“The rising cost of food is eating up more of my paycheck...”

Food Insecurity in College and University Faculty

Introduction

In 2023, 1,700 teaching faculty and upper-level administrators in 27 New Mexico colleges and universities participated in a study assessing their basic needs security. The data revealed significant levels of food and housing insecurity and its affect on their mental health and productivity.[1]

- 52% of college and university faculty work full-time.
- 28% of college and university faculty are food insecure.

Food Insecurity

Open-ended survey responses reveal faculty struggles with food insecurity, citing low wages that lag behind inflation, making essentials like food difficult to afford. Many part-time and adjunct faculty juggle multiple jobs yet still fall short of basic needs, earning too much for aid but too little for nutritious meals.

Faculty expressed concerns regarding **common themes** including:

- High food costs
- The impact of inflation
- Insufficient income
- Financial difficulties
- Time constraints imposed by long working hours.

“Lack of income; even though, I teach at 3 universities.” - Faculty (Part-time or Adjunct)

Food Security

The USDA has 4 levels of food security: high, marginal, low, and very low food secure. If one is in the top 2 categories, one is considered food secure. If one is in the last 2 categories one is food insecure.

Low Food Security

(Formerly known as food insecurity without hunger)

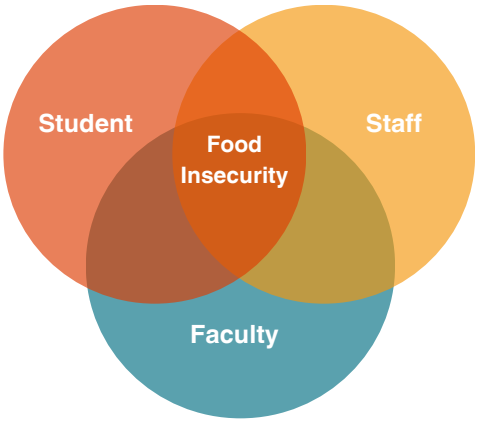
Reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet without substantially disrupting food intake or normal eating patterns.

Very Low Food Security

(Formerly known as food insecurity with hunger)

Multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake due to lack of money and other resources for food.

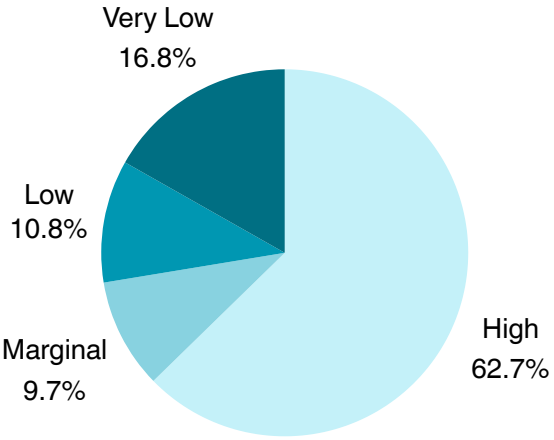
Source: USDA ERS - measurement. (n.d.). https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/



Nutrition Security

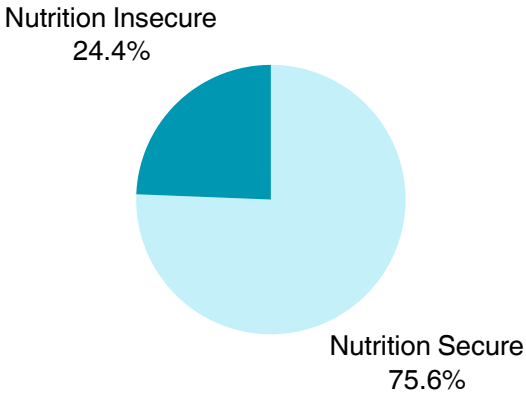
Nutrition security ensures that all individuals have consistent, fair access to safe, nutritious, and affordable foods that are essential for good health and overall well-being.

Faculty Food Security



“Rising costs of food make it challenging to afford nutritious meals.” - Faculty

Faculty Nutrition Security



“The higher price of food has made it more difficult to eat healthier. We have had to cut back, and I will often skip lunch to make sure the others have food they need.” - Faculty (Full-time)

1. The research team were University of New Mexico faculty: Drs. Cargas, Coakley, Gonzales-Pacheco, Thomas, and Buro." Additional data analysis was provided by Jennifer Minich from ICASA at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Fostering Student Success from Cradle to Career

NEW MEXICO BASIC NEEDS CONSORTIUM

“Tired from hunger.”

Table 1. Education Teachers, Postsecondary Wage Comparison

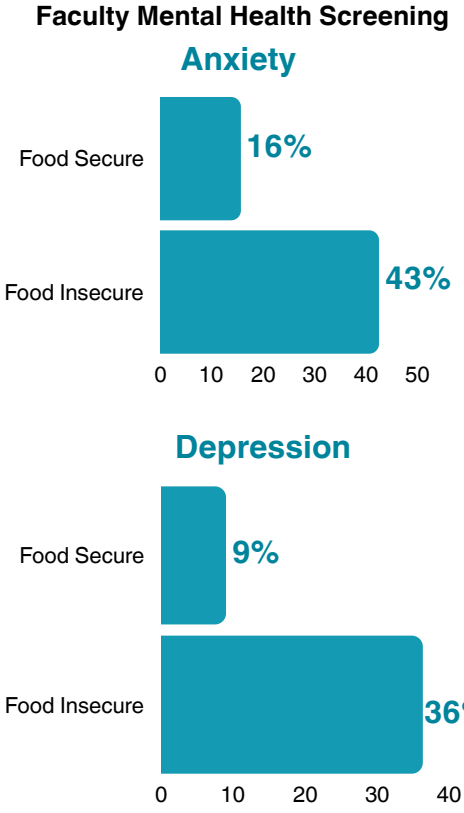
State Comparison	NM	LA	MS
Median Annual Wage	$61,080	$64,220	$65,630

Median annual wages for faculty in New Mexico are $3,000 lower than in Louisiana and $4,500 lower than in Mississippi, with all three states ranking among those with the highest poverty rates.

New Mexico is experiencing a health care worker shortage driven by limited medical school enrollment capacity, primarily due to a shortage of medical faculty at colleges, a consequence of low faculty salaries.

Mental Health and Job Performance

Faculty members facing food insecurity often experience stress and lack of motivation due to financial struggles, especially part-time workers who need to work extra to support themselves. The uncertainty around food availability affects mental health, making it harder for faculty to focus on their work.



"I'm constantly worrying about how to pay bills, which makes it hard to focus at work." -Faculty

Common themes cited by faculty are increased stress and anxiety, decreased job performance and affects overall well-being, all attributed to food insecurity.

Current Interventions

The New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium, NM BNC, aims to coordinate solutions because many interventions require a braided response, in that many levels of response need to be woven together. They work on SNAP outreach and improving campus pantries through consistent data collection, but many campuses that offer free food remain under-resourced.

Food pantries are the primary response to food insecurity in higher education. However, many campuses lack these pantries and some limit faculty access.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is another available resource, yet it remains significantly underutilized; 78.8% of food insecure faculty did not receive SNAP benefits.

"The stress from not knowing if I can afford groceries affects my motivation." -Faculty

Recommendations

Colleges and Universities

- ***Establish Basic Needs Offices***: Basic needs offices should be established on all campuses to support students as well as staff and faculty by connecting them with essential resources, including SNAP outreach and other assistance programs.
- ***Expand Food Pantries***: Ensure campus pantries are accessible to staff and faculty, and that faculty are informed about free or low-cost food options, including meal vouchers and on-campus pantries
- ***Raise Wages***: Consider adjusting faculty wages to match inflation and rising living costs.
- ***Offer Better Employment Contracts***: Adopting more stable and fair employment practices for adjunct faculty who work under short-term contracts with limited job security.

Community Engagement

- ***Partner with Local Organizations:*** Partnerships between colleges and local organizations could strengthen food assistance support.
- ***Promote Systematic Change*:**
- Institutions can support policy changes at the state and federal levels to address wage disparities and food insecurity on a broader scale.

Prepared By:

Nour Mansour
Sarita Cargas, D.Phil
Diana Gonzales-Pacheco, DCN, RDN, FAND

Questions? Contact:
basicneeds@unm.edu

NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Fostering Student Success from Cradle to Career
NEW MEXICO BASIC NEEDS CONSORTIUM