

The Rise of Food Insecure Students during the COVID-19 Crisis

7/31/2020

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Key Points

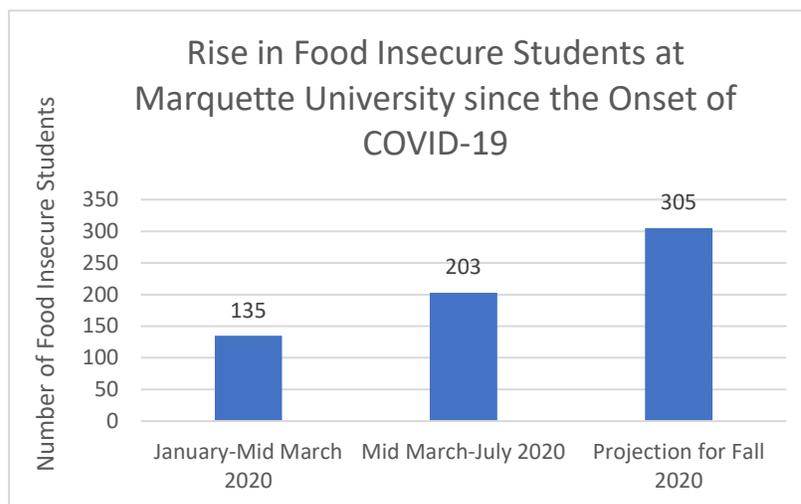
- **Food insecurity among school-aged children in America continues to grow during the COVID-19 crisis.**
- **The number of food insecure college students at Marquette University has markedly increased since the onset of COVID-19.**
- **The number of food insecure college students is likely to increase further in the Fall 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.**

Students from low-income families are not naïve to food insecurity. It has impacted many of their lives from the moment they were born. The food distribution system in place was not designed to adequately combat food insecurity in America; however, some educational systems have taken steps to provide these students with one to two meals per day³. Since the onset of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures, however, the number of food insecure children in America is projected to increase from 11 million to 18 million². Online education already presents challenges to students and teachers alike, but food insecurity brings about additional challenges for some students to overcome. When the essential need for nutritious, accessible food is not met, a significant drop in academic performance in addition to physical and mental health deficits can be found in these students^{4,6}.

Food insecurity among students is not limited to those in grades K-12. Data from a 2018 campus survey suggested that 20% of students at Marquette University experience food insecurity sometime during their years on campus⁵. To address this crisis, the Backpack Program began as a free, confidential service to assist students in receiving basic needs such as groceries and personal hygiene products. Prior to COVID-19, the Backpack Program reported serving 135 students in the past academic year (August 2019-March 2020). From March 2020 to July 2020 (1/3 the time of the previous year), that number increased by 50% to 203 students and is continually growing [Figure 1]. *That is a net gain of 68 students during the COVID-19 crisis, many due to students losing jobs or paid internships*¹. This increase in student need also comes at an increased financial cost as the Backpack Program spends approximately \$10-20 on dry goods food and fresh produce per student each week [Figure 2]. This cost is equivalent to one week of specialty coffee drinks from a coffee shop, so consider the impact that could be made if some or all of those funds were donated instead.

With many more schools opting for online education in the fall and students continuing to be out of job opportunities, the number of food insecure students will continue to grow here in America. How can you help? Consider donating to your local food pantry, school lunch program, or even [Marquette's Backpack Program](#) so that these students can meet their daily needs.

Figure 1:



Data taken from the Marquette Backpack Program. The projected increase for Fall 2020 was determined to be the same 50% increase that was seen from mid-March to July. With an increasing number of students returning to campus, the need for the Backpack Program is expected to continuously grow.

Figure 2:



Marquette Backpack Program stock room featuring a grocery bag bundle (“backpack”) of dry goods and fresh produce to be given out to a student participant.

References

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5. Siddiqui, N. "Food Insecurity Among Marquette Students." *Marquette University*. 2018. <https://www.marquette.edu/student-affairs/documents/food-insecurity-campus-report.pdf>
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