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Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential**

**Food Insecurity in Tennessee Higher Education Convening
Convening Recording Transcript
November 15, 2022**

Dr. Emily House:

Thank you all for joining. I can only see like three people, but I know that there are 45 additional people on as well, so have a great morning and thank you all.

Dr. Steven Gentile:

Alright, thank you very much Doctor House. Good morning, everyone. My name is Steven Gentile. I'm the chief policy officer here at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and I'm very much looking forward to this conversation today. I wanted to thank you again and to echo Dr House and joining today. I know that this is a busy week, busy time, but having you all here today to kick start this conversation is crucial to the development of our policy and this data, so I want to thank you for that.

I believe Amal, can you share your screen for the PowerPoint- she's working on that right now. I'm going to go briefly over what our plan is for today and how we got here and some planned takeaways that we have for this convening.

As was mentioned, we have a lot on our plate right now that we're looking forward to getting through today. We will be discussing the extent of food insecurity across Tennessee higher education institutions, the intervention strategies that are taking place right now at our institutions and I'll get to this in a second, but this is the crux of our mandate right now. We are to produce a report next year that highlights what's happening at institutions.

We're looking at the practical opportunities here with regards to food insecurity. We are going to talk about how do we best research and analyze students food insecurity needs on our campuses so that we can both define it and then measure it going forward. And then last but not least is looking at possible policies that we can engage with at the state level and at the local level to help solve or address food insecurity.

This meeting today comes at a very good time. It's not a coincidence. This is, as many of you are aware, the hunger and homeless Awareness Week. This is going on from November 12th to through 20th. I know a lot of you guys are involved in this right now. For those who are unaware, the hunger and Homeless Awareness Week is an annual weeklong national awareness program to draw attention to the problems of hunger and homelessness. It started back in higher education back in 1975 at Villanova University and now has 700 colleges, high schools and community based organizations participating across the nation.

As of today, we got several organizations who are on this call today who have events this week like Roane State right now holding a Community resource fair on its Oakridge campus, ETSU on Thursday night, holding an Oxfam hunger banquet at the DP Culp Student Center and then UT Knoxville hosting the hunger and Homelessness 4th annual summit this Friday. So again, I want to reiterate and thank you guys for participating in this, knowing this is a busy week.

We have a lot of the public Colleges and Universities on today, my thank you for participating. We've got Universities, Community colleges, TCAT Jacksboro, other organizations that are joining in today, the Tennessee Board of Regents is here, of course, overseeing our community colleges and TCATS. Our partnering organizations, Tennessee Achieves and the Ayers Foundation. These are the organizations that help make Tennessee promise happen, and they are keenly aware of the issues facing our students with regards to hunger and so I'm want to thank them for being here.

We have a number of other organizations that help support the work that's going on at our institutions directly, like the Student Basic Needs Coalition at UT, Knoxville, Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee and the Tennessee Justice Center. And my thanks to researchers from Vanderbilt University and Ohio State University for participating as well today.

We've got a number of people from our own staff here at THEC participating. We have those from my own team here. The policy planning and Research Bureau, who's charged with making this report happening and defining food insecurity. We have our academic affairs program here on the call today, academic affairs, in addition to approving academic programs across the state, also have their fingers on the pulse of the needs of our students with regards to paying for textbooks and costs that are associated with academic programs. We have a member from our Veterans Affairs team as well, who's keenly aware of the issues facing our veteran students on our campus.

We have also on the call members of our access and success outreach team. I'm going to pay special mention here for Jessica Gibson, our senior director of adult learner initiatives. She here in the agency probably has the largest finger on the pulse on what's happening with food insecurity across the State and the needs of our adult students, helping connect the resources that we have at the state level and the federal level with those adult students, and I want to thank members of that team for being here. And then also Members from our financial aid team are also on this call today.

The origin of this call, why we're here today is public Chapter 829. This is it was just passed earlier this year in the last legislative session, and this public chapter, this law now calls on THEC to submit a report to our government stakeholders by December of next year, 2023, on the issues of food insecurity affecting our state, what are public institutions doing and identifying what best practices are happening at our campuses. What I love about this bill is two things. First of all, it came about from students UT, Knoxville. That Student Basic Needs Coalition, Ashlyn Anderson, the former president of that organization, approaching our representatives in a bipartisan fashion, this is a bipartisan law to have this bill become a law. And so, this is originating from a higher education institution and from students specifically.

Second, this is very much in alignment with the direction our agency has been going for the last 10 years and our state has been going with regards to higher education, identifying not just the costs that are affecting students in the classroom, but costs that are affecting students outside the classroom with the participation of SCORE, who's also on this call, I'm sorry for not paying mention to you earlier, but with SCORE, Tennessee Achieves, Ayres Foundation and TSAC our financial aid arm, we have just recently

started giving out emergency completion grants at our institutions for Tennessee promise students to address those one off costs that hurt our students and impede their progress on to graduation. Food insecurity is one of those issues affecting our students and so over the last 10 years, we've been trying to identify ways that we can address these costs that are not just directly related to tuition and fees on campus. So with that said, this law that we have in front of us right now, we're going to produce a report, but we're going to do much more than that as well. We're going to identify policies and ways to keep this conversation going beyond December of 2023. I just want to thank you all for being here today. And I want to thank my team for making this meeting happen today as well, Amal.

Amal Afyouni:

Thank you, Steven. Awesome. So, yes, thank you guys for joining us today. So give me one moment. I just talk about really quickly why we're here today. So, what do we know about food insecurity? I want to first say thank you to everyone for joining us again. My name Amal Afyouni, I'm a graduate assistant at THEC working with the research and strategy team.

I'm also a masters of public policy student at Vanderbilt University. Over the past few months, I've had the wonderful opportunity to speak with some of our attendees today and learn about the multitude of ways our institutions and various community partners are working to combat food insecurity. Today's conversation would not be possible without the amazing work everyone at this convening is doing.

In the next portion of the convening, I'll share with you an abbreviated literature review on what we broadly said about food insecurity and higher education. In summer 2022, I conducted a comprehensive review of peer reviewed and non peer reviewed literature on food insecurity within institutions of higher education are our review, sought to answer three research questions. What does the literature say about food insecurity in higher education and its effects on students and institutions? What solutions and best practices does existing literature suggest to address food insecurity and higher education? And lastly, how are post secondary institutions in Tennessee addressing food insecurity among students?

So for those of you who are actively engaged in food insecurity initiatives on campuses or across the state, much of which I'll share will not come as a surprise to you or as new information. The purpose of today's convening is to review and is to establish common ground and for all of us on today's call to share what we broadly know and acknowledge about food insecurity in higher education, and for us to really begin filling in the gaps.

Prior to today's convening, we sent out a short bibliography of research and resources pertaining to food insecurity. As work and resources expand in this domain, we continue to expand our bibliography. For example, our former UTK Student Basic Needs Coalition President Ashlyn Anderson alerted us about her research conducted on lived experiences of students facing food insecurity. So if you're aware of any new resources that were not cited in our bibliography, please let us know and share with us.

So let's begin. What is food insecurity, food insecurity in higher education is most commonly defined using the United States Department of Agriculture's definition, which is a household level of economic and social condition of limited or uncertain, access to adequate food. We find that rates of food insecurity and higher education range from about 33 to 51%, a much higher rate when compared to the general population at about 9.8%.

Last month, the Center for Community College and Student Engagement released a national report presenting findings from the 2021 College Survey of Student Engagement, or CCSSE, the 2021 CCSSE survey included data on housing and food insecurity among college students. CCSSE served about 82,424 students from 194 community and technical colleges across the United States and found 29% of the respondents classified as food insecure and about 14% classified as housing insecure.

We met with CCSSE staff separately to discuss how Tennessee compared to the national rates. Overall, 8 Community colleges and 800 students participated in the 2021 CSSE Survey about 23.5% of those students were food insecure and about 10.3% were housing insecure.

So factors contributing to the causes of food insecurity among students in higher education are complex and often intertwined. Factors include, but are certainly not limited to, increases in the cost of attendance, such as tuition and non-tuition costs like transportation and rent, which leads many students unable to cover expenses such as groceries. In addition, limited familiarity to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program, known as SNAP among college students, may lead to low participation rates in the program, or underused benefits to eligible students.

Institutions situated in geographical areas classified as food deserts, these are defined as areas where it is difficult to access nutritional foods, often have limited access and transportation to different nutritional food sources. Other factors may include restrictive meal plans, busy schedules, and a lack of cooking facilities and abilities. Too, students who have come from previously food insecure backgrounds are more likely to experience food insecurity when they actually attend college.

The effects of food insecurity can be detrimental to student success. Students experiencing food insecurity are less likely than their food, secure peers to excel academically. They report higher levels of stress and consume less healthy diets, which can lead many students to reduce the number of credits taken, including moving from a full time to part time status or drop out completely as students who are food insecure are less likely to obtain a credential, resulting in a loss of scholarship dollars and institution invested funds.

However, despite the physical, mental, and academic effects of food insecurity, our students are resilient and often employ a variety of coping strategies to obtain food. Some students may cope by compromising the quality of their food, purchasing cheap and often processed foods with little nutritional value. When possible. Some students depend on family support and friends support and rely on institutional resources such as food pantries or meal donation programs for eligible students. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, is also used as a coping method.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted students food security levels even further, complicated and affected the academic and social experience of our college students. Many students experienced a change in food security from the institutional, individual, geographic, and economic responses to the pandemic. In addition to there were changes in housing stability, employment status, access to mental health or counseling services, and other student support structures.

We saw that the higher education emergency relief funds, known as a HEERF, provided institutions with the ability and the flexibility to distribute much needed funds to their students, particularly to meet the basic needs needed during the pandemic.

The literature review also spotlighted some solutions and best practices addressing food insecurity, many of which are being actively implemented across our institutions in Tennessee. Institutions, states, community and organizations have instituted numerous initiatives and programs to combat food insecurity and higher education.

Establishing need by conducting a needs assessment followed by institutional programs such as food pantries and meal swipe donation programs, in addition to targeted financial supports, as mentioned earlier by Doctor Gentile, such as completion grants, are some of the approaches that are being used by institutions. Food insecurity experienced by students can also be mitigated through SNAP access and awareness by college students, both at the state and institution level, in addition to fostering a food secure culture on campus and really uplifting the work of student organizations similar to that of the Student Basic Needs Coalition.

Supporting research and data collection, such as campus wide surveys that can provide evidence and support for food insecurity policies are additional strategies used to mitigate food insecurity in higher Ed. Across the nation, states have taken action to address food insecurity at their institutions of higher education. States such as California, New Jersey, Maryland, Minnesota, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania have all passed the hunger Free Campus bill, which sends funding to public colleges who are addressing food insecurity on their campuses, in addition to a hunger Free campus designation.

In addition, we've seen states such as Illinois, Oregon and California pass Benefits Navigator legislation, which requires public institutions to hire a designated individual to help students access aid programs such as SNAP or other food and housing assistance programs. Recently, New Mexico made a large financial commitment to addressing food insecurity in higher education, pledging \$900,000 to feed students in need. Moreover, the state is taking on a year long study to address the prevalence of basic needs and security across 28 of New Mexico's public colleges and universities.

While enthusiasm to address food insecurity in higher education has increased in recent years, gaps and limitations still remain. The literature reveals that the methods and metrics such as the definitions and the survey measurement tools used to collect food insecurity in higher education are not clear, consistent, and often don't fit the college student population.

In addition, there's a lack of nationally representative studies and estimates of food insecurity in higher education. However, for the first time this year, the National Post secondary Student Aid study will ask students about food insecurity, and the report is slated to be released at the end of this year. Furthermore, additional studies, of food insecurity programs are needed to evaluate the effectiveness in mitigating food insecurity. Additional research is needed on the prevalence and determinants and consequences of food insecurity in diverse populations and post secondary environments and settings.

While certainly there is much more we could talk about and unpack in the literature review, I hope this has sort of provided enough of a foundation for us to have this robust conversation in our first group discussion. As I mentioned earlier, the United States Department of Agriculture, the USDA definition and survey measurement tools of food insecurity such as the Adult Household Food Security Survey modules, have been used to measure food insecurity in higher education.

However, more recently literature argues that the definition and the survey tools themselves have not really been evaluated for use with college student populations and often don't fit the complexities of the college student population and context and the existing methods may not be sensitive to food insecurity

risk factors unique to college students such as like lack of resources, time, transportation, kitchen facilities, all of which are necessary factors to be food secure.

On the survey, we asked administrators “how does your institution defined food insecurity experienced by your students,” if an institution did not have a specific definition of food insecurity, we asked the administrators to describe how they or their staff would define food insecurity. Among responding institutions who articulate their own definition. We found common themes and variations, including students who self identify, access to food and basic needs resources, distraction from educational success, and stress and uncertainty on food sources.

So in a few short moments, we'll begin our first facilitated discussion of the day. We'll spend the next 20 minutes discussing how food insecurity in higher education is or should be defined. I'll be randomly assigning individuals to four breakout rooms with a member of our THEC staff to facilitate. We have a few guiding questions for you to consider while you're discussing how food insecurity is defined, specific to the higher education space.

With tech issues, there might be a slight delay getting everyone to their rooms, but you should transition in the next few minutes. If any questions do arise, please feel free to ask your facilitator or drop it in the chat. I'll be able to see that through the main room, but if there are no questions, I'm going to go ahead and open up the breakout rooms.

Amal Afyouni:

Hi all. Welcome back, everyone. I'm hoping everyone's gotten back from their breakout room. Can everyone still hear me and see me OK? Awesome. Welcome back. Thank you again. I'll ask the group facilitators to share a few notes from the respective conversations. We'll start with Group One.

Dr. Jacob Kamer:

Hi Amal, Jacob here from Group One. We had a very good conversation starting out with some reactions to the literature review itself. Some commentary being that what you shared in the literature review is really all not that surprising, but it's also not acceptable.

We also underscored the importance of highlighting nutrition security, not just food insecurity, so noting the quality of food, not just the quantity of whatever food happens to be available or on whatever schedule. We had one very important comment on distinguishing student types or the different types of students in this particular conversation, such as acknowledging international students and how their experience with food insecurity may differ from other students.

We also talked about in regard to defining food insecurity, how USDA scales may be valid in the adult population, but they certainly have not been validated in the higher education space, though there have been some ongoing attempts at trying to validate it in the college setting. Also, noting when we talk about defining food insecurity, acknowledging that measuring it based on “have you been food insecure over the past month or over the past 12 months” really is not very sensitive to the higher education setting as students may migrate from campus to home.

So, acknowledging that food insecurity could be contingent on the environment of the situation, we discussed quite a bit more and I'll make sure those are summarized in notes, but I'll stop there for Group One.

Amal Afyouni:

Thank you, Jacob! Group Two,

Amanda Klafehn:

Hi everybody. My name is Amanda Klafehn and I facilitated group two. I think we came across a lot of similar things to Group 1, something that was highlighted with regards to an opportunity for future research is really how we think about the role that faculty play in identifying students and supporting them and getting their needs met.

I think that's a space where there could be greater build out of the literature. There was also discussion of our campuses or institutions that serve multiple campuses and the unique challenges that those campuses can have in getting those resources to students. So not only getting one, the resources there, but two the resources to students where they're at, which I think is a unique consideration for several of our campuses across the state.

There's also discussion around the societal stigma that's associated with students picking up or getting these resources, and how campuses can support students in doing so in a way that they feel good about. Something that I think we talked a good bit about in regards to the definition was how we consider a household.

We have instances where we have students who have their own households. They may have children of their own, non traditional students as we might classify them, typically. But we also have our students who live on campuses who might be dependent students. And so, where we think about this definition with regards to the wide variety of student experiences we have is something that was highlighted in a few different ways.

We also discussed unique considerations for our student groups that we serve, international students were also referenced, but how we consider inclusive language for all of our students, those who might have religious dietary needs, among other things, and so. With that, I will pause there to turn it over to the other groups.

Amal Afyouni:

Thanks, Amanda.

Paige Elliott:

Paige Elliott. I'm also with THEC and facilitator for Group three. Similar to the other groups, we did talk about the way that definitions miss context. As Amanda mentioned, another household that we brought up were students who are living in multi generational households who are potentially attempting to support several different generations through the food pantry resources that they can get on their campus.

We also talked about the ways that food insecurity is bound up in student basic needs more broadly, needs for housing, for health, for technology, and how we can't really address one in isolation, that a student can't cook or store food for the week if they are lacking housing, for example.

We talked about the applicability of the definition to a student. Students don't necessarily see themselves in that USDA definition. Students see themselves when there is plain language and where it's clear to them that may be something they're experiencing. And so we talked about the need for transparency and just for clarity, calling things what they are for students in order for them to be able to access the resources they need.

We discussed how food insecurity is an issue that has both stigmatized and normalized, so we talked about the trope of the starving college student and how there is this expectation sometimes that you are supposed to struggle through college, but there is also this reality that students are genuinely struggling and need help and oftentimes are not able to get it because of that stigma.

And then finally, we talked about like other groups mentioned, nutrition, both access to nutritious food and knowledge about what nutrition entails, as well as the consistency of our campuses to be able to provide that. We talked a little bit about funding and how grants may run out or things like that, that may not allow our campuses to be providing all of this on a consistent nature.

Amal Afyouni:

Thank you, Paige! And Group Four.

Ryan Korstange:

My name's Ryan. I facilitated the conversation in Group four. We talked about a lot of the same things that were already mentioned and so I won't sort of come back around to those points entirely, but a couple of things that did come up in our conversation that haven't been mentioned yet are sort of around how university responses to food insecurity are sort of timely.

But the need often extends past what the response can sort of gender or engender. And so there was a conversation about research being really needed around the way that Colleges and Universities partner with community organizations to provide lasting support for food insecurity, what that looks like when it goes well, what it looks like when it doesn't, because that ongoing need is such a big deal.

We also had a really interesting conversation around how the fact that some students, by enrolling in college, change their situation related to food insecurity and so maybe have lost SNAP benefits or aren't able to use benefits that they have in the same way that they would have if they weren't enrolled in school. And so those factors seem like ones that we ought to consider as we think about a definition for food insecurity that works for college students.

Amal Afyouni

Thank you all so much. I can't express thanks for your participation and the comments you all shared were very insightful as we begin to discuss the next steps in the line of work towards the end of today's convening.

We will have one more group discussion later on in the morning and for that one we have three tracks for you to choose from. So, we have Policy Research or Practice. Track one which is practice will be addressing the Sigma of food insecurity. Track two, which is research, will be addressing collecting data on food insecurity and track three, which is policy, will be ensuring food security for all Tennessee post secondary students. For the upcoming session, I would like you guys to choose which track you would like to be a part of and which one most interest to you.

In the chat box, if you could just drop, which track you'd like to be a part of. So track one, two or three- Policy, Research or practice, if you could use the numbers so one, two or three that be great and that way we'll be assigning individuals to their chosen breakout rooms later on for our next session. But for now, let's take a 10 minute break when we reconvene, we'll take a deeper look into the results of the survey of campus administrators on matters or food insecurity in Tennessee higher education. So it's about 9:55 right now. If you want hop back here about 10:05, please feel free to stay on the link. If you want to keep yourself muted and cameras off, you're more than welcome to hang out on the link itself, but we'll be back at 10:05. Thank you all.

Amal Afyouni

Hello all. We're going to quickly reconvene, just as a quick reminder if you haven't dropped the track you'd like to join, please go ahead and do so and we'll assign you guys to the breakout rooms for the following session. If you have no preference, totally fine, we can assign you to a random room, but we want to make sure that everyone gets into the conversation they're most excited to have, but we'll get started.

In the second portion of our convening today, I'll be sharing some preliminary data and analysis from a recent survey of campus administrators on matters of food insecurity. So first and foremost, the purpose of the survey was to learn more about the pervasiveness of food insecurity across public Colleges and Universities in Tennessee, as well as what on campus initiatives are already in place to support students experiencing food insecurity.

We administrated the survey last month and data collection is still currently ongoing. The survey is meant in part to fulfill the reporting mandate set forth by legislation passed earlier this year, which Steven had discussed earlier this morning. For this survey we identified, via web searches and snowballing, the campus administrators who are involved in foods insecurity initiatives across public colleges in Tennessee. All public colleges and universities were represented in our sampling as we're two. Colleges of Applied Technology, TCAT's.

Amal Afyouni:

So our guiding questions during our survey were to address 3 overarching questions. Firstly, do institutions of higher education in Tennessee identify and collect data on food insecurity? Secondly, how are institutions of higher education in Tennessee addressing food insecurity on their campuses and do Tennessee institutions of higher education assist students with or make them aware of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP Eligibility?

So the survey administration began on October 14th of 2022. We actively began collecting responses and we are still actively collecting responses. The data I'll show you today are reflective of responses

received through till November 7th. One institution is not represented and three other institutions have only partially responded.

As I noted a moment ago, we'll continue to be collecting data and outreach those institutions. Some institutions may be represented more than once in the data where multiple administrators were identified as working within campus food insecurity initiatives. A total of 35 and 29 responses were recorded, which corresponds to about an 83% response rate. Results presented here are preliminary and they are subject to change, with additional responses coming in.

So regarding our first overarching question, do institutions of higher education in Tennessee identify and collect data on food insecurity? We sought to ascertain how prevalent food insecurity is across Tennessee higher education. During the literature review presented earlier, I noted a few national figures on the survey.

We asked campus administrators to provide or to sort of estimate the share of students experience food insecurity on their campuses. We received a total of 17 responses to this question and across all respondents, administrators estimated the rate to be around 32%, although the individual responses varied widely, from about 2% to about 75%.

Looking across different postsecondary sectors represented in the data, four year institutions estimated an average rate of around 33%. Two-year institutions, a rate of around 47% and among one of our two TCAT's represented in the data, provided an estimate of about 25%. Because that column only represents a single institution. We ask that you sort of take that statistic with a grain of salt until we receive more data.

So on the survey we also asked administrators "in the past year, has your institution taken explicit action to address food insecurity or basic needs on your campus?" To this question, we received about 26 responses. 61% of respondents indicated yes, which is very high and promising rate, and it suggests our institutions across Tennessee are actively prioritizing addressing food insecurity, as I'm sure you all noted during your conversations today. We asked if campuses were sort of identifying food insecure students, and we found that 71% were identifying them in some way, and to those who indicated they are identifying students we asked how or sort of what methods were they were doing so.

All respondents identified students via student self identification, contact with staff or faculty, referral from counseling services. Most campuses also identified students via outreach or special outreach programs and existing food pantry data. We found that no campuses identify students via financial aid applications. In addition to identifying students, we wanted to know what kind of data collection efforts exist at institutions. 66% of institutions are reporting collecting data on food insecurity.

We found that most common data collection methods utilized by institutions were the usage or frequency of food pantry or other basic needs programs, about 82% of respondents, and enrollment information, about 71%, and demographic information and about 65%.

Not recorded on the slide, but the least common data collection methods indicated by our respondents included SNAP eligibility and enrollment and other federal system programs and other collection methods that include collecting family information, family member contact information and things of that nature.

When it came to conducting research, we wanted to better understand what existing efforts were being taken at institutions. Among 26 responses to this question, we found that 62% of institutions have conducted research on their campuses, which was a much higher response rate than we were anticipating. We asked a related question on the survey too, regarding whether institutions sort of evaluate the effectiveness of their food in security initiatives or programs. Results seem to suggest there was some sort of conflation between our questions on research and evaluation.

But overall, we're learning that administrators are largely investigating or are largely aware of investigations relative to food insecurity on their campuses. When asked to describe the research in more detail, administrators indicated research such as campus wide surveys, program assistance use and evaluation surveys, and also external collaboration with organizations, as earlier mentioned, like CSSE, the Hope Survey and the Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey.

When it came to existing food insecurity services, we asked administrators to indicate whether items on a list of services were available through their institution, through an external or third party organization or through both the institution and a third party external organization, or neither, neither through an external partner or the institution itself.

As a reference point, about 58% of respondents indicated that their institution partners with an external organization to provide food insecurity relief programming. Overall, the most common services provided are food pantries, access to emergency grant funds, and SNAP enrollment services. The most common services provided directly by institutions are food pantries, web directories, or content that include assistance on services and 1st year workshops.

The most common services provided by external organizations indicated were SNAP enrollment services and subsidized transportation services. For services provided by neither institutions or third party organizations, we found that the most common responses included meal swipe donation programs and student organizations. The list we provided administrators also included free or reduced housing, which is not included on the slide before you, but respondents were almost evenly split between whether that service was being offered by an external organization or not being provided at all.

We asked administrators what additional resources could help alleviate barriers to addressing food insecurity at your institution. We found that the most common responses to this question included allocated funds and increased education about food insecurity among the campus and greater community. We found that committed space on campus was also another identified resource. The least common response to this question included increased community support, increased institutional buy in, and others, such as hiring full time staff and resource sharing across the state. Only 22% of our respondents selected increased institutional buy in, suggesting that at most of our responding institutions there is support/ buy in on campus to actually address food insecurity, which is great.

In addition to understanding what food and security resources are available on campus. We wanted to learn how students are being made aware of these programs, so if they exist, how are students being told or informed. When we asked administrators how students are made aware of food insecurity resources, most of our respondents indicated they were made aware through e-mail, through first year orientation or through social media. Again, not displayed on the slide, but we found the least common outreach methods administrator cited included text messaging and other referral methods like word of mouth and staff referrals.

Because the literature suggests that COVID-19 exasperated food insecurity, we also sought to sort of understand how the pandemic changed or otherwise influenced campus food insecurity services. The most common response to this question included modified operations and schedules. There was definitely an increased need for programming, a temporary closure of services, and opening of new services.

What we did find, however, was a complete closure, so as opposed to temporary closure, was actually the least common response amongst our institutions, which was great when we think about our institutions, even during the height of the pandemic, were trying to keep programming as open as possible. We found that one institution cited effects such as “there was an increase of orders being delivered on and off campus for a period of time. Students were not allowed to work and the pantry relied on staff to manage the pantry.” So, we saw that there was definitely a disruption of services, but it was great to see that our institutions were still making efforts.

Lastly, our third and sort of overarching question sought to determine how Tennessee institutions are assisting making students aware of the SNAP program and their eligibility. As you can see here, the majority of administrators indicated that their institutions do assist students with SNAP and other federal benefit applications.

When we asked if students are made aware of the SNAP program, 48% of our administrators said yes. So just under half of our respondents. However, when we asked if students are screened or otherwise identified for SNAP, 56% institutions indicated that they did not. So, while students may not be very aware of the program, and even if institutions do not actively screen or conduct outreach to students, institutions are still assisting students when applications and cases arise.

So what are our key takeaways? As I mentioned at the outset, survey data collection and analysis will continue and there's still much more data to unpack and consider from the survey responses. Even so, there are a few key takeaways from our perspective.

Firstly, food insecurity means something slightly different to each institution. We also found that most institutions report research or evaluations of food insecurity on their campuses, which is great when we think about where it is existing research lie. Most institutions also report food insecurity becoming more of an institutional priority within the last year, when we think about actions and steps being taken both at the institution and state level, it seems we're all sort of stepping at the beat of the same drum, which is great.

Additional allocated funds or staffing resources were cited as the most needed resources, with just under half of respondents allocating additional budgets needed to actually fund initiatives on campuses. We also found that SNAP services are widely offered, although few of our institutions reported sort of actively doing outreach or eligibility screening. We had also noticed that among our institutions had also requested to actually receive training on SNAP, which shows that we're willing to participate, increase participation among our students.

We have a few minutes before we actually need to transition to our next activity in the convening? So, I'm happy to answer any questions you have on the survey data. Again, given the size of our audience, which is great, I'll have you all place any questions that you may have in the chat box. That way, if time runs short, we can follow up with the Q&A afterwards off screen. But yes, if you have any questions,

please feel free to drop them in chat. But I'll also turn it over Amanda to give us our final portion of today's convening.

Amanda Klafehn:

Thank you, Amal. So, as you heard about a little bit earlier, for our next and final portion of the convening will be breaking back into groups to discuss where we go next in terms of practice policy and research.

We're going to break you into groups in just a moment, and like Amal said, we do have a few moments all together if there are questions about the survey results, and once you are broken into those groups, you'll have about 20 minutes again, with another facilitator to talk about that specific research area or group area and then we will closeout following that conversation. So, I see that there are a few comments coming through. Amal I'll let you go ahead and tackle that first one and then we'll go from there.

Amal Afyouni:

Awesome. Thanks, Amanda. Yes, as we've noted earlier, we're recording our main session. We hope to have both the main session and additional materials out to y'all in the following weeks of the convening hopefully not too long. But yes, we will be getting a recording out to all our attendees.

So, as you all can read, SNAP being offered to students, we have to acknowledge how having a meal plan prevents students from having access to SNAP. Thank you, Legna. Legna is the current president of the Student Basic Needs Coalition at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I think that's a great question. As it stands right now, while eligibility to college students was expanded during COVID, it was great that to see students actually access SNAP.

But as Legna noted, students who have a meal plan are automatically disqualified from the participation in SNAP and so this is a big question that we have when we think about how do we use existing resources, maybe like meal plans in conjunction with other resources such as SNAP and finding ways to sort of mitigate discounting eligibility. But I think that's a really great point to bring up, a lot of our students are sometimes required to actually sign up to meal plan. So when we think about when we make these requirements, how are we playing with student eligibility when it comes to federal system programs? But thank you Legna, so much for bringing that point up.

Cara shared "Do you have a sense from the survey of who typically manages staff slash campus food pantries and how are those resources typically funded." In our preliminary web searches of finding individuals, as we called them, point of contacts, to institutions we found that it was housed in a variety of different sources. So, whether it was in the Dean of Students Office whether it was a dedicated basic needs office it really depended.

What we really found was that most of the individuals were housed in offices that were sort of student facing and student based. Obviously, we had a few here and there that maybe we're sort of working on food initiatives on the side, through sort of personal want of wanting to work on the project or sort of special assignment through a grant.

And we sort of found that most of these resources are funded either through grants, through donations.

We also found that some institutions and organizations are partnering with one another. For example, second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee Partners with some institutions to provide and help stock food banks through different partnerships. And so, we found that there was a variety of different ways in which institutions were actually supporting their students. But by and large, it was through grants, donations and sometimes set aside institution funds.

Amanda Klafehn:

Wonderful. OK. So I think those are the bulk of our questions, but of course, please don't hesitate to share your questions here. And like Amal mentioned, we will be happy to follow up one-on-one or as a full group later on, but as you all selected earlier, we will be breaking now into the practice policy and research groups. Again, these will be about 20 minute breakouts and if for any reason you are having difficulty, I will be in the main room and can definitely move you to where you would like to be. So, if you could just give us a brief moment to get you all set up and we'll get started on our breakouts.

Amanda Klafehn:

All right, I believe everyone is now back in the room. We'll go ahead and share some of the takeaways from each of the breakout sessions. If I could go ahead and call on Amal to share what they discussed and track one.

Amal Afyouni:

Sure. Thanks, Amanda. So, again, we were sort of talking about addressing the stigma of food insecurity. A lot of our questions centered on how have institutions sort of addressed their food insecurity mitigation programs to talk about and address stigma that's associated with food insecurity. So a lot of our conversations talked about additional food insecurity mitigation programs, you know, military transition grants are also there to access. So, talking about broader student populations and what kind of programs that we can give to them.

We also talked about a lot of reaching out to students outreach via, whether it's workshops, that sort of help students recognize what food insecurity is and recognize shared experiences. I know some more participants on the call talked about directly going and visiting first year workshops or first year seminars to kind of explain the resources that are available on campuses, but also educating what food insecurity in higher education is. I think a lot of what we talked about is a lot of students don't really know that other individuals are going through similar experiences. So finding ways to not only elevate the conversation, but also bring back this idea that we're all in this together and collaboratively working with one another.

We also talked about how we are sort of providing and actually giving access to food in security programs. So obviously with COVID-19 a lot of food pantries had to result to drive up. So, we see institutions are either maintaining drive up options or use them as supplementary to in person visits to their food pantries and so we talked about greater access to students and in tandem to addressing stigma, really thinking about multiple ways to provide the same service, to make sure that we're meeting the needs of the variety of students that we have at institutions.

We also talked about making our programs and services related to students in the current day and age. So, we have one institution, Nashville State, talking about how when the food pantry was messaged as

something similar to Instacart, there was definitely an increase in participation and sort of like apt and willingness to participate. I think a lot of the times students these days have comparable programs that may not be considered food insecurity programs. So, if we can find a way to sort of replicate those at the institution level to increase participation.

And we also talked about, you know, how students feel about actually accessing resources, but a lot of the time, the literature kind of shows that students feel sort of almost ashamed to use resources, but also this feeling that there's other students that are more needy than me or need resources more than I do. So how do we find a way to, you know, nix, that sort of messaging that students have about themselves and thinking that resources are for everyone. You know, this is an Open Access resource to every single student who needs it.

Again, we talk about food insecurity, not just being something that's persistent, but being something that's situational. A student can be temporarily food insecure for a few months if they lose their job. And so making sure that we're messaging our resources as being a anytime, any use resource. We also talked about how we address sort of faculty participation in expanding food insecurity, knowledge and addressing stigma. And so, you know, we have an institution that works with faculty and staff to provide food insecurity statements, and including them in their syllabi and having several options.

And so I think we also talk about in addition to faculty participation, where does student participation lie? And so, you know, a lot of the time we see our food pantries are being stocked or a lot of the assistance comes from student volunteers and student workers. And so, thinking about if we can sort of provide messaging of giving back or to help alleviate this stigma of maybe I'm not worthy enough for these resources. But showing students that maybe you can work within the resource and actually access it. So very fruitful conversations in my group. It was really great learning a lot about the work institutions are doing to mitigate Sigma, so thanks.

Amanda Klafehn:

Wonderful. Jacob, could you share a little bit about what you all discussed in the research track?

Dr. Jacob Kamer:

Of course, and thank you, Amanda. And I'll give a quick shout out to Marsha Spence who I think was in the middle of making a very good point when we closed back into the main session. So, I think we certainly could have talked much longer than 20 minutes on where research should be going in this particular space.

But in track two for research, the overarching topic was collecting data on food insecurity and the conversation spun in many different ways, all of which very important, very valid, all underscoring that there really just isn't a lot of good data out there right now. Certainly, from a quantitative space, but more importantly, from a qualitative space and really understanding, what are the experiences of students apart from are you in need or are you not in need? So, underscoring the need for more quantitative data and understanding what does it mean to be food insecurity? What are the true implications there from a student level perspective?

We also talked about how collecting data from students making use of existing resources could inadvertently stand up a systematic barrier to using those resources. That if students are aware that

their data are being collected, they may be hesitant or less inclined to make use of a resource which I think does under score and certainly connect into some of the conversations Amal was highlighting on the stigma of food insecurity.

And also short of collecting student level information, a lot of very good points were made to, in making use of existing Research resources across the state. So, in leu of perhaps standing up a state level survey on student food insecurity, perhaps we lean into some of the researchers at our institutions, looping them into the conversation. What do they know? What data can they collect and how can researchers be shared across institutions to make sure that their knowledge, their expertise, their insight is shared on more even ground?

Addressing this from a state level and also of course when data aren't there on a specific topic, proxying that information through other available information, such as an example that we shared was using Pell or needs based financial aid assistance as a proxy for representing whether or not a student could be in need.

And of course, I think one of the big takeaways from our group is underscoring the golden question here from the evaluation perspective, absent good qualitative or quantitative data, how do we know that the initiatives that we are standing up truly are addressing the issue holistically. So there is there is much to unpack in the research perspective, but those are the really the high level points and I'll summarize more of the notes later for sharing out.

Amanda Klafehn:

Wonderful. Thanks Jacob. And Paige will you round us out with the discussion of what you guys just had discussed and track three?

Paige Elliott:

We had a great conversation about the gaps in the state and where there are potential changes that could help us more effectively address food insecurity. One topic was state financial aid policies. The way that we award based on merit and on need for tuition, but not necessarily for non tuition expenses, and that there are currently efforts across the state to address that, but that those need to be expanded and need additional funding as well.

We talked about the way that some students interact with their campuses, as food deserts that they have to put in extra effort to get the food that is both healthy and that they need and want, and that that also comes with a large time cost for students. And we know that our students are busy and should be putting in their time and effort into studying and into completion, among other things.

And that sometimes the requirement to have to use public transportation for example, to get groceries presents a huge barrier, especially for certain student populations. Again, international students were mentioned as a group that may particularly be impacted. So we dreamt about what would it look like to have a at cost grocery store on a campus where students don't have to take that extra transportation time and effort to get what they need.

Then we had a large kind of a coalescing around the idea of introducing a statewide notification system that requires colleges to provide notice of SNAP and other federal aid eligibility to students, alongside

potential expansion in the state of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. We discussed ways that currently trying to coalesce resources for students is a huge burden for campuses because as soon as you pull all of those resources together, they're out of date and so you almost have to have a dedicated person to be consistently updating that in order to help to help students efficiently and to avoid sending students to a roadblock.

And so by having some sort of statewide coordinated system that may alleviate some of that. We talked about how campuses could use more dedicated funding and personnel who are trained in this area to again continue to provide an update those resources.

And then finally, we talked about some of the limitations that would exist if we were to put in the statewide notification system. For example, current policies regarding the financial aid information that can be shared even on a singular campus across campus, certain information cannot be shared. And additionally, certain student groups are facing barriers because of what is required to receive various assistance.

So, for example the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program application requires a Social Security number which impacts our undocumented students. So, thinking about the ways that that information sharing as well as the requirements for these program currently put up barriers in ways that we may be able to start to dismantle. Some of those was really where our conversation landed.

Amanda Klafehn

Thank you! And with that, I'm going look to Amal. Are we going to open up for any questions or discussion?

Amal Afyouni

Yeah, we have some time if anyone wants to sort of throw in a bigger sort of conversation for the group. I know Doctor Spence, a few shout outs were made about your comment that you had if you would like to sort of share sort out the note you were making earlier before we cut you off. Apologies again.

Dr. Marsha Lynn Spence

I'm back. I sorry, I I'm not used to teams, so I was looking for the buttons. Well, I think and Jacob, correct me if I'm wrong, but I was talking about the fact that there are lots of faculty across our campuses, both in community colleges and four year institutions that are doing some of this research. And it I think that it provides THEC with a great opportunity to bring together those folks together, and if there's not a place on a campus that this is happening, I just gave the example of Chattanooga so UT Chattanooga, so say maybe there's not somebody doing this work at UT Chattanooga. It's gives a great opportunity for more senior faculty to mentor faculty at these institutions that could provide this, its a great. So, we do need to collect data. There are lots of researchers who are doing that. And I think that this we could bring a task force together from across the state for that.

Amal Afyouni:

Thank you, Doctor Spence.

Dr. Jacob Kamer:

I think you're spot on. So, thank you for sharing that. I'm really glad Amal that you were able to give Doctor Spence the spotlight for that, because as I mentioned before that was a really good point she was making in the midst of transition between rooms.

Amal Afyouni:

That's amazing. Thank you Doctor Spence. I definitely don't want to single out, but Miss Woods, Madison Woods a researcher from OSU shared some really great sort of insights into the work she's doing, if you don't mind sort of sharing that with the bigger group, definitely want to elevate the work that you've been doing on your campus.

Madison Woods:

Alright. Yes, hello. Thank you Amal for the shout out. So, I am a master student at Ohio State, however, I graduated from the University of Tennessee, so that's where kind of the work started. So as a graduate assistant here currently, I do a lot when it comes to educating students on food insecurity and student basic needs in general. So, I just talked about how I tried to have workshops that kind of educate students on what food insecurity is, because I just think it really starts with education and recognizing what food insecurity looks like because it's very complex and it's not just the lack of access to food.

There's a lot that goes into it. It includes like preparation of foods, the types of foods as we talked about, things like that. And then I talked about how at Ohio State, some of the different ways that we kind, in my opinion, reduced the stigma against food insecurity on campus. So again, when it comes to pandemic practices, so allowing the drive ups at food pantries on campus, we don't ask for any type of like financial aid purposes, we don't ask like why you are here, you know what your income is, anything like that. If you're a student on campus, you have a buck ID, which is like our ID's, you're allowed to get whatever you need.

And then also I talked about how there's room for food pantries to expand to residence halls. I think it's important that we meet students where they are when it comes to really anything, any resources that we're offering. But I think in the coming years, we have across higher education, the opportunity to kind of expand into all residence halls. So, one part of our food pantry is within one residence hall. But I think there's room for us to kind of maybe do like kind of like pop up shops within our residence halls.

Amal Afyouni:

Thank you, Madison. And Ashlyn I can see you on my screen right now. I want to give Ashlyn a quick shout out. Ashlyn recently released, in early October, her recent research on food insecurity in Tennessee. Ashlyn I just definitely want to give you some space to quickly touch on that and talk about that. I had the opportunity to read through it and it was just awesome to learn about the insights that she was able to gather. But definitely give you the space to talk more on that.

Ashlyn Anderson:

Yeah, definitely. Thank you so much Amal and thank you again all of you for joining this call on this conversation. I definitely have had the privilege and honor to work in the space of food insecurity and

higher education throughout my undergraduate career and after graduating. But Doctor Spence and Madison, we have some great representatives on the call from UT-K former alumni as well, so grateful for that support network.

But, happy to share in the chat the link to the to the article but my thesis research which like Amal mentioned was recently published, was focused on this idea of a qualitative understanding of food insecurity among college students. Right. Because as we've talked about in this discussion there's been a proliferation of data around food insecurity. We know the numbers. We know the statistics. We know that they're shockingly high, but we what we really lacked in and continue to lack is a qualitative understanding of food insecurity among students.

So really, what is the lived experience of food insecurity? What does food insecurity mean for a college student? And so, in this article, I had the privilege to interview 30 college students attending University of Tennessee, Knoxville. And through those conversations, I was really able to understand more of what is the lived experience for students and how they personally understand food insecurity.

So in one of the breakout sessions I mentioned this normalization of students not even really considering themselves food insecure. That was actually something in the interview, We never mentioned the term food insecurity because it is just a label, and a lot of students don't identify with that label, though they may be identifying with some of the characteristics of what food insecurity is. And then one of the best parts I think of what came out of the research is this idea that students identified their own solutions.

So when you give students the microphone and say, what do you want to see to address food insecurity on your campus or across the state? They came up with some really excellent solutions and things that can be implemented. So definitely if you if you give it a read, check that section out on student centered solutions to food insecurity because at the end of the day, we should continue to center student voices and lived experiences as part of this work, so thank you.

Amal Afyouni

Thank you, Ashlyn. And again, I just dropped that back that link into the chat. Please give it a read. It was it was awesome to see that work come out, but I'll throw it back to Amanda, to wrap us up.

Amanda Klafehn:

Wonderful. Thanks Amal. I'm going to go ahead and pull up the slide deck again really quickly. Hopefully you all can see that now. So I want to first really thank everyone for their participation in fruitful discussion throughout the breakout sessions. As Amal and Steven had shared in the opener. This work was kick started last year with UT, Knoxville and the State legislature. We've been really engaging in this work, really Amal, spearheading that since this early summer. And so we have plans to continue to take action on a few different things over the next several weeks, some of which we've already been mentioning.

So first is really continued survey data analysis and again, major shout out to many of you on this call who completed that survey. We're going to continue to collect from those that we haven't been able to, but also just continuing to dig into the really rich information that was provided to learn a little bit more as Amal shared earlier.

We also are going to be compiling our information from this meeting, not only the really critical conversations occurring in each breakout, but kind of providing a more holistic summary of what we've been doing. So more to come on that. And again, additional survey outreach and data collection so that we can ensure that we have a holistic representation of our campuses across the state.

Looking ahead, as we've discussed, also a few possibilities for things that we are considering. One, a possible student survey, thinking about really getting that student voice as Ashlyn was highlighting and how critical that is for our understanding of food insecurity and Tennessee. We're considering too the potential for an additional convening. I think there have been a lot of really fruitful conversations and connections occurring just today and so continuing to foster that conversation across our institutions in higher education generally. And then finally, of course, we have our food insecurity reporting requirement.

This is due December 31st of 2023, and so what we'll be doing is over the next several months, working to compile that final report. So those are a few of the next steps that we have on our docket here at THEC and I will kick it over to Steven to close this out.

Dr. Steven Gentile:

Thank you, Amanda, and thank you everyone who's participated today and thank you to members of THEC who helped facilitate. I really want to express my gratitude again to Ashlyn and those who helped to get this off the ground and running, and we will continue using you as a resource going forward. But this is, as mentioned before, is very important work to be doing and Tennessee, in the context of higher Ed, where you know we have some of the best financial aid in the country per award dollars per person per student.

However, there's still much need to solve and so I really do appreciate this opportunity to do so. You guys will be receiving this recording and the coming weeks Amal and Jacob will be sending that out. Should you guys have any questions or thoughts or comments on this going forward, please don't hesitate to reach out to any one of us at the research and strategy division. There's our contact information. My name is steven.gentile@tn.gov. That's my e-mail address. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

We will be likely holding another convening again. We've got 13 months before this report is due and so much to do between now and then. So, we value your time and your insights, and again, you'll probably be hearing from us in the future as well for future convenings. Amal anything else I should add before we head out.

Amal Afyouni:

I just want to say thank you again to everyone who participated in the survey. Thank you for your responses. And again, thank you for everyone participating in today's convening. It's been just great hearing all the great fruitful conversations that we've been having and really finally having a collaborative moment together again. We're going to wrap up at 12. We'll give you guys back 55 minutes of your time. Again, I hope everyone has a great rest of their week and thank you again for participating with us. Thank you again.