Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs Engage Assessment

by

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Abstract

To address basic needs insecurity at ten, four-year Alabama universities, a state-wide, six-phase coalition was mobilized to decrease student-reported food insecurity by increasing collaborative efforts across campuses and communities. The Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs Engage Assessment aimed to assess engagement and collaborative efforts within the state-wide Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs (ACCBN).

Each university coalition champion completed a survey via Qualtrics on coalition participants, structures, processes, development, and relationships using previously validated measures. To follow-up, researchers conducted interviews to collect qualitative data on areas of improvement and strength within the coalition, expertise of coalition partners, challenges of coalition formation, meeting structures, and available resources and education.

Results of the study showed the value of university administration involvement and recruitment strategies of pre-existing services and activities. These results offer a starting point for other coalitions that may seek to address these insecurities at institutions of higher education.

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Introduction

Basic needs insecurities

Maslow's hierarchy of needs outlines a five-sequence hierarchy to human self-actualization that builds upon a foundation of physiological needs, such as food, shelter, and rest (Maslow, 1943). It is when those basic, physiological needs are unmet that an individual is less likely to achieve self-satisfaction and actualization. When access to these needs are threatened, an individual may expect poorer health outcomes and a diminished well-being with prolonged impacts.

With the rising costs of higher education, students at colleges and universities in the United States have found themselves unable to have a productive experience due to the impact of basic needs insecurity, including food and housing insecurity (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). In recent years, the prevalence and outcomes of basic needs insecurity have been documented among college students (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). Experts have called upon institutions of higher education, governments, and professionals to address basic needs insecurity in order to decrease basic needs insecurity prevalence and build a system that supports academic progress (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2015).

Food insecurity

Food security is defined as "consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living"; the term 'food insecurity' encompasses households or individuals that do not have adequate, consistent access to food (Anderson, 1990; Coleman-Jensen, 2017, summary page). Economic research reports from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimate 15.6 million American households (12.3%) have been food insecure at some point or

have had difficulty providing adequate food to all members of the household (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, & Singh, 2017).

Moreover, the prevalence of food insecurity among college students is much higher compared to the incidence within the general population (Goldrick-Rab Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). In 2018, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates between nine to fifty percent of college students are food insecure. (United States GAO, 2018). Additionally, the GAO noted that risk for food insecurity is higher for individuals with a disability, first generation students, former foster youth, individuals with homelessness/housing insecurity, low-income families, single parent status, and individuals receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

Prevalence of food insecurity among college students. In 2009, Chaparro, Zaghloul, Holck, and Dobbs detailed prevalence of food insecurity among college students in Hawai'i in which 21% and 24% of non-freshmen college students were food insecure or at risk of being food insecure, respectively. The results of this study indicated that the prevalence of food insecurity was double that of the general population in the area. To follow-up this study, researchers at a mid-sized, rural university in Oregon found a preponderance of the student population (59%) were food insecure (Patton-López, López-Cevallos, Cancel-Tirado, & Vazquez, 2014). In a recent systemic review, Nazmi, et al (2018) found 43.5% in a sample of college students (N=52,085) met criteria for food insecurity. However, the prevalence of food insecurity among college students is not unique to the United States (US). In a study of Australian college students, 12.7-46.7% reported being food insecure on a one-item survey (Hughes, Serbebryanikova, Donaldson, & Leveritt, 2011). Much like the prevalence reported by

Chaparro et al (2009), the prevalence of food insecurity was double when compared to the general population.

Assessment of food insecurity

In 1997, the USDA released the Guide to Implementing the Core Food Security Module that aimed to evaluate and measure food insecurity in the US. In 2000, it was revised to refine the surveys for standardized use and consistency (Bickel, Nord, Price, Hamilton, & Cook, 2000). The updated Core Module was designed to capture prevalence and severity of food insecurity by three, validated questionnaires, 18-item, 10-item, and 6-item surveys. The surveys delineate between two main categories (food security and food insecurity) that each have two sub-categories (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). The categories are explained as follows:

Food security

a. High food security is defined as having no issues related to access of food, including no limitations to obtain food.
b. Marginal food security indicates anxiety related to adequacy of food but does not acknowledge a change to overall diet or intake of food.

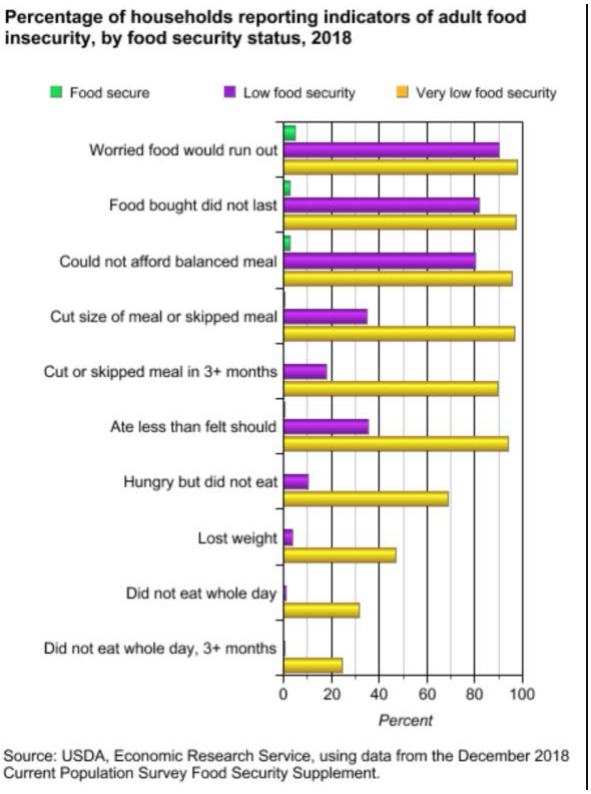
Food insecurity (individuals in these categories are labeled as food insecure)

a. Low food security identifies a decrease in quality of diet and nutritional content but not a decrease in quantity of food or adequacy.
b. Very low food security outlines a decrease in quality and quantity of food and that may result in hunger, a physiological consequence of malnutrition and inadequacy of food intake. Additionally, it is characterized by various disruptions in food intake patterns.

Indicators of food insecurity, include anxiety concerning ability to obtain adequate amounts of food for the household; inadequate quality or quantity of food for various members of the household; running out of food without the ability to obtain or purchase more; changes in food intake patterns; reduction in quality of food; occurrence of consequences related to food insufficiency such as hunger, malnutrition, and weight loss (Bickel, Nord, Price, Hamilton, & Cook, 2000, p. 8).

Figure 1

Percentage of households reporting indicators of adult food insecurity, by food security status, 2018



Note. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019)

Housing Insecurity

Unlike food insecurity, housing insecurity is poorly defined and lacks a standard measure. Experts have called for a new, broader definition to provide appropriate and accurate estimations which can inform evidence-based policy and government assistance programs, utilizing the USDA's Core Food Security Module as a model (Leopold, Cunningham, Posey, & Manuel, 2016; Bickel, Nord, Price, Hamilton, & Cook, 2000). Cox et al. (2017) offered a definition of housing insecurity as

> "Limited or uncertain availability of stable, safe, adequate, and affordable housing and neighborhoods; limited or uncertain access to stable, safe, adequate, and affordable housing and neighborhoods; or the inability to acquire stable, safe, adequate, and affordable housing and neighborhoods in socially acceptable ways." (p. 7)

A qualitative study of 51 individuals helped to outline housing insecurity as a "multidimensional construct" that is better described on a continuum which is outlined by the level of threat to the stability of housing (Frederick, Chwalek, Hughes, Karabanow, Kidd, 2014, p. 965). Additionally, the cost burden of living expenses was offered as a possible method of measuring housing security. A household may be defined as 'cost burdened' if living expenses account for more than 30% of their income or 'very cost burdened' if living expenses cost 50% or more of the household income (Bailey, Cook, Ettinger, Casey, Chilton, Coleman, et al, 2015). Stone (2006) argues money left over after paying rent and utilities, also known as "residential income" should be measured. Additionally, Cox, Rodnyansky, Henwood, & Wensel (2017) describes seven dimensions of homelessness, including "housing stability, housing affordability, housing quality, housing safety, neighborhood safety, neighborhood quality, and homelessness" (p. 1).

Prevalence of Housing Insecurity. Due to the lack of a standardized definition, it is difficult to capture or understand the prevalence of housing insecurity. To identify housing insecurity, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development utilizes the American Housing Survey for Housing Quality to identify inadequate housing (Eggers & Moumen, 2013).

In the lone national estimate of homelessness or housing insecurity among undergraduates, 56,000 students reported they were homeless on the 2013 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This incidence marks an increase from 2009 when 47,200 undergraduate students reported being homeless (National Association for Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2014). Trawver & Hedwig (2019) reported 30% of a sample of undergraduate students (N=193) reported being uncertain if they would be able to pay rent and 8.3% had experienced homelessness since being in college. Tsui, et al (2011) found 41.7% of undergraduate students identified as housing insecure in the past year, including 1.2% reported being homeless, 10.5% noted living in public housing, and 5.5% received a rental supplement through a federal or local assistance program.

Competing Costs of College and Assistance

In recent literature, experts have speculated the causes of increased basic needs insecurity among college students, including increasing costs of tuition, competing costs of college, and decreasing buying power of financial assistance or grants. After adjustment for inflation, the annual cost of undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions has risen by 31 percent from the 2006-2007 academic year to the 2016-2017 academic year, which totals to an estimate of $17,237 per academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Furthermore, the number of undergraduates in households that fall at or below the federal poverty line (130%) has risen from 28 percent in 1996 to 39 percent in 2016 (Radwin,

Conzelmann, Nunnery, et al, 2018). While financial aid is intended to cover some or all of the costs of a college education, there is evidence that it is not successful in meeting that goal as students could accrue costs that total to a large amount of a families' total income (Goldrick-Rab & Kendall, 2014). Therefore, the increasing costs of obtaining a college degree may account for the rising prevalence of food and housing insecurity.

In 1965, The Title IV of Higher Education Act created three types of assistance to alleviate barriers related to costs of a college education. The three types of assistance based on student financial need included William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Federal Direct Loan), the Federal Pell Grant (Pell Grant), and the Federal Work-Study Program). Additionally, to supplement federal assistance, state appropriations supply funds for operating expenses and grant proposals to public colleges while social assistance programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, offer food vouchers for individuals that meet financial need criteria determined by individual states (GAO report, 2018; SNAP eligibility, 2019).

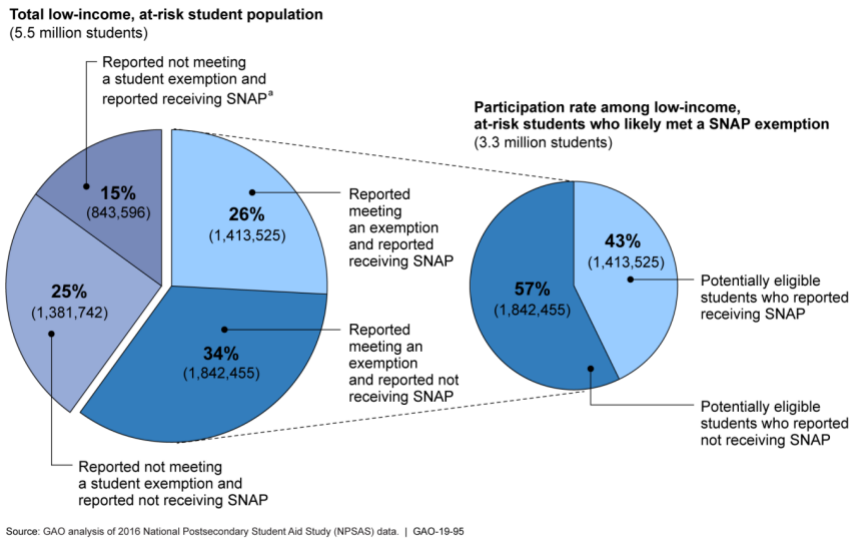
In the 2015-2016 academic year, 72 percent of students received some type of financial aid including; grants, student loans, work-study programs, federal veterans' education benefits, and Federal Direct PLUS loans(GAO report, 2018; Radwin, et al, 2018). Though these various forms of assistance are intended to remove financial burden, there is evidence of increased student debt loan, decreased buying power of the Federal Pell Grant, and decreased access to social assistance programs for students (Baum, Ma, Pender, et al, 2017, Friedman, 2018; Food Stamp Act Amendments, 1980).

The number of students utilizing Federal Pell Grants has increased from 23% in 1999-2000 to 40% in 2015-2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). It is estimated that Federal Pell Grants covered most costs of attendance in the 1990s compared to current estimates that it

may cover approximately one-third the cost of tuition and room and board fees. (Baum, Ma, Pender, et al., 2017). Therefore, students utilizing Federal Pell Grants may seek other ways of financial assistance, including student loans. In 2018, Friedman reported $1.5 trillion in outstanding student loans shared among 44 million individuals. To alleviate costs, students may also seek employment; however, it is reported that students often work long hours at low-wage jobs without benefits, paid leave, or other flexibilities (Bozick, 2007; Ray, Sanes, & Schmitt, 2013). Furthermore, one of the most common reasons for dropping out of college is the need to work for pay (Johnson & Rochkind, 2009). The burden of expenses to obtain a college education can be compounded by the difficulties in navigating assistance programs, including SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, benefits. SNAP provides food vouchers for nutritious foods to low-income individuals and households. Among the SNAP eligible students with at least one risk factor for food insecurity, 57% did not report utilizing the program (3.3 million students). According to the National #RealCollege Survey, 20% of food insecure students reported receiving SNAP benefits (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019)

Figure 2

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Among Low-Income College Students At-Risk of Food Insecurity in 2016 (GAO, 2018).



Note. (GAO, 2018)

In 1980, the Food Stamp Act Amendments mandated that college students could not obtain SNAP benefits if they received financial assistance from their parents or guardians (Food Stamp Act Amendments of 1980, 1980; GAO report, 2018). The law states that full-time students can be exempt from the restriction if they meet a set of criteria outlined in the amendment. However, the list of exemptions can also be problematic as students are required to meet certain age requirements, work a minimum of 20 hours per week at paid employment, participate in a state or federally financed work-study program, and receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits (TANF) (GAO, 2018). If the student meets exemption requirements, he or she is required to submit a paper application with information on household earnings and assets. After submitting the application, the student would be interviewed to obtain information on needs and eligibility (GAO, 2018). With these rigorous and intrusive exemption

requirements, many professionals are advocating for changes to the system to allow electronic SNAP applications, utilize collaborative data to identify eligible students, and allow college enrollment to count for the work requirement (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2015).

Impact of Basic Needs Insecurity

It is well established that basic needs insecurity (food insecurity and housing insecurity) are linked to fair/poor physical health, and mental health outcomes (Farahbakhsh, et al., 2017; Knol, Robb, & Wood, 2017; Martinez, Grandner, Nazmi, Canedo, & Ritchie, 2019). The possible mechanisms for poorer health outcomes among individuals with basic needs insecurity has been explored. One possible mechanism is through a lower-quality diet that is higher in energy-dense foods like fat and sugar, while being lower in nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, milk/milk products, and grains (Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005; Gallegos, Ramsey, & Ong, 2014; Mello et al, 2010). Due to low intake of nutrient-dense foods, a greater likelihood of low serum nutrients has been observed, including; calcium, vitamin E, vitamin A, and carotenoids (Bhattacharya, Currie, & Haider, 2004; Dixon, Winkleby, & Radimer, 2001; Gundersen & Ziliah, 2015).

Additionally, basic needs insecurity has been linked to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia (Bhattacharya, Currie, & Haider, 2004; Holben, 2010; Martinez, Grandner, Nazmi, Canedo, Ritchie, 2019; Gunderson & Ziliak, 2015; Pan, Sherry, Njai, & Blanck, 2012; Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010). Individuals with basic needs insecurities are more likely to experience depression, psychological and emotional stressors, poorer sleep outcomes, cognitive deficiency, atrophy in areas of the brain that are related to learning and memory, and increased levels of cortisol (Gunderson & Ziliah, 2015; Hamelin, Habicht, & Beaudry, 1999; Leung, Epel, Willett, Rimm & Laraia, 2015; Lupien, King, Meaney, McEwan, 2000; Lupien, McEwan, 1997).

With the increased risk for poor physical and mental outcomes, an individual with housing and food insecurity may expect an increased need for medical care. Moreover, basic needs insecurity has been linked to postponing medical care and medications with increased visits to the emergency department and hospitalizations (Kushel, Gupta, Gee, & Haas, 2006).

Impact on Academic Performance

In addition to poorer physical and mental health, individuals with basic needs insecurities are more likely to have poorer academic performance. Food insecurity has been shown to negatively impact academic behaviors, such as attending class and studying (Faminton, et al, 2012). Students are also more likely to report that it is difficult to concentrate during exams (Farahbakhsh, et al, 2017). Basic needs insecurities have been linked to poorer grade point averages (GPAs) and higher drop-out rates (Maroto, Snelling, Linck, 2014; Martinez, Frongillo, Leung, Ritchie, 2018; Skomsvold, Radford, Berkner, 2011). As it is believed that the brain continues to develop well into the twenties, food and housing insecurity may have prolonged impacts to cognitive and physical development (Pujol, Vendrell, Junque, Martí-Vilalta, and Capdevila, 1993).

Coalitions

To address systemic issues, institutions of higher education have formed coalitions to address topics of health promotion and prevention, such as substance abuse and violence prevention (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman,1993). Coalitions are defined as “an organization of individuals representing diverse organizations, factions, or constituencies who agree to work together in order to achieve a common goal” (Feighery & Rogers, 1989, p. 1 as cited in Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993). Per this definition, it is possible for coalitions to take a social-ecological approach to systemic issues. Coalitions should act as a unit

of identity, build on strengths of the individuals parts, facilitate collaboration, draw on the knowledge of members to promote co-learning, promote organization and planning, and address issues in a positive and ecological sense (Israel, Schulz, et al.,1998).

It is well-established that successful coalitions adopt a plan and organizational structure that accomplishes outcomes and aims set by members and stakeholders (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wanderman, 1993).The steps to develop a coalition include formation or engagement of individuals, organizations, and resources; establishment of an organizational structure and planning; implementation or action; and maintenance of action to achieve goals and outcomes set by members (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Florin, Mitchell, & Stevenson, 1993). Evaluation is vital to ensure accomplishment of the goals and outcomes agreed upon by stakeholders. Evaluation should be conducted at all steps and at all social ecological levels with an emphasis on triangulation of data to gain a better understanding of the coalition and its aims (Goodman, Wandersman, Chiman, Imm, & Morrissey, 1996). Many measurement and evaluation tools have been procured and validated to assess coalition outcomes and effectiveness, including evaluation of partnerships, organizational structure, leadership, and engagement (Granner & Sharpe, 2004).

Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs

In 2019, 10 four-year universities in Alabama formed the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs (ACCBN) with a mission to "unify college campuses throughout Alabama to ensure student basic needs are met, thereby empowering all students to succeed in school, earn their degrees, and open doors to opportunity".

Similar food insecurity or basic needs insecurities coalitions or tasks forces have been formed at other institutions in the United States, namely The State University of New York or

Washington State University (Graham, 2013; Nakata, 2019). However, the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs is leading as one of the first statewide coalitions aimed at addressing basic needs insecurity outside of an institutional network.

The coalition's initial aim focused on food insecurity but expanded its reach to basic needs insecurities, including food and housing insecurity. The coalition initiated its plan utilizing six phases (see figure 3). The first phase of the coalition, known as the engage phase, aimed to engage individuals on campus and in the community to form a coalition at each of the 10 universities. Each university coalition was responsible for appointing a champion, or chair, to facilitate coalition formation and communicate with statewide coalition leadership during the engage phase.

ACCBN is led by experts of basic needs insecurity and nutrition as well as leaders at universities across the state. The coalition leadership and champions have created a goal "to increase awareness of student food insecurity, cultivate a strong network of university and key stakeholders, strive to make food insecurity a priority among campus, community, and state leadership, and support strategies that ensure access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods for college students."

Figure 3

Phases of Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs

Note. **(**Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, college students are at an increased risk of basic needs insecurities, which can lead to poorer health and academic outcomes. Even if students have access to assistance programs or financial aid, the impact of these insecurities is pervasive and can cause detriment to the college experience. To address basic needs insecurity, institutions around the United States have taken steps to assist students with campus food pantries, scholarships, education/resources, research, and coalitions to act as leaders against basic needs insecurity (GAO, 2018).

To address the increasing prevalence of basic needs insecurity among college students, ACCBN was formed in order to support students and their academic success. Through its mission and goals, ACCBN has engaged all levels of campus and community partners and stakeholders to offer resources and skills that aid in combating basic needs insecurities.

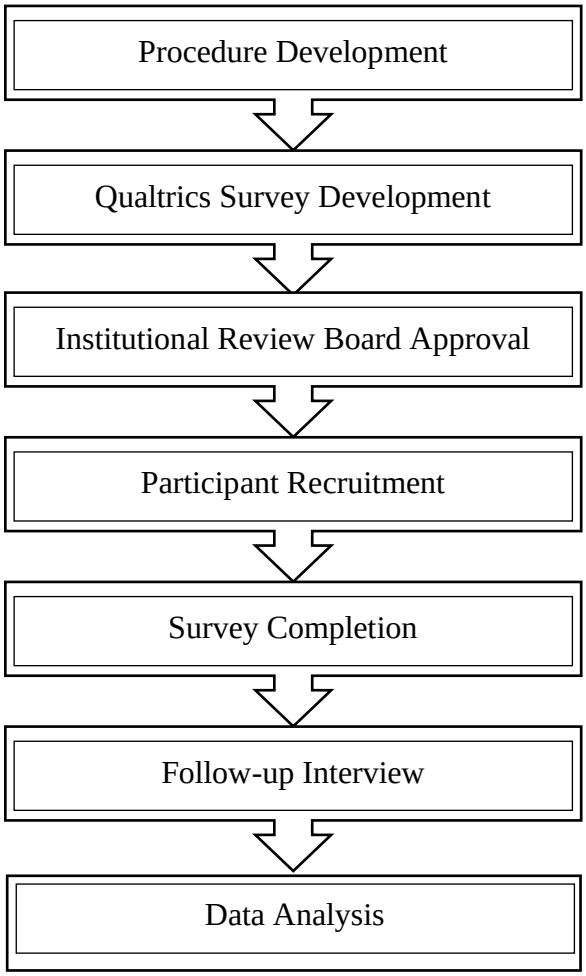
Methods

Aim

To assess engagement and collaborative efforts in the first phase (Engage) of the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs at ten, four-year universities in the state of Alabama.

Figure 4

Procedure of ACCBN Engagement Assessment



Recruitment and Procedure

The ACCBN has six phases: plan to engage coalition members, assess prevalence of student basic needs insecurity, create an actional plan focused on sustainable change, implement the action plan, evaluate processes, outcomes, and impacts, and celebrate successes (Hunger-Free Universities, 2019). In the first phase (Engage) of the coalition, university representatives, also known as champions, were asked to participate in an assessment of collaborative processes and efforts. Through an online survey and interview, champions were able to report information about their efforts to recruit members and to form a coalition that meets the needs of their individual institutions which was supported by the state-wide coalition (ACCBN).

Researchers obtained approval through the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Invitations to participate in the two-part study were extended by email to the appointed champions at the Alabama A&M University, Alabama State University, Auburn University, Jacksonville State University, Troy University, Tuskegee University, University of Alabama, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of North Alabama, and University of South Alabama. Coalition champions were employed by the universities and were appointed to represent their institution in the state-wide coalition. Participants worked in a variety of departments, including Student Affairs, University Counseling Services, Extension, Hunger Solutions Institute, Student Success Center, and Housing and Residence Life.

In the study invitation email, champions received the link to a Qualtrics survey which asked questions concerning coalition characteristics and membership. Researchers sent two follow-up emails as a reminder to complete the survey. As the champions completed the survey, researchers sent a follow-up email to schedule an interview. The interviews were conducted by

Zoom and were semi-structured with open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded for accuracy and with the permission of the champion. Champions were sent two follow-up emails and were contacted by phone as a reminder to schedule the interview after the completion of the survey.

Survey Instruments

Participants completed a 76-item survey via Qualtrics adapted from The Coalition Effectiveness Inventory (Butterfoss, 1998) and Level of Collaboration Survey (Frey, et al, 2006). The survey took approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. See Appendix 1.

Coalition Effectiveness Inventory

Butterfoss (1998) developed the Coalition Effectiveness Inventory (CEI) as a self-assessment tool to evaluate strengths of a coalition as well as a way to identify the stage of a coalition. Participants were asked to rate characteristics of coalition personnel, coalition structures, coalition processes, and coalition development. See Table 1.

Table 1

Coalition Effectiveness Inventory Assessment Scheme

0	Characteristic is absent
1	Characteristic is present but limited
2	Characteristic is present
N/A	Characteristic not applicable at this stage of the coalition

Level of Collaboration Survey

Frey, et al (2006) defined collaboration as the "level of cooperation that involves teamwork, communication, and consideration" (p. 386). The Level of Collaboration survey is

intended to evaluate cooperation between partners and members based on a scale of relationship characteristics. The scale appears below (p. 387).

Table 2

Five Levels of Collaboration and Their Characteristics

Five Levels of Collaboration and Their Characteristics				
Networking 1	Cooperation 2	Coordination 3	Coalition 4	Collaboration 5
-Aware of organization -Loosely defined roles -Little communication -All decisions are made independently	-Provide information to each other - Somewhat defined roles -Formal communication -All decisions are made independently	-Share information and resources -Defined roles -Frequent communication -Some shared decision making	-Share ideas -Share resources -Frequent and prioritized communication -All members have a vote in decision making	-Members belong to one system -Frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust -Consensus is reached on all decisions

Follow-up Interview Questions

The development of the interview questions was informed by validated instruments (Butterfoss, 1998; Cramer, Atwood, & Stoner, 2006; Frey, et al, 2006). Table 2 lists the planned interview questions.

Table 3

Interview Questions

"In what ways does your coalition excel?"
"In what ways does your coalition require improvement?"
"Have you provided your coalition with resources or education on basic needs insecurity?"
"What types of expertise does your coalition possess?"
"What are the challenges you faced while building your coalition?"
"How often do you meet with your campus and community partners?"
"How do you plan to make your coalition represent diversity and inclusivity?"

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the survey responses as the sample size of participants was small and not generalizable.

Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by transcription software and were cleaned in a Microsoft Word document. Transcripts were returned to coalition members for content verification. The audio recordings and transcripts from the interviews were screened for key words. The transcripts were coded by two researchers using ATLAS.ti 8 Scientific Software Development GmbH to identify themes within the interviews.

Results

Ten (10) university representative, also known as champions, were contacted to participate in the study. Nine (9) coalition champions participated in the pre-screening surveys dispersed in Qualtrics to assess university coalition collaborative processes and efforts (90%). Seven (7) coalition champions participated in the interviews (70%). Six (6) champions participated from five schools through recorded video conference platform, and two (2) champions participated by phone in which in-depth notes were recorded. Interviews occurred during work hours and were between 7-23 minutes in length.

Coalition Partnerships

During the Engage phase of the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs, university coalitions formed partnerships with various services, departments, and members to provide expertise and resources. Table 2 represents a list of services, departments, and individuals that were noted by the coalition champions when asked the expertise within the individual coalitions on the survey and in the interviews.

Table 4

Coalition Partners

Alumni Associations
Athletic Departments
Campus Dining or Food Services
Campus Libraries
Campus Recreation
Campus Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Programs
Case Management
Centers for Social Inclusion
Community Partners (Religious Organizations, Local Non-profits and Local Food Pantries)
Community Property Owners and Landlords
Counseling Services
Department of Nursing, Health Services
Disability Support Services
Diversity and Inclusion Representatives
Faculty
Financial Aid Offices
Fraternity and Sorority Life
Health and Wellness Center
Housing and Residence Life Office
International Student Offices
Marketing Department
Off-Campus Services
Office of Sustainability
Student Affairs Administrators and Staff
Student Foster and Homelessness Support Services
Student Government Associations
Student Life Offices
Student Organizations
Undergraduate and Graduate Students
University and Local Police Departments
University Presidents
Veteran Affairs
Wellness Alliance

Themes

Upon analysis of the interviews, two major themes emerged: the value of university administration involvement and recruitment of pre-existing services and activities.

University Administration Involvement

Five champions (71%) discussed engagement of university administration as an important factor in coalition buy-in among campus and community partners. Six champions (75%) in the survey indicated their administrator was 'committed to and supportive of the campus basic needs coalition'. In the interviews, six champions (86%) acknowledged support and/or commitment from administrators, such as the University President, Vice President of Student Affairs, or Dean of Students. The role of the university administrators included acting as a push signatory in a commitment statement to address food security as well as participating as a coalition champion, member of the coalition, or supportive partner. In the interviews, participants acknowledged the importance of the commitment from administration to increase buy-in from other campus and community partners as well as a way to increase access to resources. When asked about challenges faced when building the coalition, one respondent acknowledged involvement of the Dean of Students was the reason that they had not encountered many challenges:

> "[Dean of Students] is someone who has the capability and influence as far as accessing in the university resources and addressing food insecurities among our students. He's very active, and he plays a very pivotal role in assisting us and coming up with strategies and things that we can do to assist our students."

Another participant discussed the difficulty of member engagement without the title of an administrator:

> "I don't have a title behind my name. I'm not an assistant dean. I'm not an [Assistant Vice President], or anything like that. And so really getting people to respect the work and understanding was very challenging."

Engaging Members from Pre-existing Services and Activities

Upon the formation of individual university coalitions, several champions discussed gathering representatives from pre-existing services and activities that had the aim of addressing basic needs insecurity, such as campus food pantries, case management, meal voucher programs, and emergency grant programs. Members of the coalition represented many levels within the university system, including administration, staff, support services, and students. In the survey responses, six champions (75%) noted the members of the coalition offered a variety of resources and skills. Champions indicated that they engaged far-reaching and diverse services that were already doing "great work" to build campus and community partnerships. When asked how their coalition represented diversity and inclusivity, one champion noted the goal of being "strategic about bringing key game players to the table so that there's a point for everyone. And that sees every different type of student possible, and then ask [what can we do better]?"

In addition to information on engagement of coalition partners, champions reported information on structures, such as written bylaws and goals. Per the survey responses, 75% (N= 6) of university coalitions lacked bylaws/rules of operation and 62.5% (N= 5) lack a mission statement in writing. However, 37.5% (N= 3) of coalitions

had goals and objectives in writing, and 50% (N=4) held scheduled meetings at least once a month.

Challenges of Recruitment. The champions also spoke of the challenges in getting all partners together for scheduled meetings. One champion noted the intention of keeping the initial coalition small with the goal to build as the needs of the coalition expanded. When asked about challenges, another champion noted:

> "[There was] the typical coalition building challenge. Making people feel a part of it; as you build the collaborative piece, making people feel joint ownership but not losing their individual spotlight. It's always a balance of all working in this together. Yes, you're doing great work. But we're also working in this together. So, it's been a balance and also having the different levels of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and making them all feel equitable in their voice and in their successes and in their influence."

Additionally, three champions mentioned difficulty with maintaining a consistent membership and momentum due to member turnover. As a result, champions discussed having to re-build the foundation of the coalition or having to recruit more members to lead or to participate in the coalition. Of the champions that completed the survey, one (12.5%) noted regular training of new and old members was present within their coalition.

Discussion

Food and housing insecurity can be detrimental to physical and mental health as well as lead to poor academic performance and higher attrition rates (Farahbakhsh, et al., 2017; Knol, Robb, & Wood, 2017; Maroto, Snelling, Linck, 2014; Martinez, Frongillo, Leung, Ritchie, 2018; Skomsvold, Radford, Berkner, 2011). Experts have called upon institutions of higher education to address basic needs insecurity in order to improve the lives and health of students as well as to provide all students with the opportunity of a holistic and productive college experience (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2015).

In the first phase of the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs, university champions engaged campus and community partners to form a collective movement to address food and housing insecurity among students at universities in Alabama. During interviews with campus coalition champions, investigators aimed to understand engagement and collaborative efforts at 10, four-year universities in Alabama. From the interviews, the investigators found two themes emerge, the value of university administration involvement and the method in which coalitions recruited members through pre-existing services and activities.

Per the conversation with coalition champions, the involvement of university administration improved buy-in from other campus partners and helped to increase resource allocation. It should be noted that involvement from university administration was beneficial with various levels of involvement from general awareness of the coalition to participation as a coalition champion. However, it was most beneficial when the administrator had active membership in the coalition and was educated on the issues of basic needs insecurities among college students. One study of a successful campus-wide

coalition for suicide prevention noted “top administrator buy-in was critical for full community participation, momentum, and sustainability” (Kaslow, et al., 2012, p. 125). The information gained from this study would complement the notion that administration plays a key role in the formation and sustainability of a coalition in its early stages.

To initiate engagement of coalition membership, coalition champions discussed inviting key players to the table by involving campus and community partners that were already addressing basic needs insecurity in some way. Broton & Goldrick-Rab (2016) discussed the most strategic college leaders take a local approach to investigate the needs of their students and to address those needs appropriately with the resources available drawing on the strengths of the institution and community (p. 20). By engaging members that were educated on the topic and had systems in place, coalition champions were able to build momentum and strength in university efforts to address basic needs insecurities.

Participants discussed challenges with building coalitions related to balancing the practice of creating a cohesive group and recognizing individual efforts. During the infancy of coalition formation, champions noted the difficultly of breaking down silos to create a group with the same goals. Participants also discussed the difficulty with member and leadership turnover; it was noted that turnover was especially impactful when there was a loss of institutional knowledge about basic needs insecurities or available resources.

As many of the coalitions were in the early stages of formation, individual coalitions lacked coalition structures, such as written bylaw/rules of operation or a mission statement. Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman (1993), noted a clear mission or guiding purpose was the most important element in formation. It should be noted that

the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs Security, had a clear mission statement, goals, and objectives that were outlined in the early stages of the formation of the state-wide coalition. Therefore, it is possible that the state-wide coalition offered a foundational structure that was supportive in the formation of individual university coalitions.

Potential Impacts

To our knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate engagement with a state-wide university coalition to address basic needs insecurity. The information from this study would be a starting point for institutions interested in forming campus-based basic needs insecurities coalitions and engaging campus and community partners.

Per these findings, university coalitions found engaging university administration helpful in gaining interest of campus and community partners as well as aiding in resource allocation for the coalition. Champions expressed that the interest and engagement in the coalition increased after the administrators became involved. We could speculate campus partners may have felt the coalition had a stronger foundation and reach with the involvement of administration, which in turn increased momentum and sustainability of the coalition.

Involving administration can be particularly important as a way to display a collective and organized platform to address basic needs insecurities that could result in broader, systemic changes. In one study of undergraduates, participants expressed that ensuring basic needs security of students should be a central mission of institutions; while other students in the sample noted administration and staff were helpful on a case-by-case basis but lacked a systematic interventions (Broton, Frank, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). Due

to the resources available to administrators within the coalitions, they have the unique opportunity to advocate for broader, systemic interventions. These interventions would include incorporating resources from a wide range of campus and community partners, including partners from supportive services as well as research and academic departments.

Engaging partners that already have systems and resources in place is a natural starting point in the formation phase of a coalition (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wanderson, 1993). As noted by participants, getting key members to the table was the first step in creating a collective platform to address issues of basic needs insecurity. Based on survey and interview responses, champions found success in taking a localized approach by creating an initial list of members and expanding based on needs of the coalition and community.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the role of the state-wide coalition in the engage phase of the university coalitions. As a preponderance of university coalitions lacked structures, such as a written mission statement and bylaws or rules of operations, the state-wide coalition offered an over-arching mission to guide individual coalitions. Therefore, the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs may act as the guiding force for individual coalitions and can be the united front that works to enact systemic change throughout the state institutions.

Limitations

It was understood that many of the coalitions were in early stages of formation and may not have been able to complete all questions in the survey or interview. Additionally, coalition champions were volunteers in which the role of leading their

university coalition may have been only one of the responsibilities of their position at the university.

Moreover, the nature and difficulty of coalition building is a limitation. It was noted several times throughout the interviews that partnerships, employment, and programs were constantly changing. Champions noted the constant change in coalition membership made it difficult to sustain growth and efforts. Other champions discussed the difficulty of creating a collaborative group in which members feel joint ownership of work while also showing appreciation for the individual efforts of members.

Due to a small, convenience sample of coalition champions, the survey responses were not generalizable. Technology was a barrier as some participants did not feel comfortable with the zoom interviews and elected to participate in a phone interview which was not recorded due to technical difficulties.

Lastly at the time of this study, the Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs did not include two-year colleges and institutions. However, it is understood that students who attend two-year colleges also experience increased rates of basic needs insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019). Therefore, this study should be replicated to include champions from two-year institutions in order to make the results generalizable to those student populations.

Future Directions

The Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs should continue to move through the six phases. Evaluation of engagement should be conducted at the beginning of each phase to ensure the appropriate personnel and resources are being included in the efforts of the coalition. By continuing evaluation at the beginning of each stage, members

can meet the needs of their institution and implement changes to coalition membership, as needed.

Moving forward, diversity and inclusion of members with various identities, perspectives, and roles should be a key factor in the decision to grow the coalition in order to be representative of the student population, particularly as students of color, students from countries outside of the United States, first-generation students, and non-traditional students are at an increased risk for basic needs insecurity (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019).

Conclusion

In the past ten years, the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among college students has been documented and better understood (GAO, 2018; National Association for Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2014). Due to increasing cost of college attendance and competing costs of college, students at institutions of higher education are at an increased risk for basic needs insecurity (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, there is an increased risk of having basic needs insecurity for students in marginalized groups, especially African American students, students that identify as LGBTQ+, and students that are dependent from their parents (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019).

This study is one of the first to assess engagement efforts in the beginning stages of a state-wide coalition aimed at combating student basic needs insecurity. The results of this study offer a starting point for other coalitions that may also seek to address these insecurities at institutions of higher education. Future studies should look to expand these results to other state-wide coalitions and should include two-year colleges as institutions look to address basic needs insecurities among a variety of student populations.

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Appendix

Alabama Campus Coalition for Basic Needs Engage Assessment Survey

Q1 1. Name of University

_____

2. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for ADMINISTRATORS at your university?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our university's administrators are committed to and supportive of the campus basic needs coalition.	○	○	○	○
B. Our university's administrators commit personnel and financial resources to the campus basic needs coalition.	○	○	○	○
C. Our university's administrators are knowledgeable about coalitions.	○	○	○	○
D. Our university's administrators are experienced in collaboration.	○	○	○	○
E. Our university's administrator replaces a campus basic needs coalition representative if a vacancy occurs.	○	○	○	○

Q3 3. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for the FACILITATOR/CHAIR of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition's facilitator is knowledgeable about the coalition-building process.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition's facilitator is skillful in writing proposals and obtaining funding/resources.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition's facilitator trains coalition members as appropriate.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition's facilitator is competent in needs assessment and research.	○	○	○	○
E. Our coalition's facilitator encourages collaboration and negotiation.	○	○	○	○
F. Our coalition's facilitator communicates effectively with members.	○	○	○	○
G. Our coalition's facilitator is committed to the coalition's mission.	○	○	○	○

H. Our coalition's facilitator provides leadership and guidance in maintaining the coalition.	○	○	○	○
I. Our coalition's facilitator has appropriate time to devote to the coalition.	○	○	○	○
J. Our coalition's facilitator plans effectively and efficiently.	○	○	○	○
K. Our coalition's facilitator is knowledgeable about the basic needs content area.	○	○	○	○
L. Our coalition's facilitator is flexible in accepting different viewpoints.	○	○	○	○
M. Our coalition's facilitator demonstrates a sense of humor.	○	○	○	○
N. Our coalition's facilitator promotes equity and collaboration among members.	○	○	○	○
O. Our coalition's facilitator is adept in organizational and communication	○	○	○	○

skills.				
P. Our coalition's facilitator works within influential political and community networks.	○	○	○	○
Q. Our coalition's facilitator is competent in negotiating, solving problems, and resolving conflicts.	○	○	○	○
R. Our coalition's facilitator is attentive to individual member concerns.	○	○	○	○
S. Our coalition's facilitator is effective in managing meetings.	○	○	○	○
T. Our coalition's facilitator is adept in garnering resources.	○	○	○	○
U. Our coalition's facilitator values members' input.	○	○	○	○
V. Our coalition's facilitator recognizes members for their contributions.	○	○	○	○

Q4 4. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for MEMBERS of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not appicable
A. Coalition members share the coalition's mission.	○	○	○	○
B. Coalition members offer variety of resources and skills.	○	○	○	○
C. Coalition members clearly understand their roles.	○	○	○	○
D. Coalition members actively plan, implement and evaluate activities.	○	○	○	○
E. Coalition members assume lead responsibility for tasks.	○	○	○	○
F. Coalition members share workload.	○	○	○	○
G. Coalition members regularly participate in meetings and activities.	○	○	○	○
H. Coalition members communicate well with each	○	○	○	○

other.				
I. Coalition members feel a sense of accomplishment.	○	○	○	○
J. Coalition members seek out training opportunities.	○	○	○	○

Q5 5. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for your campus basic needs coalition STRUCTURE?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition has bylaws/rules of operation.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition has a mission statement in writing.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition has goals and objectives in writing.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition provides for regular, structured meetings.	○	○	○	○
E. Our coalition establishes effective communication mechanisms.	○	○	○	○
F. Our coalition has an organizational chart.	○	○	○	○
G. Our coalition has written job descriptions.	○	○	○	○
H. Our coalition has a core planning group (e.g. steering committee).	○	○	○	○
I. Our coalition has subcommittees.	○	○	○	○

Q6 6. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for your campus basic needs coalition PROCESSES?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition has a mechanism to make decisions, e.g. voting.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition has a mechanism to solve problems and resolve conflicts.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition allocates resources fairly.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition employs process and impact evaluation methods.	○	○	○	○
E. Our coalition conducts annual action planning session.	○	○	○	○
F. Our coalition assures that members complete assignments in timely manner.	○	○	○	○
G. Our coalition orients new members.	○	○	○	○
H. Our coalition regularly trains new and old members.	○	○	○	○

Q7 7. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for the FORMATION of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition has designated permanent staff.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition has broad-based membership, including community leaders, professionals, and grass-roots organizers representing the target population.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition has designated office and meeting space.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition has structures in place.	○	○	○	○

Q8 8. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for the IMPLEMENTATION of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition has processes in place.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition conducted a needs assessment.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition developed a strategic plan.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition implemented strategies as planned.	○	○	○	○

Q9 9. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for the MAINTENANCE of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition revises strategies as necessary.	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition secures financial and material resources.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition is broadly recognized as authority on issues it addresses.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition has maintained or increased the number of its members.	○	○	○	○
E. Our coalition membership benefits outweigh costs.	○	○	○	○
F. Our coalition is accessible to the community.	○	○	○	○
G. Our coalition's accomplishments are shared with members and the community.	○	○	○	○

Q10 10. At what level would you rate the following characteristics for the INSTITUTIONALIZATION of your campus basic needs coalition?

	Absent	Present but limited	Present	Not applicable
A. Our coalition is included in other collaborative efforts	○	○	○	○
B. Our coalition's sphere of influence includes state and private agencies and governing bodies.	○	○	○	○
C. Our coalition has access to power within legislative and executive branches of agencies/government.	○	○	○	○
D. Our coalition's activities are incorporated within other agencies/institutions.	○	○	○	○
E. Our coalition has obtained long-term funding.	○	○	○	○
Our coalition's mission is refined to encompass other issues/populations.	○	○	○	○

Q11

11. In the section on the left, list each campus/community organization, department or division (example: Dining Services, Alumni Association, etc) represented by an individual serving in your campus basic needs coalition. Using the scale provided on the right, select the extent to which you (as the coalition facilitator/leader) currently interact with the organization and/or individual.

	Networking -Aware of organization -Loosely defined roles -Little communication -All decisions are made independently	**Cooperation** -Provide information to each other -Somewhat defined roles -Formal communication -All decisions are made independently	**Coordination** -Share information and resources -Defined roles -Frequent communication -Some shared decision making	**Coalition** -Share ideas -Share resources -Frequent and prioritized communication -All members have a vote in decision making	**Collaboration** -Members belong to one system -Frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust -Consensus is reached on all decisions
1.	○	○	○	○	○
2.	○	○	○	○	○
3.	○	○	○	○	○
4.	○	○	○	○	○
5.	○	○	○	○	○
6.	○	○	○	○	○
7.	○	○	○	○	○
8.	○	○	○	○	○
9.	○	○	○	○	○
10.	○	○	○	○	○