

Expanding food assistance may help colleges retain students, study says

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Food insecurity is a pressing issue among U.S. college students and has increased dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In a survey conducted by Healthy CUNY in April 2020, 50% of CUNY students reported worrying that they would run out of food before they could buy

more.

In a secondary analysis of the CUNY-wide student survey, Associate Professor Heidi Jones, Distinguished Professor Nick Freudenberg and colleagues explored the association between food insecurity and the impact of COVID-19 on educational outcomes and tested whether anxiety and depression mediated this relationship.

Students who were food insecure were more likely to experience disruptions to their [educational experience](#), reporting higher rates of being unable to do their schoolwork, dropping or withdrawing from classes and anticipating delays in their graduation. There was some evidence that [food insecurity](#) may lead to anxiety and/or depression, with both affecting students' ability to do schoolwork, and depression also affecting potential delays in graduation.

In their study published in the *Journal of American College Health*, the researchers suggest developing student campus services that link food assistance with psychological services such as mental health counseling or referrals to community-based or telehealth [mental health services](#) to maximize opportunities for leveraging this reciprocal relationship.

"The link between mental health and [food security](#) shown in this study suggests that health, mental health and [social problems](#) that many college students face are closely intertwined," says Freudenberg. "Expanding food assistance may help especially those community colleges and public universities serving low-income populations to avoid the drops in enrollment that the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered."

More information: Emily Berger et al, Food insecurity associated with educational disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic for college students and the role of anxiety and depression, *Journal of American College Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2022.2093115](https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2093115)

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