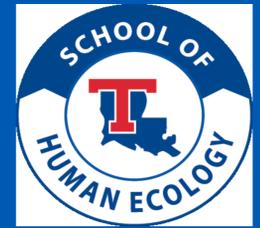


# Louisiana Tech University Campus Food Pantry: Impact of COVID-19 on the Management of Food Supplies and Service



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## BACKGROUND

United States has endured numerous pandemics prior to COVID-19. The uncertainty of COVID-19 left many questioning the safety, availability and accessibility to an adequate food supply and the food distribution systems. Thus, analysis of emerging trends in the food industry and changes necessary to prevent contamination of the food supply is necessary to protect vulnerable populations such as those with compromised immunity and food insecurity. Access to food pantries has never been more important, but with limited food available because of manufacturing shortages, limited volunteers and the ability for emergency food operations to meet the demand, was difficult to manage. The new challenges COVID-19 presented, required food pantries to closely exam existing systems and identify key aspects of their operations that posed the greatest risk in spreading the virus to their staff, volunteers, and their participants while meeting an unprecedented heightened demand for supplies (Schoenfeldt, 2020). While food insecurity among college students is emerging, there is still more to be explored, especially since the pandemic has worsened the financial stability of so many. Gaining a greater understanding regarding the nuances of college students' struggles to consistently access nutritious foods, effective food delivery systems can be implemented to sustain a more reliable food system for college students.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the COVID – 19 pandemic on the management of the Good Nutrition Food Pantry at La. Tech. This project also describes the demographics of the food pantry patrons, compares and contrast the number of pounds of food provided pre-pandemic and during, highlights the employment status of patrons before the” onset of the pandemic and at the onset of the federal mandate to “shelter in place and identifies the top 10 food items Selected by the patrons.

## METHODS

Retrospective demographic data and pantry usage information was collected from all clients prior to the pandemic, September 2019 to March 2020, and compared to data collected from March 2020 through July 2020. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate changes in demographics and frequency of client visits.

## RESULTS

A total of 186 client records were analyzed which represented number of students enrolled with the University during the data collection period. Pre-pandemic, approximately 46% (n=26) of the clients were male and 44% (n=25) were female. That number increased to 129 clients starting March 16, 2019-July 31, 2019. After the start of the pandemic there was little change in the percentage of men and women visiting the pantry, 40.4% (n=52) and 42% (n=42%), respectively. In terms of race, 31.6% (n=18) of the clients who visited the pantry pre-pandemic were white whereas, 47% (n=27) were black. However, after the onset of pandemic, 28% (n=36) were white and 30.3% (n=39) were black. Prior to the start of the pandemic, 26% (n=15) of the clients indicated they lived in the University dormitories with the percentage declining to 9.39% (n=12) after the University transitioned students and faculty to virtual instruction. Unemployment was indicated at 28% (n=16) prior to the pandemic and 41% (n=53) after. Approximately 19-20% of the clients declined to provide information regarding their gender, school classification, type of residence and employment status. The average number of pantry visits pre-pandemic were nine per month and increased to 37 per month after the pandemic began. The number of food items that were mostly frequently selected by the clients included cold cereal, rice dishes , heat and serve entrees, ground beef, chicken halves, canned tuna, canned chicken, dry milk, breakfast/granola bars, rice, and beans.

Table 1  
 Demographics of Food Pantry Patrons Pre-pandemic and During

Characteristic	Pre-Pandemic N = 57	Early Pandemic N = 130
Race		
White	18 (31.6%)	36 (28%)
Black	27 (47%)	39 (30.3%)
Other/Did Not Answer	12 (21.4%)	55 (41.7%)
Employment	16 (28%)	53 (41%)

Table 2

Comparison of food provided, number pantry visits and top 10 items selected pre-pandemic and during.

Item	Pre-Pandemic (9/2020-3/2020)	Early Pandemic (3/2020-7/2020)
Total Pounds	29.9	643.9
Average Pounds/Patron	.51	4.99
Total Patrons	58	129
Number Visits	60	180
Top Items Selected	Micro Meals	Cold Cereal
	Cold Cereal	Micro Meals
	Cinnamon Snacks	Cinnamon Snacks
	Belvita Bars	Ramon Noodle
	Pancake Mix	Belvita Bars
	Granola Bars	Chicken
	Rice Dishes	Tuna
	Mac-N-Cheese	Rice Dishes
	Ramon	Cheeze-Its /Oatmeal

## CONCLUSIONS

Unemployment appeared to increase significantly during the evaluation period. Food item changes determined by daily observations of clients who remained on-campus or in local apartments were made. Of concern was the number of students not providing demographic information. This may be related to the stigma associated with pantry usage. As a result of the pandemic, the food pantry has begun an on-line grocery ordering system with an expanded food selection and is working toward enhancing the nutritive profile of food items. Measures should be established to allow ongoing emergency food provision to students. Additional research is needed to determine reasons for client's reluctance to answer demographic questions.