

SUBJECT: Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee Meeting Report for March 25, 2026

The Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee of the Board of Trustees met on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 4:00 pm, via Zoom in accordance with MGLA Chapter 30A, as amended by Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, which among other things allows remote participation through June 2027.

Present for the Committee were Trustees, Immerman (chair), Billings (vice chair), Beckett, Cabral, Lancome; President Keenan (ex-officio); Vice President Galinski; Provost Silva; Associate Dean of Students Kao; Director Wong; Assistant Director Berube; and Executive Assistant Putzig.

Chair Immerman called the meeting to order at 3:47 pm. The following items were discussed:

Enrollment Report (Attachment A)

Spring 2026 enrollment data reflects a slight decline in undergraduate day student headcount compared to the previous year. However, the evening division experienced growth, driven largely by increased enrollment in the online social work program. Special programs, including Early College and Dual Enrollment, also saw modest gains. At the graduate level, headcounts increased, particularly within education programs.

Spring enrollment outcomes were stronger than those observed in the fall, with increases across all categories of newly enrolled students. The undergraduate day population consisted primarily of transfer students. The evening division saw continued growth, largely attributable to the online fire science and social work programs. Graduate enrollment gains were driven by programs in counseling, education, and nursing. Overall, these trends reflect encouraging progress.

Looking ahead, data from the past three fall cycles indicate that Fall 2026 deposits are trending higher than in previous years. Applications and admitted student numbers also remain ahead year over year, and the university remains cautiously optimistic that this momentum will continue. A clearer picture of enrollment is expected following June orientation sessions.

Positive trends are also emerging in summer enrollment, particularly within the evening ABSN, social work, and graduate programs.

MA Board of Higher Education's New "Innovation Regulation" (Attachment B)

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education adopted a new "Innovation Regulation" in February 2026, establishing a statewide framework designed to encourage academic innovation. The regulation allows institutions to propose time limited pilot programs through targeted waivers of existing degree requirements. Proposals are subject to external review, Board approval, and ongoing evaluation.

The intent of the regulation is to respond to issues of affordability, access, and evolving student needs, while creating space for institutions to test new academic models without mandating change. The framework does not eliminate the 120-credit bachelor's degree standard, mandate three-year degrees, bypass accreditation, override faculty governance, or remove general education requirements. Rather, it supports reimagining how students earn degrees through competency-based learning, expanded transfer and prior learning pathways, and applied, workforce aligned models that emphasize learning outcomes over seat time.

To develop a pilot program, such as a 90-credit degree, institutions must submit a faculty-led proposal that undergoes shared governance review. Proposals must clearly justify the requested waiver, demonstrate equivalent learning outcomes to existing 120-credit programs, and outline student benefits and protections. Following institutional review, proposals advance through external evaluation and public comment before being assessed by the Department of Higher Education and brought forward to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

Innovation pilots are time limited, subject to ongoing review, and may be adjusted as needed, allowing institutions to remain nimble and responsive to changing conditions. Safeguards include adherence to accreditation standards set by NECHE, demonstration of academic quality and financial stability, clear disclosure and informed student consent, and requirements for annual reporting and final evaluation.

As Salem State begins to explore potential pilot programs, key considerations include workforce demand, student interest, institutional capacity, faculty engagement, and alignment with the university's broader framework and mission.

Food Insecurity (Attachment C)

The campus Food Pantry plays a critical role in supporting student wellbeing, academic persistence, and graduation outcomes. Addressing basic needs, including food security, is directly linked to student retention and success. Food insecurity can negatively impact students' ability to focus, attend classes, maintain academic performance, and support their physical and mental health. At Salem State, food insecurity is associated with an annual decrease in retention of up to 15%.

Recent institutional data indicates that 49.2% of students reported that food did not last, and they could not afford to purchase more, while 50.5% reported being unable to afford balanced meals. Additionally, 24.5% of students reported experiencing hunger but not eating due to financial constraints. These data reflect the experiences of students actively enrolled in courses, working, and progressing toward graduation, often while facing significant challenges. Graduate students were not included in this dataset, suggesting that the overall level of need may be even greater.

The goal of the Food Pantry is not only to provide access to groceries, but also to restore student dignity and support holistic wellbeing. In addition to food, the pantry offers essential personal care items such as detergent, soap, and deodorant.

Looking ahead, the university is exploring the development of a centralized Center for Wellbeing that would serve as a hub for addressing a range of basic needs, including food and housing security, social and academic engagement, access to medical insurance, and transportation support. Currently, the CARE Office addresses many of these interconnected challenges. Establishing a centralized hub would

create a more coordinated and accessible approach, allowing students to receive comprehensive support in one location.

There being no further business to come before the committee and upon a motion made duly by Trustee Billings and seconded by Trustee Lancome it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 5:10 pm

Voting in the affirmative: Immerman, Billings, Beckett, Cabral, Lancome

Voting against: None

Prepared by: A. Putzig, Executive Assistant, Student Success

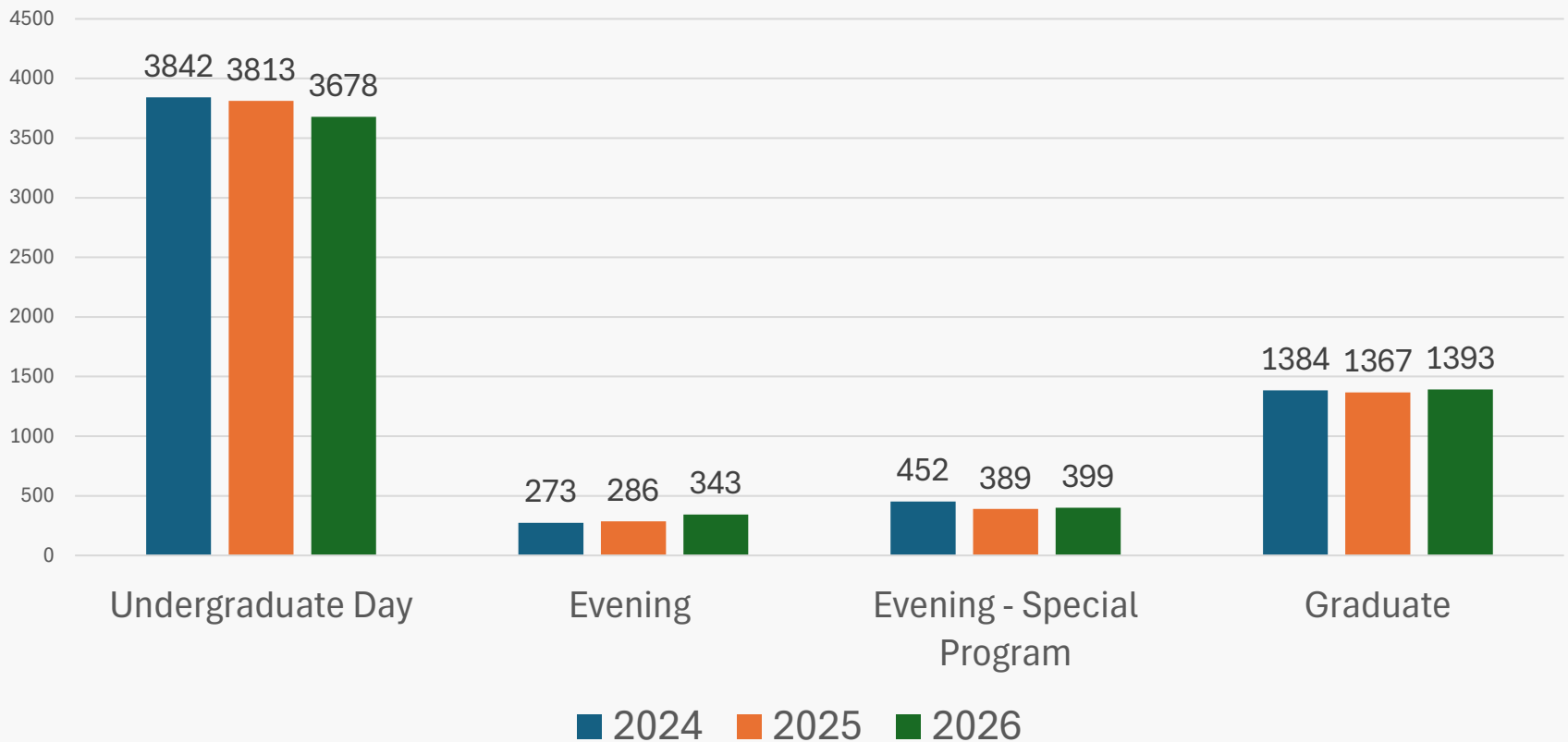
Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee of the Board of Trustees

I. Enrollment Report

- a. Spring 2026 Final Numbers
- b. Fall 2026 Insights

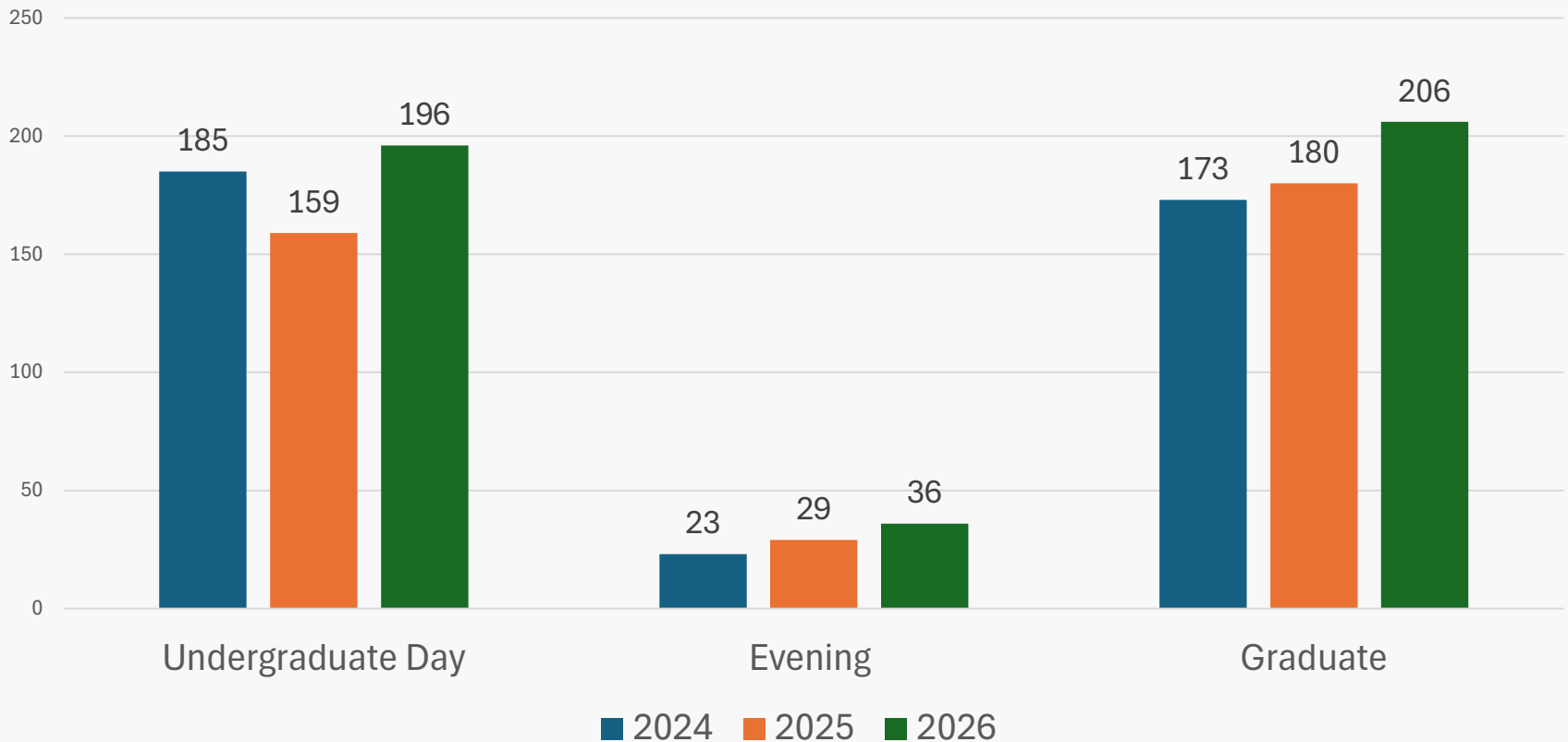
a. Spring 2026 Final Numbers

Total Spring Headcount



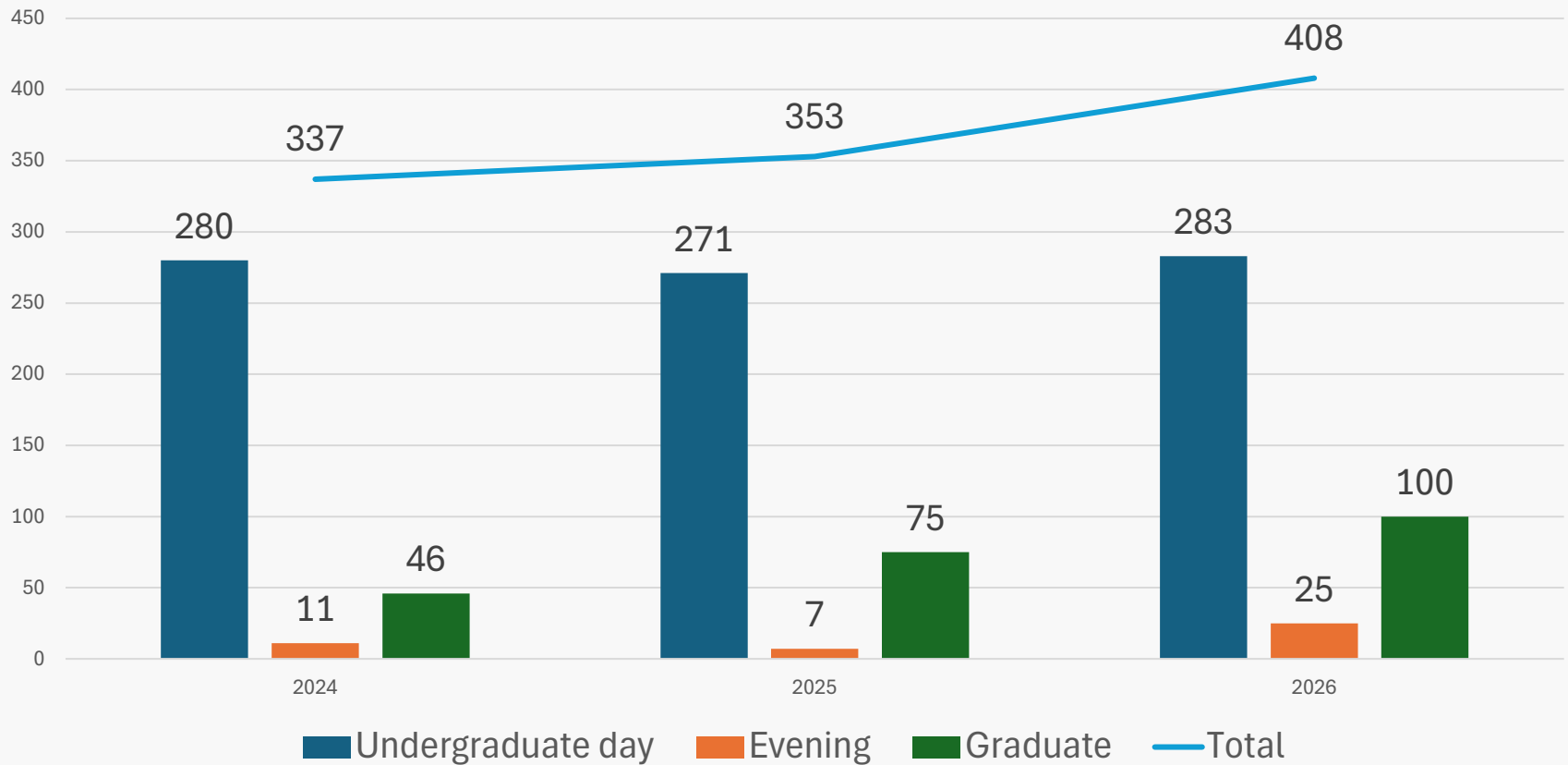
a. Spring 2026 Final Numbers

Spring Admissions New Students



Fall 2026 Insights...the numbers

Fall Admission - Commitments as of 3.18.26





Fall 2026 Insights

Concerns

- Smaller pool
- Increased competition
- Free community college

Positive Trends


- Admits and commitments up across the board.
- Accepted Students Day registrations are up by 42%
- Increase in online programs (Social Work)
- FAFSA submissions are trending ahead
- Gearing up for Orientation (Spanish Session for Supporters)



The MA Department of Higher Education's New Innovation Regulation


What it is, what it is not, and what it could mean for SSU

David J. Silva, Ph.D.
Provost and Academic Vice President
March 2026




Today's Objectives

An outline of the presentation



Share Information

- To understand the facts
- Consider the implications for SSU
- To create space for trustee comments
- Key Conversation Expectations
 - We engage today knowing that this is a **first** discussion on this topic – and not the **last**
 - Some questions will not receive answers (today)



What the Regulation Is

A Formal Pathway for Academic Innovation



- Officially: **610 CMR 16.00**
 - Adopted by the MA Board of Higher Education (BHE) on 10 February 2026 (motion 26-42)
- Allows institutions to propose time-limited pilot programs by...
 - Permitting targeted waivers of existing degree rules
 - Subjecting proposals to external review, BHE approval, and ongoing evaluation

The Big Picture

... And why this matters now



An Invitation for Academic Innovation

- A new, statewide regulatory framework
 - Adopted by the MA BHE
 - Operationalized by the MA DHE
- It's About **Process**
 - How to move new ideas and “ways of doing” forward
- The MA BHE's intent
 - Responds to affordability, access, and changing student needs
 - Designed to test ideas carefully, not mandate change

What the Regulation Is **Not**

Important Guardrails



- ✗ Does not eliminate the 120-credit bachelor's degree
- ✗ Does not mandate three-year degrees
- ✗ Does not bypass accreditation
- ✗ Does not override faculty governance
- ✗ Does not eliminate General Education

The Road to Implementation

Moving a 90-credit program forward



Institution creates a proposal

- University identifies potential programs
- Departments develop proposals
- Review via Shared Governance

Justification of requested exception

- Clear educational rationale
- Equivalent learning outcomes to 120 credit degree
- Student benefit & protections

Proposal review

- External expert review
- Public comment
- DHE assessment →
- Recommendation to BHE

Innovation Pilots are

- **Subject to review for continuation**
- **Time-limited**
- **Reversible**

It's *Not Just* About Counting Credits

Credit hours are the visible issue — but not the only one



BHE's intent = Reframing how students earn degrees

- Competency-based learning
- Transfer and prior-learning pathways
- Applied and workforce-aligned models

seat time

(accumulating credits)



learning outcomes

(establishing competencies)

Safeguards

Quality and consumer protection are explicit



- Accreditation standards remain fully in effect (NECHE)
- Institutions must demonstrate:
 - Academic quality
 - Financial stability
 - Adequate student support (and interest)
- Clear disclosure and informed student consent
- Annual reporting and final evaluation required

Academic Considerations

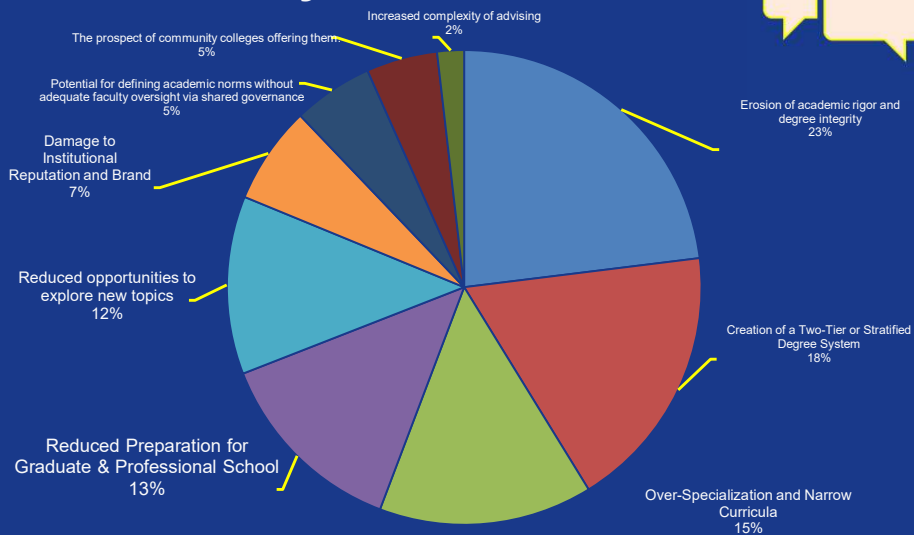
Centering Excellence and Equity



Issues to Ponder

- Academic depth and rigor
- Integrity of the bachelor's degree as an academic credential
- Equity and the risk of a two-tier system (90-credits vs. 120-credits)
- Preparation for graduate study
- Mission alignment
- Faculty roles and workload

SSU Faculty Considerations



Shared Governance = Central

Nothing changes about how academic decisions get made

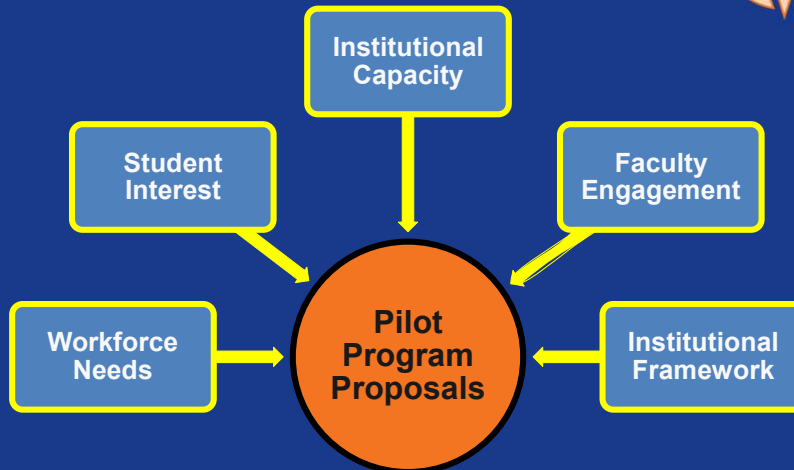


Any new academic program requires review and approval of...

- Faculty *Academic Oversight*
- Provost > President *Administrative Review*
- SSU Trustees *Institutional Governance & Stewardship*
- DHE / BHE *Executive Branch Approval*

Direction for SSU Pilot Programs

Identifying Opportunities for Innovation





Salem State University Food Pantry

Supporting Student
Well-being

Food equity relates to:

- Less likely to graduate
- Impacts first-generation students
- Inability to focus
- Low class attendance
- Lower grades
- Decreased physical and mental health



At SSU, food inequity means an annual decrease in retention by as much as 15%



What Do We Know?

Data Snapshot: SSU Food Equity

Spring 2026 ACHA-NCHA III
(Graduate students not included
in this survey)



49.2% (+11%) 2,301 students reported food did not last, and they could not afford more.

50.5% (-5%) 2,361 students reported they could not afford balanced meals.

24.5% (-9%) 1,146 students reported being hungry but not eating due to a lack of money.

American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment III: Salem State University Executive Summary Spring 2026. Silver Spring, MD: American College Health Association; 2026.

Student Story: Restoring Dignity

Student unable to afford detergent, shampoo, soap, deodorant, shaving supplies

- Felt bullied due to odor and appearance
- Began avoiding classes despite strong academics
- With CARE and pantry support, resumed attending classes



Vision: Center for Essential Well- Being

“There is no academic success
without essential well-being.”

Centralized Hub

- Food Equity
- Housing Equity
- Financial Equity
- Well-being Services
- Transportation Equity
- Social Engagement
- Academic Engagement





Future Support

