



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

One Ashburton Place, Room 1401
Boston, MA 02108-1696

TEL (617) 994-6950
FAX (617) 727-0955
WEB www.mass.edu

Richard M. Freeland, *Commissioner*
Charles F. Desmond, *Chairman*
Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

UMass, State Universities, Community College Campuses Scale Up Efforts to Help Hungry Students

Faculty, Staff Report Growing Levels of Food Insecurity on Campus, Cite Impact on Student Academic Performance

Contact: Katy Abel
MA Department of Higher Education
[\(617\) 994-6932](tel:(617)994-6932)
kabel@bhe.mass.edu

BOSTON – Tuesday, November 25, 2014 -- Nineteen of Massachusetts' 29 public college and university campuses have opened food pantries or have begun to distribute food to hungry students who in some cases are choosing between paying educational expenses and buying food, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) reported today.

A recent informal survey of statewide student support services conducted by the DHE shows that the number of campus-based food pantries, including those operated by student organizations or clubs, has grown to twelve in recent years, with seven additional campuses providing a variety of services to address food insecurity, such as vouchers for cafeteria meals and food drives to aid students and their families.

"There is a long history of Massachusetts public college and university students being civically engaged in hunger relief efforts in their communities, especially during the holiday season," said Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner of Higher Education. "Now we see that growing numbers of students themselves are in need of assistance. This has troubling implications, especially at a time when we are redoubling our efforts to boost graduation rates and fill the so-called 'talent pipeline.' We cannot expect students to perform well in their studies and to graduate in a timely fashion if they are going hungry."

At present **UMass Boston** and **UMass Lowell** have food pantries located on campus. Students at **UMass Dartmouth** have announced plans to open a pantry at a church located near campus, while staff at **UMass Amherst** are exploring the possibility of offering food assistance to students at an off-campus site. Four of the nine state universities - **Bridgewater, Framingham, Salem and Worcester State**, along with twelve of the state's 15 community colleges - operate pantries, mobile food markets or distribute vouchers for meals and snacks.

The Department plans to work with staff from **MassBay Community College**, which is collecting food for a holiday food bank on campus, to create a comprehensive survey instrument to track reports of food insecurity among students across the state.

"The DHE's scan of food insecurity issues at our public campuses is sobering but not surprising," said Representative Tom Sannicandro (D-Ashland), Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Higher Education. "We currently rank 46th in the nation in providing need-based financial aid to students, which is why I support the [recent recommendations](#) of the Higher Education Finance Commission including a proposed increase in funding for the MASSGrant program to assist Massachusetts' neediest students."

Sannicandro noted that the value of a MASSGrant (as a percentage share of the average tuition and fees at the state's public colleges and universities) has dropped from 80% in 1988 to just 9% today.

At **North Shore Community College (NSCC)**, staff became aware of the need for food distribution "after hunger-related fainting incidents on campus," according to Tatiana Burgos Espinal, NSCC's Director of Development. "The NSCC Foundation moved quickly to make privately raised funds available to pay for cafeteria vouchers that were then extended to students as a short term solution."

"The need to create a pantry at **Springfield Technical Community College (STCC)** was motivated by the overwhelming reports of instances where faculty and staff were 'stepping up' to buy food for their hungry students," said Roosevelt Charles, Direct of Access & Student Success, at STCC. "We are in conversations with a local food bank to learn how best to 'scale-up' and sustain our pantry efforts."

At **Bridgewater State University**, faculty and student volunteers have organized a food bank in the student union building, where the number of students seeking food doubled from September to October.

The 2014 *Hunger in America* survey results for eastern Massachusetts, released by The Greater Boston Food Bank, showed that 11% of adult clients receiving food supplies at community pantries and distribution centers identified as either full-time or part-time college students. Additionally, 30% of client households reported that in the past 12 months they had chosen between meeting post-secondary educational expenses and paying for food.

"We are seeing greater numbers of students in need of food assistance," said Kendra Bird, The Greater Boston Food Bank's Direction of Distribution Services and Nutrition. "This is a population we have begun to track more closely."

"I am very thankful to the faculty, students and staff at our campuses, and to community partners who are helping to address the issue of food insecurity," Freeland said. "All of our students deserve the chance to develop critical thinking skills and talents to succeed in Massachusetts' knowledge-based economy. It's vital that their nutritional needs, as well as their academic needs, are properly met."

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