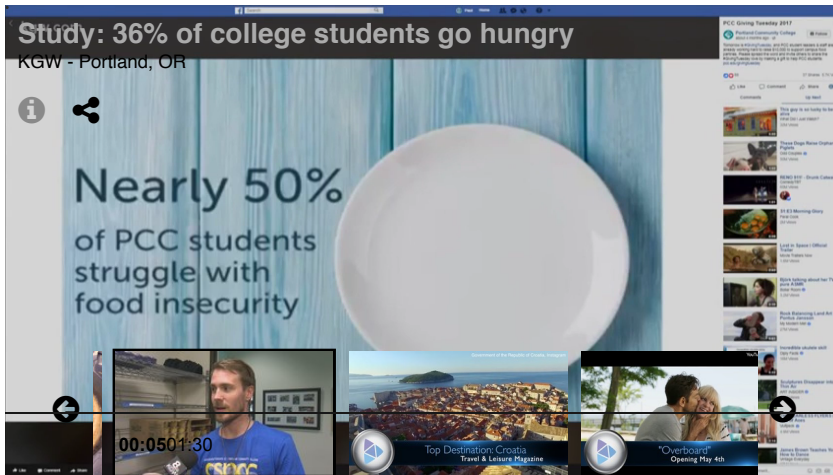


# Starvation issues in universities? The real college problem is obesity.

James Bovard, Opinion columnist Published 7:00 a.m. ET April 11, 2018 | Updated 1:56 p.m. ET April 11, 2018



*A new report claims college students are 'food insecure' and starving. But better research shows they're overweight and lazy.*



(Photo: Nati Hamik, AP)

Starvation might be stalking among college students, according to shocking headlines in *Newsweek* (<http://www.newsweek.com/are-students-starving-study-finds-widespread-hunger-us-colleges-871268>) and elsewhere, and *The Washington Post* warns of "The hidden crisis on college campuses (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/04/03/the-hidden-crisis-on-college-campus-36-percent-of-students-dont-have-enough-to-eat/>)."

In reality, last week's report from Temple University and Wisconsin HOPE Lab (<http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>) is typical of the baloney that spawns policy hysteria nowadays.

Temple University/HOPE researchers assert that 36% of four-year college students and 42% of community college students are "food insecure" — a vaporous term beloved by pro-welfare advocates.

This analysis is modeled on the Department of Agriculture's annual Food Security survey. USDA is emphatic that its survey does not measure hunger (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>), but that neonsize warning sign was ignored by this study (titled "Still Hungry and Homeless in College").

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Temple/HOPE respondents were asked (<http://www.wihopelab.com/publications/Basic-Needs-Insecurity-College-Students.pdf>) questions such as whether they feared "food would run out before I got money to buy more," or "Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?" Redefining hunger as abstaining from second servings makes for a push-button crisis.



The study asserts that 26% of students with a college meal plan are “food insecure.” Did they oversleep and miss breakfast?

Half the respondents who received Pell grants (\$26.6 billion for 7 million low-income students in 2016 (<https://trends.collegeboard.org/student-aid/figures-tables/pell-grants-total-expenditures-maximum-and-average-grant-and-number-recipients-over-time>)) were labeled “food insecure.”

This study offers no clues on what happened to that largesse — or to the other \$100 billion in federal assistance ([https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/FY\\_2016\\_Annual\\_Report\\_508.pdf](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/FY_2016_Annual_Report_508.pdf)) provided to college students in 2016. Apparently, no matter how many handouts government provides, students still cannot be expected or trusted to feed themselves.

Some findings should have triggered the “dumpster data” alarm. Temple/HOPE “found that homosexual students were at much greater risk of basic needs insecurity than heterosexual students, but that bisexual students were at the highest risk (<http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>.” More than 10% of the respondents from four-year colleges labeled themselves “bisexual,” and half of bisexual students allegedly go hungry.

Are they too busy cavorting with both genders to eat, or what? If there were a national conspiracy to starve bisexuals, we would’ve heard about it before now.

College students are supposedly three times more likely to be “food insecure” (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=84972>) than other Americans. But the survey response rate was less than 10%, and responders were self-selected and enticed by the chance to win \$100 prizes for spending a few minutes filling out an online form.

Survey results were also skewed because females were far more likely to respond than males (70% vs. 27% of respondents, with 3% “non-binary”), and they are more “food insecure” than male students (37% vs. 28%). But female college students spend an average of 10 hours a day on their cellphones (<https://www.presselegram.com/2014/09/29/study-college-students-addicted-to-cellphones/>), according to a 2014 study. Maybe turn off the phone and microwave some oatmeal?

In lieu of this statistical charade, far more solid data exist on college students’ health and diets. Rather than being perpetually famished, 70% of college students gain weight (<http://www.health.com/family/college-gain-weight>) during their undergrad years.

A 2017 Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior (<http://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046%2816%2930872-7/pdf>) report found that during four years of college, the percentage of students overweight or obese rose from 23% to 41% — a 78% increase.

And few students are svelte when they arrived on campus: High school students were 30 times more likely (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15601984>) to be overweight than underweight, according to a study published in *Obesity Research*.

It was only seven years ago that USA TODAY heralded a new campaign: “Fighting the obesity epidemic on college campuses (<http://college.usatoday.com/2011/11/07/fighting-the-obesity-epidemic-on-college-campus/>).”

**More:** Diversity is good for business, not just social justice, and colleges should say so (</story/opinion/2018/02/26/diversity-good-business-not-just-social-justice-colleges-should-say-so-ronald-crutcher-column/354670002/>)

**POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media** (<http://usatoday.com/policing/>)

The Temple/HOPE report fails to note that college nowadays is practically a part-time diversion even for full-time students. Students spend far less time studying than their predecessors — down from 24 hours a week in 1961 to 14 hours in 2010 (<http://www.aei.org/publication/leisure-college-usa/>).

*The Post* noted in 2012 that “the typical student today spends 27 hours a week in study and class time ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/is-college-too-easy-as-study-time-falls-debate-rises/2012/05/21/gIQA7uUgU\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/is-college-too-easy-as-study-time-falls-debate-rises/2012/05/21/gIQA7uUgU_story.html)), roughly the same time commitment expected of students in a modern full-day kindergarten.” But expecting students to use free time to get a job to feed themselves is beyond the pale.

Instead, the only viable solution is a new federal assistance program. A *Post* article on the Temple/HOPE study noted that “advocates have called on the federal government (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/04/03/the-hidden-crisis-on-college-campuses-36-percent-of-students-dont-have-enough-to-eat/>) to provide free or reduced-cost meals at colleges, as is already done in primary and secondary schools.” So politicians should treat adults like helpless children, no matter how old they become or how much aid they already receive?

Besides, federal school meal programs have been perpetual dietary disasters, deluging kids with excessive sugar and fat and spawning obesity (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/health/research/08childhood.html>) across the land.

Many colleges would be wise to offer lower-price meal plans in lieu of the five-star buffets they serve. But a national goal of “no college kid hungry” would bloat more students at a time when obesity wreaks more havoc than a few missed meals. In the long run, obliterating individuals’ responsibility for feeding themselves is the worst possible dietary outcome.

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