal communications, and innovators. The secretary documents both the progress of team research as well as the thinking process that occurs during meetings. This role also involves taking on the task of fleshing out ideas into communicable writing. The job of community outreach and scheduling of interviews falls to the team member in charge of communications. This function is important in order to help the team formulate an accurate picture of the problem space as viewed by experts in the field. The researcher finds relevant and documented information that helps to support or modify any hypotheses we may come up with about food insecurity in Atlanta, such as when we discovered that food insecurity is present at Georgia Tech due to research we had done about different populations within the problem space. The analyzer, a role often overlapping with that of researcher, creates meaningful connections between the research and interview data that we bring in as a team. The manager controls the length and schedules the timings of meetings, while helping to keep us on track as we narrow our focus from the wide problem of food insecurity to a specific population. This person makes sure we address all assignments in a complete manner, and provides perspective on the big picture of our problem space. It is important to note that all of the members of our team are filling any one of these roles at one time.
The mentors and partnerships we have formed over the past few months have been with a wide variety of actors within the problem space. Our contact with the Atlanta Community Food Bank, Chris Ferguson, is the Education and Outreach Coordinator for the organization. Interviews with Ferguson have yielded useful information about how food banks function in a large city. He is very knowledgeable about food insecurity in Metro Atlanta and the mechanics of food distribution systems. Our main partner, Dr. Dana Hartley, has facilitated a relationship between our project and Klemis Kitchen. Klemis Kitchen has just begun providing its services for food insecure students, and Dr. Hartley has been able to give us valuable insight into how starting up her initiative involved strategic connections between organizations like Georgia Tech Dining and a student volunteer base. Dean Stein is also involved in Klemis Kitchen and has agreed to assist us with the project. Georgia Tech Dining’s Sustainability Outreach Coordinator, Grant Grimes, knows a lot about commercial food distribution in a college setting and is constantly looking for opportunities to expand the Campus Kitchen effort. After interviewing Mr. Grimes, we have a stronger idea of how initiatives at Tech come to fruition when they are backed by strong, established supporters.

**TIMELINE**

_Summer 2015:_

As we have successfully partnered with Klemis Kitchen, we are going to be in constant contact with them from here onwards. During the summer, we intend to develop a method to expand the use of the available resources for Klemis Kitchen. We know that we want to focus on research to create a more thorough database, but the current number of people using Klemis Kitchen is not substantial enough to conduct a legitimate survey. Therefore, we will research outreach methods in order to create a marketing campaign for Klemis Kitchen.

_Summer 2015:_

During this time, we aim to begin the implementation of the method developed during the summer. Over the course of the semester, our project will require constant attention in order to extrapolate the most data and to assure everything is going as planned. We will likely begin to work within Klemis Kitchen in order to gain a better understanding of their obstacles and how we might help.

_Spring 2016:_

During this time, we will analyze our success by examining the growth of the program or creating a new plan of action based on what we learned from the previous semester. We will then reevaluate the focus of the group accordingly. We could begin to collect data if the population accessing Klemis Kitchen is large enough by then, start working on a solution, or help another college in Atlanta begin marketing or collecting data.
BUDGET

We don’t anticipate having any costs in implementing our solution beyond normal office supplies. We would expect that our cost will mainly come from data gathering procedures. For example, we might need professional software to help us analyze data. Since our problem space is focused on Georgia Tech, we do not anticipate traveling, unless there is an opportunity for us to learn about our problem in the scope of Atlanta instead of being strictly limited to Georgia Tech. This would include things such as the conference several of our group members participated in. We will have some local field trips to places, like ACFB and MAC to volunteer or interview in order to get better understanding.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

While we originally wanted to gather data on the population of Klemis Kitchen, our recent talks with Dr. Hartley and Dean Stein revealed that there is only about "2 or 3 dozen" students using campus kitchen, with at least one student representative of every demographic group. Data gathered on this population would be inaccurate and reveal nothing about food insecurity at tech. However, both Dr. Hartley and Dean Stein mentioned the need of a marketing campaign in order to increase the number of students. In their past experience, every outreach effort has brought another "wave" of students, so we believe that we can expect a larger wave of students if we develop a broad based marketing plan. Not only will this increase the number of students using Klemis Kitchen, but also spread the word around campus about the organization, thereby making Klemis Kitchen a better known name.

We believe this marketing plan, as well as the analysis of the results, will take most of year 2. After year 2, we hope to carry out data analysis as we had originally planned, including searching for different correlates that may be indicative of food insecurity.

We hope to remain in contact with Chris Ferguson of the Atlanta Community Food Bank during this time because of his experience and knowledge in the problem space of college food insecurity. Throughout this entire process, partnerships will be crucial to our success. They are our best sources for general knowledge, specific statistics, additional contacts, funds, etc. Our current partners include Chris Ferguson at the Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB), Georgia Tech, Dana Hartley and Dean Stein of Klemis Kitchen, and Grant Grimes of Klemis Kitchen. We will foster these existing relationships and build new ones in order to achieve the best solution we possibly can as students at Tech.
SOURCES