

TheDC Investigation: Universities encouraging students to receive welfare benefits

By Matthew Boyle - The Daily Caller 2:48 AM 12/07/2010



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Many American [colleges and universities](#) are steering their students toward a new source of “financial aid”: food stamps.

In Oregon, for instance, both [Portland State](#) and [Pacific University](#) encourage their students to apply for food stamps. “Many students are surprised to learn that they may be eligible for Food Stamps,” explains Portland State’s website.

This may be a little surprising given that food stamps were created to help struggling poor people, not heavily-subsidized and frequently-idle college kids. But have no fear, assures Portland State: “Being a [college student](#) is hard work! Not just academically, but financially too.”

Far from framing the decision to apply for food stamps as a last resort, the university’s website makes taking government handouts sound like a moral imperative. “As tuition increases, many students struggle to make ends meet,” the site explains. “Sometimes grants and loans don’t stretch far enough and students are forced to work low-paying jobs. For some, this still is not enough to get by. Having to choose between buying groceries or a \$125 textbook is a tough decision that many students have been forced to make at some point in their [college](#) careers. As if taking a full class load wasn’t stressful enough!”

On its website, Odessa College in Texas describes food stamps as a form of “[financial assistance](#).” Bellingham Technical College in Washington State [walks its students](#) through the process of applying for food stamps step-by-step.

In Iowa, Des Moines State University lists food stamps information on its [financial aid page](#), while Iowa State University [recommends](#) that students struggling with food costs go on the dole.

Cornell University, meanwhile, [has assembled a handy instruction sheet](#) for students hoping to get federal food assistance.

Encouraging middle class kids to sign up for welfare may seem like a quick way to overburden government services (not to mention foster dependency), but the federal government itself appears to be in favor of it. In 2008, the Department of Agriculture renamed the food stamps program, part of a rebranding effort designed to remove the stigma attached to government aid. [Food stamps](#) are now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and accepting them isn’t supposed to be embarrassing.

The state of California is taking particularly aggressive steps to convince its citizens to go on welfare. In October, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s administration [announced plans](#) to rename its food stamps program CalFresh. “One of my highest priorities is the health and well-being of our children and all Californians, and access to healthy food options is a great beginning to achieving this,” Schwarzenegger explained in an [October 23 release](#). “My Administration is committed to encouraging all eligible Californians to take part in this program and take advantage of these healthy benefits.”

[The new image campaign is working](#). Almost 14 percent of the entire U.S. population now receives some sort of government aid. The use of food stamps, in particular, has grown dramatically. There are at least 6 million more Americans receiving government food assistance this year than last, for a total of more than 42 million people.

If you think that increase is comprised mostly of hard-luck [single moms](#) and laid-off auto workers, that doesn’t exactly seem to be the case. While the USDA doesn’t keep records by occupation, many new food stamps recipients clearly are students, according to campus news accounts from across the country.

That doesn't surprise Cato Institute budget analyst Tad DeHaven. "The federal government and, by extension, the state governments who oversee the programs, it's impossible for them to accurately determine who needs it and who doesn't need it," DeHaven told TheDC. "With students, they don't take into consideration student loan subsidies. They might be getting family income, assets and stuff like that. So, it's quite frankly easy to get them."

As government works to remove the traditional stigma associated with receiving welfare, DeHaven expects the food stamp program to continue to grow dramatically. "If you get the mentality that, 'well, so and so is getting their share, so I should get my share as well,'" he says. "It's a quintessential example of people endeavoring to live at the expense of other people."

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