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From food access to food sovereignty: Striving to meet university student needs

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Abstract

The ongoing neoliberalization of higher education has meant that college and university students at state institutions face declining state support for their education, increasing debt, precarious post-graduation job opportunities, and a dominant cultural emphasis on personal responsibility rather than collective care. These neoliberal conditions exacerbate structural inequities (along various axes, including race, economic status, disability, etc.) within student populations. This paper explores two aspects of inequity in food insecurity among students: specific challenges and inequities students face by virtue of their position as college students, and intersectional inequities faced by some students by virtue of other identities to which they belong. This paper presents findings from two

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Disclosures

At the time of publication, Darby, Kempton, Stubblefield and Webster were employed by Western Washington University (WWU), the subject of this research study. At the time the research was conducted, Hemmer, Holt, and del Rosario were students at WWU and employed by the same institution.

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research efforts at Western Washington University, a public university in the USA Pacific Northwest. First, we share findings from a 2018 qualitative, interview-based study of food-insecure students on the campus. We then draw from our experiences as practitioners and present critical reflections on our own campus food security efforts, differentiating between those that address food security (access), food justice, and food sovereignty. Our findings from the qualitative study suggest that students feel a sense of personal responsibility for their food insecurity, and that food-insecure students both rely on social networks for support and feel stigmatized by their food insecurity. Our critical reflections on campus programs reveal that most of the traditional food security efforts (e.g. emergency aid, food pantries) neglect to either effectively support BIPOC students and others most affected by food insecurity, or provide a sustained community-support mechanism for food-insecure students in general. We position food sovereignty-oriented programs as a way forward in addressing the intersectional inequities faced by students, and also in bolstering communities of support.

Keywords
Food Insecurity, Food Justice, Food Sovereignty, Higher Education, Campus Farm, Food Pantries, Neoliberalism, Washington State, United States, Qualitative Research

Introduction

In 2020, 39% of U.S. college students at two-year institutions and 29% at four-year institutions experienced food insecurity (Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021). Food insecurity on college campuses is inseparable from the cultural, political, and economic environment in which it takes place. Neoliberalism has come to dominate not just the political and economic arenas but social and cultural spheres as well (Duggan, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Wilson, 2017). Neoliberalism is a hegemonic set of conditions characterized by a sharp decline of government regulations and safety nets that protect individuals in favor of policies and regulations that facilitate "free" markets, thus rhetorically reducing individuals to rational economic actors rather than recognizing them as citizens of the state (Harvey, 2005; Wilson, 2017). Neoliberalism has strongly influenced the experiences of U.S. college and university students, especially at public institutions, as states have reduced their support for public higher education and shifted the financial burdens onto individual students. Neoliberalism has impacted private institutions and the students enrolled in them, by treating "students as customers" and piling on campus amenities (luxury dorm rooms, shiny new student centers) to attract full tuition-paying students to their institutions (Mintz, 2021, p. 87).

Adjusted for inflation, tuition at public colleges and universities nationwide has quadrupled since 1970 and tripled since 1990 (Hanson, 2021), driven in large part by declining state support for higher education (Mitchell et al., 2019). Since the 1970s, there has been in addition a substantial shift from grant-based financial aid to loan-based aid (Saunders, 2010). Average undergraduate loan debt at graduation in the U.S. rose from US$5,060 per student in 1975 to $31,100 in 2021, adjusted for inflation (Hanson, 2021). Federal financial support for higher education has a smaller impact than it once did, because public university tuition has multiplied over the last two decades and grants have not kept pace. In the 2001–2002 school year, the maximum Pell Grant was US$5,690 (2021 dollars), and the average cost of a public four-year university including tuition and housing costs was US$13,710 (2021 dollars). In the 2021–2022 school year, the Pell maximum has risen to US$6,495, while average public university costs have increased to US$22,690 (Ma & Pender, 2021). Where state and federal programs formerly paid higher proportions of their educational expenses, students increasingly rely on loans (Ma &Pender, 2021).

Getting by on financial aid dollars or wages from part-time work became more challenging for college students during the Great Recession, partly because "parents have fewer resources to help out, there is greater competition for work-study jobs, and many schools have increased tuition to cover their expenses" (Robbins, 2010, para. 4). In addition to working more hours while in school and facing increasing levels of post-graduation debt, students also face an uncertain employment future. High student loan debt can force students to

choose a vocation based solely on ability to pay back loans (Giroux, 2002). Students are living in an age of precarity, characterized by uncertainty about the availability of employment and social support resources, with material, cultural, and emotional implications (Wilson, 2017). Declining state support for universities has also led public institutions of higher education to pursue revenue-generating strategies, including contracting out housing and dining services to large corporations (Marcus, 2021). Under these conditions, students are viewed as customers (Giroux, 2002; Saunders, 2010). They are seen "less like members of a community of learners and more like individuals focused on enhancing their human capital and who are solely responsible and accountable to themselves" (Saunders, 2010, p. 63). Under neoliberalism, state-supported safety nets are declining just as self-help strategies and the misguided notion of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" are becoming a common moral grounding (Duggan, 2012).

At the same time that state resources for public education have been dwindling, state institutions have been increasing their enrollment of first-generation and BIPOC college students, both from desire to do right by historically marginalized groups and from need for tuition dollars. Many students from these backgrounds lack the financial resources and familial wealth that an average college student in the past could rely upon. For example, a report from the 2019 National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators showed that Black students struggled with loan debt more than other racial groups, with a higher percent of Black students taking out loans, a higher average debt per borrower for Black students, a lower percentage of Black students graduating with no debt, and an increased difficulty in repaying loans compared to other racial groups (Fredman, 2019).

These political economic conditions have created systemic food insecurity inequities and challenges for college students *by virtue of being public university students*. A recent survey of 86,000 students from 123 public and private U.S. colleges and universities by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice found 45% of respondents to be food insecure in the month preceding the study (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019).[1] Food insecurity rates tend to be higher among students at two-year institutions and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Hagedorn-Hatfield et al., 2022). While another recent study using nationwide data suggests that college students do not face higher rates of food insecurity than nonstudents (Gundersen, 2021), student experiences with food insecurity and the strategies used to address it are different than those in nonstudent populations. Food insecurity forces students to navigate damaging trade-offs in a zero-sum game: time spent studying or attending classes competes with time students could be working for income (Henry, 2017). In one study, working students were twice as likely to experience food insecurity than those who did not have a job, suggesting that for students "working their way through college" the combination of income from financial aid and jobs is insufficient to meet their needs (Patton-López et al., 2014). These conditions are exacerbated by increasing housing costs in many college towns (Trapasso, 2021). Students experiencing food insecurity are also more likely to struggle academically, usually with adverse impacts on GPA (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson et al., 2018; Maroto et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2016; Patton-López et al., 2014) and time-to-graduation (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Martinez et al., 2018).

The neoliberalization of higher education also exacerbates existing structural inequities, creating *intersectional inequities* in food security among college students. An intersectional lens acknowledges the overlapping ways in which oppression acts along multiple axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, first-generation college students and those with minoritized racial identities are at greater risk for food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2016; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018), as are women, queer students, trans and gender nonbinary students, students with disabili-

[1] The largest food insecurity studies lump private and public universities together, making it difficult to determine whether students at public institutions experience higher rates of food insecurity than those at private colleges and universities.

ties, students with children, students eligible for Pell grants, and older students (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). At public institutions, 40% of grant money goes to "high-achieving" students, a designation that tends to track with identities of privilege; relatively wealthy students also tend to receive larger grants (Barnes & Harris, 2010; Dillon & Cary, 2009; Mintz, 2021).

Despite the hunger faced by many college students, federal food assistance programs and local food banks are not common coping strategies for food-insecure college students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019; Waity et al., 2020). Full-time college students typically are ineligible for federal food assistance through SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Though temporary exemptions were granted during the COVID-19 pandemic, these policies are built upon the false assumption that most students are financially supported by their parents (Landry et al., 2021). Quite counter to that assumption, in 2016 a quarter of college and university students worked full time (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Food-insecure students also often face cost-prohibitive on-campus meal plans; at some institutions, students "appear to be forking out 70 percent more per day on campus than they would likely pay to cook and eat on their own" (Mathewson, 2017, para. 7). That many institutions require students to participate in meal plans, which most colleges and universities contract with three large private companies to provide, and often while removing access to communal dorm kitchens to make more space for student housing, is another example of the emphasis on forced participation in markets inherent to the neoliberal era (Anderson, 2021).

Existing research on food security among college students provides strong empirical documentation of a growing crisis, but has fallen short in exploring the nuances of student perspectives and experiences in navigating food insecurity, including within the neoliberal context of economic precarity and individualization, and the support mechanisms for food- insecure students with consideration of both *intersectional* inequities and the inequities faced by students *by virtue of being students*. While statistical findings are important in revealing trends and prevalences in food insecurity, quantitative approaches do not always acknowledge the moral urgency of this crisis, nor do they provide a nuanced understanding of the variety of student experiences and needs. Few published studies in this area have focused on the experiences and voices of food-insecure students (Henry, 2017; Stebelton et al., 2020; Wells-Edwards, 2020); only one of which we are aware of has specifically examined the experiences of students vis-à-vis neoliberal conditions in higher education (Schraedley et al., 2021). In addition, despite widespread concern about food insecurity in higher education, few studies have described or reflected on student support mechanisms, e.g., on-campus food pantries, nutrition literacy education, meal vouchers, emergency cash, and campus gardens (Davis et al., 2021; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; Landry et al., 2021). Examination of targeted support for students with marginalized identities is particularly lacking. In this paper, we emphasize that making sure that students are adequately fed in an era of neoliberal higher education requires addressing both sets of food security inequities: those affecting students *by virtue of being* students (especially those at public institutions) and those *intersectional* inequities that have been exacerbated under the current political and economic regime.

Scholars of food insecurity and access frequently describe mitigation programs with a three-part typology: those that emphasize food security (access), those that strive for food justice, and those that seek to promote food sovereignty (Holt-Giménez, 2010). These three categories can describe any effort to address food insecurity; we apply them to the college and university context. Food security (access) programs are efforts that put financial resources and/or food in the hands of people who need it; within this framework, a "lack of food security is largely understood as an 'access' issue" (Noll & Murdock, 2020, p. 3). While these efforts often provide vital material benefits to individuals, they do little to address the underlying structures of neoliberalism that created conditions of food insecurity in the first place, nor do they tend to engage those affected by food insecurity in decision-making processes (Holt-Giménez, 2010). These programs are temporary fixes that are often

short-lived, underfunded and therefore unsustainable: they are necessary, but not sufficient if the underlying causal mechanisms for food insecurity remain unaddressed (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Food access programs stand to ameliorate food insecurity for students as a group, but such programs do little to address intersectional inequities, as they do not explicitly address needs of individuals with marginalized identities, nor do they address underlying structural causes of inequity.

Food justice efforts, on the other hand, "seek to address injustices that disproportionately impact upon people based on race and class" (Clendenning et al., 2016, p. 170) and emphasize the "right to food" (Holt-Giménez, 2010, p. 3). Within a food justice context, particular attention is paid to the needs of individuals with marginalized identities, but those people are not always at the decision-making table. Food justice efforts often provide alternatives to corporate food regimes and neoliberal conditions without directly challenging them (Clendenning et al., 2016). In other words, food justice efforts reflect a progressive political stance that attempts to create just food provisioning systems without addressing the foundational causes of food insecurity (Holt-Giménez, 2010).

Food sovereignty is a more politically radical approach that emerged from peasant farmer movements in the Global South like La Via Campesina (Holt-Giménez, 2010). Food sovereignty is the "right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007, p. 1). In contrast with food justice efforts, within the food sovereignty paradigm communities *are* the food systems decision-making table. Food sovereignty efforts sometimes conceptualize food provisioning within a gift economy. Potawatomi scholar-author Robin Kimmerer describes how the gift economy operates: "gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate" (2013, p. 25). The obligations are not financial, but social and reciprocal. A gift economy is a social community with "ongoing relationships" (2013, p. 26). While food sovereignty movements aim to disrupt the underlying structures that create conditions of persistent food insecurity, their radical nature is often challenged by the "omnipotence of the corporate food regime" that shapes both discourse and practice even of food sovereignty efforts (Clendenning et al., 2016, p. 175).

With the consequences of neoliberalism as the backdrop, this paper integrates two research efforts that aimed to better understand college student food insecurity at Western Washington University (WWU) in Washington State, U.S. We examine how students experience, navigate, and cope with food insecurity, and how programs to address food insecurity on our campus support these students. We hope that this research and critical reflection will inform efforts across other college and university campuses.

Methods

This paper draws from two related research efforts: a 2018 study of students experiencing food insecurity on our campus, and (2) a critical reflection drawing from the authors' own experiences supporting food-insecure students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors of this paper write from their positions as faculty member, staff members who run many of the programs described here, and recent alumni. We draw from the transformative research paradigm (Mertens, 2008), which focuses on the lived experiences of our research subjects and gives voice to these students, who often have limited power in the operations of colleges and universities. Our approach acknowledges that objectivity is not entirely possible nor desirable (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2017); instead, we aim to first understand the experiences of food-insecure students and then to critically examine support efforts in place, with the goal of using this information to enact change on our campus and at other colleges and universities.

In 2018, a subset of the authors conducted a qualitative research study aimed at better understanding student experience with food insecurity at WWU, a public university in Bellingham with 16,121 students (95% undergraduate, 5% Masters) in 2018/ 2019 (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2022a). As at other U.S. colleges and universities, WWU students face burdens of

neoliberalism: increased student loans, unaffordable local housing, and high rates of food insecurity. Even at a relatively low-cost public institution like WWU, where in-state tuition was roughly US$8K per year and out-of-state tuition US$23K per year in 2018/ 2019, students are likely to emerge with tremendous student debt. Graduating students in 2014/2015 faced an average debt of US$17,050; although 37% of students face no debt at all, the average for those with debt is US$29,479 (Krieg et al., 2015). In 2019 39% of students at WWU experienced low or very low levels of food security, higher than the average rate of food insecurity (33%) at other four-year institutions (Hope Center, 2020). Certain WWU groups have particularly high (>50%) rates of food insecurity: nonbinary students, queer students, Black students, Indigenous students, students who receive Pell grants, students with children, students who have been in foster care, and students with a learning disability (Table 1). While not included in Table 1, housing insecurity (49% of students) and homelessness (19% of students) also intersect with food insecurity challenges at WWU: 28% of students experience both food and housing insecurity and 11% of students experience both food insecurity and homelessness (Hope Center, 2020).

The 2018 study drew from the population of undergraduate students at Western Washington University who experience food insecurity as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Bickel et al., 2000). Participants were recruited through fliers posted around campus that provided a link for potential participants to take an online screening survey through Qualtrics. A convenience sample of

Table 1. Food Insecurity Rates at WWU by Category, 2019

	Category (n)	Food Insecurity (%)
Total		**44%**
Gender identity	Male (433)	35%
	Female (973)	39%
	Nonbinary/Third gender (68)	60%
	Prefers to self-describe (14)	64%
Transgender identity	Identifies as transgender (37)	41%
	Does not identify as transgender (1,399)	38%
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual or straight (888)	34%
	Gay or lesbian (80)	53%
	Bisexual (334)	46%
	Prefers to self-describe (101)	50%
Racial or ethnic background	White or Caucasian (1,261)	37%
	African American or Black (41)	54%
	Hispanic or Latinx (132)	49%
	American Indian or Alaskan Native (43)	42%
	Indigenous (23)	70%
	Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American (15)	20%
	Southeast Asian (67)	34%
	Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian (27)	33%
	Other Asian or Asian American (108)	41%
	Other (40)	38%
Student receives the Pell Grant	Yes (412)	51%
	No (980)	35%
Student has children	Yes (44)	55%
	No (1,497)	38%
Student has been in foster care	Yes (18)	56%
	No (1,437)	38%
Student has been in military	Yes (13)	46%
	No (1,441)	38%
Disability or medical condition	Learning disability (261)	52%
	Physical disability (79)	47%
	Chronic illness (220)	44%
	Psychological disorder (722)	47%
	Other disability or condition (34)	44%
	No disability or medical condition (582)	29%

Data source: Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2020, January). *2019 #RealCollege survey results: Institution report for Western Washington University.*

21 food-insecure students participated in 25–55-minute semi-structured interviews, building on a Texas study of food-insecure students (Henry, 2017); interview questions focused on causes of food insecurity, coping strategies, impacts, and support. We recorded and took notes during the interviews, and collected limited demographic information from participants via a paper survey administered after each interview. Following similar studies (Henry, 2017; Stebelton et al., 2020; Wells-Edwards, 2020), an emergent, qualitative research methodology (Bernard, 2017; Cresswell, 2014) with a small sample size allowed for more in-depth exploration of student experiences than would be achieved through a larger survey. All 21 participants were undergraduate students who scored either "very low" or "low" levels of food security, according to the USDA household scale (USDA Economic Research Service, 2022). The sample largely mirrors the demographics of undergraduate students at WWU (Table 2). Using the online application Dedoose, we applied both inductive and deductive qualitative research analysis techniques to the transcribed interviews, starting with an initial set of codes based on the interview questions and previous studies, then adding and adjusting in subsequent coding iterations (Bernard, 2017).

Table 2. Characteristics of Study Sample (*N*=21)

	Percentage of Study Sample (Frequency)	Percentage of WWU undergraduate students (2017) [a]
Gender		
Female	57% (12)	57%
Male	19% (6)	43%
Nonbinary/third gender	(2)	Not reported
Prefer not to answer	(1)	N/A
Racial identity		
White	71% (15)	72%
Asian/Asian American	10% (2)	11%
Hispanic/Latino	14% (3)	9%
Other	5% (1)	N/A
Housing		
I live by myself	29% (6)	Not reported
I live with family	5% (1)	Not reported
I live with roommates/friends	67% (14)	Not reported
I live off campus	76% (16)	88%
I live on campus	19% (4)	12%
I do not currently have a stable living situation	14% (3)	Not reported
Eligible for Federal Work-study funding		
Yes	29% (6)	
No	48% (10)	
Don't know	19% (4)	
Average Age	20.9	21.2

[a] Data source: Western Washington University Office of Survey Research. (2018). *Nutrition and food security–2017.* https://wp.WWU.edu/osr/2017/10/18/nutrition-and-food-security-spring-2017/

The WWU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board deemed this an exempt project, meaning that the study posed minimal risks to participants. Participants were provided a US$30-equivalent incentive and a list of on- and off-campus food assistance resources. We took standard measures to protect participant identities and strived to create a conversation space that respected their time and perspectives. We share their stories and experiences with respect and gratitude.

In addition to the 2018 study of students experiencing food insecurity on our campus, this paper includes critical reflections based on the authors' roles as practitioners who have been involved in efforts to address food insecurity at WWU during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022). We critically reflect on campus food security programs by drawing from our own practitioner experiences and observations and by examining institutional data. The typology of food security— access, justice, and sovereignty (Holt-Giménez,

2010)—provides a framework for understanding the promise and limitations of food programs on our campus. We approach this critical reflection exercise in the spirit of institutional learning, whereby this reflection will strengthen our own efforts to address food insecurity within our institution and ultimately impact institutional practices.

Characterizing Campus Need: Results from a 2018 Study of Food-Insecure Students

Key themes that emerged from analysis of the 2018 interviews include the causes of food insecurity, coping strategies, social connectivity and stigma, impacts on students' lives, and personal responsibility. Participants identified a range of reasons for experiencing food insecurity, underscoring ways in which the neoliberal environment in higher education has contributed to food security inequities *by virtue of being students*: students are financially squeezed by needing to work to pay tuition and minimize loans while also facing high housing costs and expensive on-campus food options. Many participants held jobs, some more than part time while being a full-time student. Over half (62%, 13) mentioned place-based factors impacting ability to buy food, such as rising living expenses and lack of job opportunities; as one woman stated, "I think just the cost of living…rent in Bellingham is just so expensive compared to the minimum wage." As this participant noted, rental prices in Bellingham are high: over the last decade the fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment has increased 47%. During the pandemic, rental increases ranged from 25% to 40% (Anderson, 2022).[2] Participants also identified the high price of dining meal plans and foods for purchase on campus as another challenge.

A preponderance of students interviewed (81%, 17) reported having little to no financial support of any kind from their families, suggesting *intersectional* inequities based on class. The data in Table 1 reinforce this finding: students receiving Pell Grants, an indicator of low socio-economic status, experience higher rates of food insecurity than those who are not Pell-eligible. Most participants mentioned an unforeseen life event or expense, such as unemployment, bills, personal or family health issues, or a stolen vehicle, as responsible for their food insecurity. One student described a traumatic experience in their life that led to their food insecurity: "My mom had a pretty serious stroke and she was really the breadwinner of the family and God, we spent a lot of money on the surgery because she had a condition that is pretty rare." Without sufficient and sustained social safety nets, students navigate these challenges and their resulting food insecurity individually.

To navigate food insecurity, participants skipped meals, made strategic purchasing and budget decisions, limited their types of foods, and turned to social support networks. Some participants skipped meals to "save up" meal swipes on their dining plan, while others used this as a regular strategy to conserve food consumption. When asked how they navigate having limited resources for food, one participant said: "Basically, like eating maybe once a day. Like I just got paid so I'm going to be able to eat for like at least like the next two weeks. But then the last two weeks are basically like you eat once a day or like you don't really eat." Notably, less than a quarter of participants used formalized food assistance, such as food banks or SNAP benefits, and less than a third of participants had little knowledge of SNAP requirements or locations of community food banks. Over two-thirds of interview participants indicated that they experience strong feelings of stigma associated with being food insecure, consistent with the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility. Students largely felt that they are not among those for whom food assistance was intended; one participant described the challenge of figuring out "where to draw the line … when is it okay for me to ask for help for things that are designed for people who are way worse off than me?"

Social networks play a complicated role in the lives of food-insecure students. Despite their reluc-

[2] Rising housing costs and relatively stagnant income levels contribute to high levels of food insecurity among nonstudent residents, as well.

tance to utilize formalized food assistance programs, two-thirds of students (62%, 13) identified communities and relationships that help them cope with food insecurity. For example, several participants were comfortable regularly asking friends or strangers to "swipe them in" to a campus dining services meal. Among the students who reported generally positive and nonjudgmental experiences friends and peers, many mentioned that their non–food-insecure peers shared information about resources both on- and off-campus, such as events with free foods, locations of food pantries, or getting meals covered in social situations. While social networks provide material and emotional support for students experiencing food insecurity, over half of the participants mentioned that food insecurity adversely affected their social life. As one participant said, "When other people want to go out, they want to do these things and I just don't have the time, the money or the energy to do a lot of those things."

Participants reported myriad negative impacts of food insecurity on their college experience: a diminished ability to focus, constant fatigue, needing longer to process information, and being easily distracted. These negative impacts represent the sacrifices food-insecure students make in different areas of their lives. As one participant stated, "It's like I'm having to make some pretty serious sacrifices … either I make sacrifices for my physical body or my social life." These sacrifices and negative impacts—emotional experiences with a common theme of personal responsibility —felt unavoidable for many students. For most participants, their feelings seemed to be driven by the assumption that they are supposed to be able to "make it" on their own, and to reflect values around personal responsibility. Under neoliberalism, where individual responsibility has supplanted collective care, guilt and shame are predictable responses to the "failure" of becoming food insecure (Swales et al., 2020). Their thoughts about accessing food assistance resources reflect this sense of personal responsibility; as one participant stated, "I don't really want to ask for [my parents'] help because I'm an adult and I feel like I can handle this on my own."

In many of these interviews, students expressed feelings of individual and institutional responsibility for food security, while ascribing moral value to taking personal responsibility. Most participants communicated the sense that they *should* be able to take care of themselves and that asking for or expecting help was a moral failing. This even extended to asking for help from family:

> Oh God, I could easily ask for help from my parents because they're really good about that. Like they want to make sure I'm happy up here and not like hating myself. … [They] don't want to know [their] kid's starving themselves. But I don't know. Also … rather than not eat for a while, I'd rather go into a little bit of credit card debt, shop somewhere else.

Students expressed the notion that making sure they have enough food to eat is part of being an adult. One student said "I don't really want to ask for their [my parents'] help because I'm an adult and I feel like I can handle this on my own." Another student said, "If I'm that hungry then I must be doing something wrong." Another offered the following reasoning:

> Well, it's not really the university's job to support students, even though I appreciate all the stuff they do for me. The university … is like a self-sustaining entity that is not obligated to provide for their clients. I am so very grateful [for] the direction universities have taken to reach out with all these awesome programs. … But expecting your university to provide for you isn't a good mindset.

The neoliberal worldview did not fully diminish student interest in structural causes of and solutions for food insecurity, however. Most students saw at least a minor role for WWU in improving food security, for example by offering more financial aid and work-study positions. Other participants focused on campus dining services and the food service provider, suggesting that the university offer cheaper and more flexible options that meet student dietary and financial needs. Several felt that the university could do more to support students by starting conversations around food insecurity to

lessen stigma, and they saw a need for increased advertisement of available resources.

Addressing Food Insecurity on Campus During COVID-19: Results from a Critical Reflection on our Efforts

Although many WWU students faced food insecurity before COVID-19 struck, the pandemic created increasingly dire circumstances in 2020 as food banks shut down, community food support temporarily closed, and common student jobs in the service and transportation sectors disappeared. Like many other colleges and universities, Western Washington University shifted to an online learning environment in March 2020 and mostly retained that format until fall 2021. WWU is a predominantly white institution (PWI) with limited faculty and staff representation and support for students of color. COVID-19 pandemic impacts amplified existing intersectional inequities on campus. In a summer 2020 survey, Black students reported that the pandemic exacerbated "the additional work of navigating a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), the daily work of responding to the historically white supremacist culture and systemic and institutionalized racism of Bellingham and Whatcom County, the individual and group work to deal with current racial trauma such as the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, the individual and group work to recover from generational racial trauma, and the intellectual and emotional labor of trying to reform the university" (Social Justice & Equity Committee, n.d., "Executive Summary of the Primary Research Projects," para. 2). BIPOC students' outrage about racism on and off-campus has led to a proliferation of committees, and little action (Social Justice & Equity Committee, n.d.).

Several authors of this paper have led efforts to address food insecurity on campus during COVID-19. While some institutional efforts to provide support for food-insecure students were put in place before the pandemic, the last two years instigated a proliferation of new support efforts that make modest inroads in addressing structural, *intersectional* inequities and to engage students in decision-making about support systems on campus. In the next section, we share critical reflections on our efforts to address student food insecurity through programs that address food security (access), food justice, and food sovereignty.

Addressing Food Security (Access)

The pandemic brought a new sense of urgency to the food security crisis on our campus, prompting the university to institute programs that provide immediate financial or food access to hungry students in the form of emergency funding, Swipe Out Hunger (described below), and several food pantries. Many of the students interviewed in 2018 reached a crisis point in food access when they confronted unanticipated expenses—when a particularly cold February led to an astronomical power bill, when a family member developed a terminal illness, when their car broke down. These types of unanticipated challenges became more commonplace during the pandemic. To better match student needs with available services, the University Financial Aid office now lists food, shelter, and campus resources and access to emergency funding (WWU Financial Aid Center, 2022), and the office has also given out several rounds of COVID-19 funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Securities (CARES) Act of 2020 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. As of November 2022, over US$25 million was disbursed to students at WWU in the waves of allotments and applications providing a safety net for students during the first two years of the pandemic (C. Capron, personal communication, February 20, 2022). This safety net is not set to continue after spring 2022, despite ongoing need.

Another student support program began in 2019, in collaboration with the campus food service provider, with WWU joining over 400 Swipe Out Hunger partners (Swipe Out Hunger, 2022). This program allows students to donate unused meals from their purchased meal plans for students who need food assistance. Several participants in the 2018 study reported asking friends and strangers to "swipe them in" to a meal at campus dining facilities; the Swipe Out Hunger Program lessens the stigma from this practice, but it does rely on some students having extra meals, which means that they spent substantially more on meals than was required for their own needs. Participa-

tion is routed through the financial aid office and may not be approved if it will negatively impact a student's financial aid package. In the first three years of the program, there have been over 450 meal requests—with some students requesting meals for multiple quarters (Swipe Out Hunger WWU, 2022).

Even prior to the pandemic, several departments around campus began creating informal food pantries for students. In 2019, the WWU student government, Associated Students (AS), advocated for a larger and more routinely stocked food pantry to be housed in the student union. The WWU Hub of Living Essentials (WHOLE) is a drop-in style pantry that operates during the same hours as the union. There is no sign-in process, and students can take any nonperishable food and personal care items they need. An AS staff member operates WHOLE, which largely functions on donations from the campus community and financial support through an annual online giving campaign. Because the food pantry is unlocked and open to all, the AS does not track how many students use this resource; this also reduces the stigma that many students in the 2018 study identified. On December 13, 2021, University President Randhawa sent a university-wide email stating that there would be a US$5,000 donation to the WHOLE in place of having a holiday party as had been tradition (Randhawa, S., personal communication, December 13, 2021). Raising student fees has also been suggested as a long-term funding strategy; in a 2019–2020 student exit survey, the majority of respondents indicated willingness to pay an additional US$5–15 in student fees to support a campus food pantry (Krieg et. al, 2015). While the President's donation and student willingness to pay more to support their fellow students may indicate compassion and generosity, they also reinforce the neoliberal notion that food insecurity is a problem to be solved individually or entrepreneurially, rather than institutionally. Students are taking the lead, however, in advocating for a system that is fully funded by the state of Washington; the 2022 Associated Students Legislative Agenda is pushing for funding, assessment, and legislative action to support basic need and college affordability actions, with equity central to its advocacy (Huffman & Handa, 2022). The AS demands a role for the state in supporting basic human needs—a shift away from neoliberal policies.

Additional food pantries were created in response to increased need during the pandemic. When the university moved teaching and learning online in early 2020, the WWU Outback Farm manager and student staff connected with local grocery surplus and set up informal, "guerilla" food distribution events to any students who needed provisions. The Outback team and student volunteers drove, loaded, carried, organized, and promoted these informal events on social media. Carloads of food disappeared within hours. These informal events were quickly brought under the auspices of the university, with a more formalized approach that was attentive to food and COVID-19 safety concerns.

A pilot "food pantry pop-up" event was coordinated with a campus-wide group of concerned WWU staff members referred to as the Student Needs Working Group. This walk-through event allowed students to show their campus ID and pick up pre-prepared bags of food. The contributions of the food service contractor were essential for leveraging their purchasing power, bagging items, storing supplies, and assisting with setup (Foster, 2020). Outback student staff worked to welcome recipients and to organize, load, carry, and hand out food bags. With the pilot considered a success, grant monies and other funding were secured to provide Friday food pantry pop-ups that served an average of 100 students each week. Vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, and omnivore options were available along with spices, recipes, and fresh produce from Outback Farm and local organic farms. These events were advertised in social media, by faculty members to students in their classes, in the campus online newspaper, and of course by word of mouth. Through these collaborations, the pop-up food pantry provided weekly support for students March 2020–June 2021.

These food security (access) programs—emergency funding, permanent and pop-up food pantries—provided vital material support for students during particularly precarious times, but they fell short in addressing student food needs and ended up distancing some students who might most need

these resources. For example, during the pandemic students using the food pantries on campus were not required to show or swipe their student ID, while the pop-up pantries did eventually require this to track grant monies used to purchase food. On the one hand, tracking student use of food pantries might allow for more targeted provision to meet student needs and may help the institution garner additional financial support (Ullevig et al., 2021); on the other hand, however, asking students to swipe their ID cards also had a demoralizing and stigmatizing effect on some recipients, and can sometimes count towards their financial aid allocation. One of the authors reflects on their experience as a student:

> I had recently left my former on-campus job where I had successfully created a clothing closet and food pantry. Unfortunately, once I left my position the University took over that space and began policing who had access, tracking usage, and labeling students who used the pantry as "at risk"… the University rarely sees food insecurity as "its problem" and pushes the responsibility of nourishing students onto community programs, local food banks, and, ultimately, on the students themselves. This not only puts strain on community programs but leads to students taking on extra work in order to keep themselves fed, and in some cases drop out of school altogether.

Programs like the food pantries that previously were created by students and staff to provide these crucial resources have sometimes been shut down or taken over by administrators.

While these efforts to address food access have provided vital basic needs to students during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also stop-gap measures with short-term funding sources that do not address the root political-economic conditions that create high rates of student food insecurity. Rather than creating communities of support, these programs provide food aid to students who must opt in as individuals; from our interviews we determine that some students feel undeserving of this sort of aid, even if they are in great need. These food access programs also share a top-down approach to decision-making and resource allocation; students are not getting opportunities to help shape these efforts. Because underrepresented students are not involved in creating and implementing these programs, these efforts do not always meet their needs, and in some cases students aren't even aware of these resources. For example, at a recent talking circle aimed at understanding underrepresented students' needs during the pandemic, a student noted that a Black at WWU group chat with peers "has been 100 times more helpful than anything that school has come up with, because it's just like a group of students offering support, and then telling each other about resources" (Social Justice & Equity Committee, n.d., "Team Lead: Brandon Joseph. Insights," para. 18), and shared, as an example, discovering the CARES Act funding through this chat rather than official notices. The Swipe Out Hunger program works only within the current system of a corporate dining contract. A student-led "Shred the Contract" club and campaign advocate for a dining system located outside the corporate contract system in order for students, especially BIPOC, to more easily access affordable, ethical, and culturally appropriate meals (Herlinger, 2020).

Addressing Food Justice

The COVID-19 pandemic also spurred programs that reflect a *food justice* approach by providing targeted support for former foster youth and unhoused youth. These efforts aim to address both inequities *by virtue of being students* and *intersectional* inequities on campus while still working within the dominant food system and higher education paradigms. These efforts incorporate some student voice and community building into their programs, however. In the 2019–2020 academic year, WWU received two grants to provide support to two student communities particularly vulnerable to food and housing insecurity, former foster youth and homeless youth.

WWU Success Scholars offers a community for new and transfer students who are former foster youth or unaccompanied homeless youth by hosting social and engagement workshops, providing an academic success coach, and providing information about campus food security and ongo-

ing basic needs support in program newsletters. WWU Success Scholars includes a student group that plans events like resource fairs, socials, and awareness week campaigns. Another state grant provides funding for WWU to be a pilot site for the "Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness" program, providing short-term emergency housing, showers, storage, technology assistance, and food assistance to students who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (Washington Student Achievement Council, 2022). In addition, a case management group meets weekly to provide systematic support for students referred for, and properly connected to, the services they need. From our 2018 study, we know that most food-insecure students lack a financial safety net. While both of these programs are funded by time-limited grants, they have the potential to help create safety nets that assist students from the foster care system or underrepresented students get the food and other resources they need to thrive. Unlike the food access efforts described in the previous section, these efforts begin to address *intersectional* inequities and provide alternative communities of support, to address inequities facing students *by virtue of being students*, without directly challenging the neoliberal conditions that create food insecurity. These programs struggle, however, to create sustained support, as they all operate on short-term funding.

Addressing Food Sovereignty

The food security (access) and food justice approaches that have been described reflect a dominant paradigm of "insecurity," "lack," and labeling students "at risk." The dominant approach is particularly concerning when working with students facing white supremacy, classism, and other forms of discrimination. Food sovereignty approaches flip these narratives and center the entitlement of individuals and communities to exercising agency over food systems (Holt-Giménez, 2010). By focusing on giving underrepresented students voice and power to make decisions about the campus food environment, programs with a food sovereignty approach provide a more radical alternative to the neoliberal university environment. On our campus, food sovereignty efforts are underway in two spaces: the Center for Education, Equity and Diversity and Outback Farm.

The Center for Education Equity and Diversity (CEED) is a resource center located in the WWU Woodring College of Education for students, staff, faculty, and community members who are interested in topics of educational equity, critical multicultural education, and Tribal sovereignty with an emphasis on social justice and critical consciousness cultivation. CEED hosts a welcoming and critical community/social space, provides justice-oriented professional development, operates a multicultural resource library, and nurtures critical consciousness and organizational change. Food sovereignty and justice have always been central to the work of CEED, currently the home of the WWU Native American Student Union (NASU); most of the food-oriented work the center does involves events hosted in collaboration with NASU and Indigenous farmers. The director and the coordinator of CEED are both Indigenous people with deep connections to NASU. The coordinator (one of the authors of this paper) is a former NASU student who helped establish CEED's current programs and events that are centered around food insecurity, and more specifically around providing NASU students, and other students of color, with access to fresh, organic, sustainable, ethically harvested traditional foods, as well as the opportunity to meet Indigenous activists and farmers and engage in land-based education.

As with many of the participants in the 2018 study, this community—in this case, one embodied in a physical space—is a crucial support system. One of the authors describes the impact of CEED center on their experiences as a student at WWU:

> When I first found CEED as a student, I was deeply feeling the effects of just existing within the institution. Like many students at WWU and beyond I was struggling to balance working an on-campus job, an off-campus job, school, and homework all while trying (and failing) to budget and maintain some semblance of a healthy schedule. My grades were slipping and I was feeling burned out. CEED welcomed me and provided crucial supports in the form of academic advising, mental health

> support, community connection, and most crucial of all-access to food. Any time someone walks into the CEED space there is always some form of food—from donated Cup O' Noodles to left-overs from catered CEED events.

The central tenets of CEED are the gift economy and food sovereignty. While we have outlined critical steps the university has taken to provide some resources, it is often within a transactional framework, with the expectation of things in return (e.g. tracking data, grant funding, publicity). CEED, however, provides resources to support and show love to the community.

The center started collecting food donations from faculty and staff, saving event leftovers for students, and organizing trips to Indigenous farms to ethically gather and harvest fresh produce. Director Dr. Kristen French, in partnership with her daughter Elizabeth Bragg of Long Hearing Farm, began donating fresh organic vegetables to CEED and NASU. Early in the pandemic, these consistent donations of fresh produce led to the formation of the program Gifts of Gratitude (GoG), which combines donations from faculty, staff, and the Office of Tribal Relations with produce from Long Hearing Farm to make grocery kits for students, for either pick-up or delivery services. Each kit contains produce, pantry essentials, snacks for busy students, self-care tools, and a pamphlet based on a quarterly theme. For example, one of the GoG kits was made in collaboration with Indigenous chef and activist Mariah Gladstone. It consisted of squash and wild greens from Long Hearing Farm, ground bison, traditionally grown and harvested wild rice from Red Lake Nation Foods, and traditionally harvested maple syrup from the Passamaquoddy Nation, with a recipe crafted for these ingredients by Mariah. There was a virtual cook-along event in which students who got a specific GoG kit received live instruction on how to prepare the dish, as well as a talk and Q&A session with Mariah. During the pandemic, Gifts of Gratitude was a way to protect student safety while still providing access to CEED resources. This program serves between 15 and 30 students per event and is funded by faculty, staff, and other community members. It builds on informal farmers market events with produce from Long Hearing Farm that were held prior to the pandemic.

Due to WWU and state laws regarding use of state resources to gift food and other items, all staff and faculty involved have to participate in a volunteer role. There is no secure funding or public university support for this program, despite demonstrated need. In spite of this, CEED hopes to secure the approval and long-term funding to expand Gifts of Gratitude into a formal food pantry that complements the existing network of pantries on campus and expands on the work the center is already doing, without succumbing to a transactional framework by remaining open to all students and providing particular support to BIPOC students. CEED is currently working to partner with local BIPOC farmers and fishermen to supply students with ethically harvested ingredients. The center also hopes to begin cultivating and harvesting traditional foods with NASU in the campus WWU Outback Farm.

Outback Farm serves as an experiential learning site and recreation area for WWU students as the campus organic gardens. It is the oldest program of the interdisciplinary Fairhaven College, started 50 years ago as a unique setting for hands-on development of student skills to develop self-resilience and professional opportunities. The farm features permaculture practices and is home to community gardens, chickens, crop production rows, beehives, mushroom cultivation, and a food forest. The farm provides ways for students to be involved in the food system from the ground up: they can grow their own food, determine what they want to eat, decide what is culturally appropriate for them, and get support. Students take classes, grow food, experiment, learn, reflect, advocate, create art installations, restore wetlands, and break bread together. The farm employs a team of students who collaboratively make decisions, implement ideas about growing food, and distribute produce to food-insecure students. Three year-round leadership coordinator positions (permaculture, operations, and engagement) work alongside four to five Federal Work-Study students and were joined in 2021 by an AmeriCorps

member dedicated to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

The pandemic pushed Outback Farm to further develop its focus on food sovereignty, in production and programming. Instead of following the common model of market gardening, which is transactional by nature, student farmers committed to growing food for other students to give away freely. The underlying value guiding the farm is that everyone has a right to food and that everyone has a right to know about where their food comes from and to participate in that system. All vegetables, herbs, fruit, nuts, eggs, honey, and mushrooms are distributed to WWU students facing food insecurity. The goal of Outback Farm is not only to put fresh, healthy food on students' plates but provide classes, workshops, and experiential opportunities so they not only improve their current diets and mitigate hunger, but also gain long-term skills and critical nutritional and cooking knowledge. The Outback encourages students to participate in the farm through classes, events, and work parties so that they feel connected to their food source and participate in growing food for each other as an expression of community and mutual aid. Farm produce is shared through events like the free farmer's market series that was conducted during 2021 and weekly deliveries to campus food pantries.

CEED particularly supports BIPOC students, who face disproportionately high levels of food insecurity (Table 1), thus addressing *intersectional* inequities. Both CEED and Outback Farm create space for students to exercise decision-making over their food environments—a key principle of food sovereignty. Instead of creating a sense of scarcity and shame, this new approach empowers and honors students no matter where they are on the food security spectrum. These spaces also create an environment where mutual aid and collective social support is the norm, countering the troubling individualism that was expressed in some of our interviews with food-insecure students. Both programs attempt to move beyond the transactional, charity approach of most food access and food justice projects in favor of a more relational approach. CEED has struggled to secure consistent institutional funding and support, in part because their efforts push back against the standard model of addressing food security. In other words, CEED—and to a certain extent Outback Farm—face challenges because they provide an alternative to some of the very conditions that create and exacerbate food insecurity in the first place: declining institutional support for students and individualization of responsibility.

Discussion

In this paper, we have examined college student food security under conditions of neoliberalism across two sets of inequities. The neoliberal condition creates particular challenges and inequities for college students, *by virtue of being students*. These conditions reinforce and amplify already-existing racial and economic disparities; these *intersectional* inequities exist within student populations. Many of the findings of our 2018 study reinforce other recent studies: participants cited the high cost of tuition and housing as key causes of food insecurity (Gaines et al., 2014; Henry, 2017), and many participants said that their food insecurity was precipitated by a tipping point or exogenous event, or by having multiple financial stressors (Henry, 2017). Similarly, as in other studies, our participants often skipped meals, utilized social resources, and made strategic purchasing decisions to cope with their food insecurity (Henry, 2017; Hughes et al., 2011).

In addition to validating findings from the few previous qualitative studies of food- insecure college students, the findings from our 2018 study revealed two new insights relevant to supporting food-insecure students. First, the findings indicate the paradoxical role of social networks and community for them. From our interviews, we know that students turn to social networks and their communities for help navigating food insecurity, which several WWU programs have successfully built upon. Reliance on social networks, however, does not discount the possibility for stigma and loneliness among food-insecure students: "The paradox here is that students do not experience food insecurity in isolation, but their hesitancy to speak openly about their struggles may lead to feelings of isolation" (Stebleton et al., 2020, p. 743). Avoiding social environments because of food insecurity has negative impacts on students. Sociali-

zation is demonstrably a vital part of the college experience. Strong social networks provide important mental and physical health support (Thoits, 2011), and improve retention, especially among BIPOC and first-generation students (DeBerard et al., 2004; Dennis et al., 2005).

Second, our findings reinforce the role of neoliberal conditions in higher education in producing food insecurity among students (inequities *by virtue of being students*); even as they are being financially supported for their education, the support often falls short of meeting their basic needs. In our study, some students respond to this by doubling down on their sense of personal responsibility for failing to provide for themselves. Duggan describes this as "social service functions" being "*privatized* through *personal responsibility* [emphases in original] as the proper functions of the state are narrowed, tax and wage costs in the economy are cut, and more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family" (2012, pp. 15–16). These processes help explain why students in our study do not tend to be critical of their educational institution or the state writ large, as they have been conditioned to view otherwise.

In our critical reflection as practitioners at WWU, we examined programs and efforts to address food security (emergency aid, permanent and pop-up food pantries), food justice (programs for former foster and unhoused youth), and food sovereignty (Outback Farm and CEED). While the food security (access) efforts undertaken on our campus provide material support for students in need, they are just scratching the surface of need. Food pantries across campus regularly run empty, and the food pop-ups have not been offered since Fall 2021, when students returned to campus. The COVID-19 pandemic brought attention and resources to this issue, but many funding sources to support food pantries and emergency aid are disappearing as the pandemic subsides. On our campus, students have had limited voice in these programs, which has led to practices (including tracking through ID swipes) that serve to alienate the very students who most need food assistance. Ultimately, these programs do not address the long-term financial drain of earning a university degree, nor the individualization of responsibility that is characteristic of contemporary neoliberal society. The programs that fit the food justice category offer some tentative support for students experiencing *intersectional inequities*; however, they have limited funding and reach. And none of these programs aim to support and engage with groups who experience the highest rates of food insecurity on our campus: BIPOC students, queer students, and students with disabilities (Table 1).

The programs that fall into the food sovereignty category address the *intersectional inequities* of food insecurity at WWU and provide the kind of community-building approach that this study indicates is needed. Outback Farm and CEED also differ from the other programs in that they do not limit their offers of food and community to those with a demonstrated need and instead are open to all. This distinction emphasizes dignity and offers an important antidote to the individualized, transactional approaches of typical campus programs. Our experiences with CEED and Outback Farm point to the potential of community building and mutual aid as part of addressing hunger. We offer these as examples of programs and efforts that could be duplicated across university spaces as a supplement to institutionalized support efforts.

While the results from the 2018 study and our critical reflection provide important insights, the findings are limited by the small sample size and our limited positionality in critical reflection. While future research might be helpful to better understand the experiences and needs of students who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, listening sessions and surveys conducted by our colleagues (Social Justice & Equity, 2020) nevertheless suggest that BIPOC students and other students with marginalized identities urge faculty, staff, and administrators to take action to funnel resources toward direct support of students. At least on our campus, we have some models and insights about approaches that might better support students. Now our task is to give students and programs the needed resources they need, while building opportunities for critical feedback and reflection.

Conclusion

Our findings also point to broader political-economic challenges. Efforts to address food inse-

curity are band aids unless they include a comprehensive consideration of total educational costs borne by students, including housing costs. This is especially true for institutions where most students live off-campus and housing costs are high. Similarly, universities and colleges can develop strategies to allow affordable and convenient food on campus to ensure that students do not skip meals, as many participants did. At WWU, students living on campus are generally required to purchase a meal plan; a typical meal plan providing 95 meals (and US$331 in "dining dollars") over the 11-week quarter equates to US$9.50 per meal (WWU Dining, 2020). Students who live off-campus and just want an occasional meal on campus pay more per meal: US$15.05 for dinner, though students receive a modest 10% discount if meals are purchased through a Viking Dollars program (WWU Dining Services, 2022). Food options on campus are limited by a contract granting a corporate food service provider monopoly control over campus dining options, keeping small, less expensive eateries or food trucks off campus (WWU, 2019). Students on this campus are not alone in demanding more just dining services; the nationwide network Uprooted & Rising supports food sovereignty efforts at colleges and universities (Uprooted & Rising, 2022). Expanding financial aid to reflect high housing costs, facilitating student co-housing and dining cooperatives, and structuring dining contracts to allow flexibility are some examples of how students might be better supported within existing political-economic structures.

What is also needed is a set of more radical alternatives for supporting food-insecure students, especially from underrepresented identities. The food sovereignty efforts undertaken by CEED and Outback Farm provide examples. Outback Farm and CEED's Gifts of Gratitude program show how it is possible to create student-led communities of care where food provisioning is relational, where students connect with the broader food system and gain competency in producing their own food. There are also opportunities for more a radical response to the treadmill of debt and overwork that many students face: debt resistance. For example, the Debt Collective's "Can't Pay! Won't Pay! Student Debt Strike" encourages those who are able to do so to pay $0 a month on student loans in protest of the inhumane condition of debt (Debt Collective, 2022). Student experiences are both unique and universal: these struggles are linked to broader community struggles with housing and food insecurity. In our own community, the COVID-19 pandemic instigated the creation of multiple mutual aid groups aimed at providing food, childcare, and rides for city residents. In late 2020 and early 2021, activists and unhoused community members set up an encampment in front of city hall to give visibility and create space for community support in the form of organized meals and medical care.[3] To fully address the food insecurity crisis on college and university campuses, these bottom-up food sovereignty programs must be coupled with comprehensive rethinking of the political-economic challenges that communities face in this neoliberal moment.

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