

# Project DASH: Expanding Food Access for College Students



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## PROJECT DASH: COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Providing students with more resources: two-thirds of college applying for home delivery were not receiving financial aid and 40% of students had a job while they pursued their degree.

Project DASH empowers social impact organizations—such as food banks and pantries—to work with Dashers and use DoorDash technology to provide local delivery to their communities. Since its creation, Project DASH has powered over 6 million deliveries of an estimated 100 million meals across the US and Canada.

Last year, with support from DoorDash, the [Urban Institute](#) studied the effectiveness of Project DASH home delivery partnerships. They found that 80 percent of surveyed anti-hunger organizations stated that a motivating factor in seeking a DoorDash partnership was the ability to reach new people in need. This research sheds light on how home delivery of food and essential items helps fill a critical gap, especially for older people, people with disabilities and people in rural communities.

Another group of recipients who benefit from this service are students in higher education. We partnered with a student-serving organization to learn more about how Project DASH helps students get the meals they need while juggling busy schedules and studying for classes. The program, started in late 2023, serves around 40–60 college students every month and has delivered an estimated 3,000 meals to date.

The partner is open for limited hours, so being able to reach more students in need who were unable to get there during their operating hours was a clear priority. Students requesting home delivery can apply for this service via an online form which can minimize the stigma associated with asking for help.

Initial interest in the service was overwhelming. Less than 24 hours after posting its first sign-up form, the partner had received about 150 responses and the need was clear. In their latest intake form, two-thirds of students applying for home delivery reported that they were not receiving any financial aid. Being able to reach students who are spread out across the area they serve was crucial.

Partner leadership cited how important home delivery is in overcoming any type of stigma associated with coming and waiting in line. They recognized that asking for help is a hard step to take and praised delivery as a way to maintain anonymity. This distribution channel is irreplaceable for the partner, whose staff in the past have done home deliveries themselves with their limited capacity.

Project DASH didn't just give our partner a new channel for distribution but allowed the team to expand the total amount of food they were able to distribute. Specifically, the partner has been leveraging Project DASH on Saturdays when they do large distributions. They're able to maintain the number of students visiting the pantry that they would typically have on a Saturday – at least 300 – and use Project DASH on top of this to serve an additional 40 to 60 orders that they prepack before the rest of the distribution starts.

### Hearing from college students

We surveyed 40 students who have received a delivery through the partner in the last 6 months and the overwhelming majority (88%)<sup>1</sup> said that they were satisfied with the service and almost 80% said that delivery helped them free up time for their studies and overcome transportation or mobility barriers:



We interviewed four students who have received Project DASH deliveries in the past 6 months and heard a common theme: home delivery helped students focus on their education while being able to support themselves and their families.

### Boosting academic performance

**Charlene**, a second year undergraduate student who lives with her friend and their family, walked us through her experience:

“ I am an architecture major right now. Moving across the country was hard and I missed my family. Currently, I'm living with my friend and her family away from campus. I take the bus to campus and the commute can take me almost an hour. I've received the delivery service around five times and the experience has been very positive.”

Like 40% of students in our survey, Charlene has a job alongside her studies which means that she often has a hard time going in person. Home delivery means she doesn't have to skip classes or miss work:

“ Oftentimes I work on Saturdays and Sundays and during the week I have school or errands to run which means I'm not always available to go in person.

Without home delivery, getting the meals I need would have been harder, especially in the run up to finals when my schedule was incredibly crammed. During the weeks when I receive the delivery, I can do more schoolwork, I feel more productive. I can easily spend another 3 hours on my studies. For example, I had extra time to touch up on my renders for architecture in my core classes. Food delivery helped me raise my grade and produce more professional work.”

<sup>1</sup>Question answered by n=33 subset of the full sample.

## Making time for research

**Busayo**, a PhD student studying epigenetics, tells us about how home delivery helps him focus on his lab work:

“ I'm a PhD student and my focus is on Epigenetic reprogramming as a therapeutic model in obesity. My research requires me to spend 3-4 days a week at the lab for experiments including sometimes on Saturdays. Going in person takes a lot of time for me on a Saturday when I might also have to head into the lab for a full day of work.

Food delivery makes things simpler for me. This helps me focus on my lab work, knowing I have the food there waiting for me. It's a positive impact on my mental health. I'm able to save 3-4 hours which is more time for my research. When I have to go in person, I find the extra travel time to be exhausting. I need to recharge before starting on my lab work for the day.”

And with his nutritional background, Busayo understands just how the home delivery helps him make healthy meals:

“ The food I received helped me make healthier choices, for example, I might not have made smoothies which are so nutritious. Just having the ingredients on hand made it so much easier when I might not have the luxury of time to go out and get them.

## Feeding students and their families

**Ashley** is a fourth year undergraduate studying elementary education living with her family. Like half of the students we surveyed, Ashley finds that home delivery helps her feed both herself and her family members.

“ Currently there are eight of us in our family living together. Food delivery has been really beneficial because we're able to sustain ourselves for longer. It's both a time saving and a cost-effective way for us to eat.

Going down in person and waiting in the line would take me about an hour total. I typically take a rideshare because public transport is harder for me to get to and that can get expensive. Saturdays are also tricky for me because many of my family members are at work which means I'm looking after my young nephew.”

Delivery also means trying new things for herself and her family and making healthier decisions:

“ Without the delivery, we would have eaten less veggies. Having healthier snack options during finals and classes has helped me focus and feel more awake. Having more food in the house has generally improved our stress.”

## The need for expansion

But all of the students told us they wish the service was expanded. **Hayden**, a mechanical engineering masters student and a dad of three, tells us more:

“ I live about 15 miles away from campus. My wife and I share a car which she uses to drive to work so my main mode of transport is an e-bike or e-scooter. Navigating college through the pandemic and with three children was tricky for us. Food delivery could be great for us but we needed more food than we received.

Going in person is very time consuming for us. Delivery could save me as much as two hours. The last delivery helped us get food we might otherwise not have physically been able to get. I think at the time I was deep in exam prep and my wife was really busy so we wouldn't have been able to get out to pick up food. This delivery helped us get by.”

Hayden mostly studies online so that he can be home to look after his children but when he does visit campus, he finds it hard to fit visiting in person between his classes:

“ When I tried to visit in person, the line was just too long and I didn't have time to stand around. When I'm on campus, I'm busy with my studies and under a super time crunch. I didn't get any food that day.”

For organizations looking to expand food access for students, email Project DASH at [projectdash@doordash.com](mailto:projectdash@doordash.com).