MEDIA ADVISORY

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Public Forum: The Truth and the Facts: Food Inequality on Long Island at Adelphi on April 9
—Food, Place and Stigma Perpetuate Food Inequalities, Study Finds—

WHAT:
In recognition of World Health Day, Adelphi University’s Institute for Social Research and Community Engagement (iSoRCE) will announce the findings of its two-year, 152-page pioneering study, “The Truth and the Facts: Food Inequality on Long Island,” the region’s first comprehensive look at the experience of living in food poverty. The purpose of the study is to generate new knowledge that can inform programs and policies to increase access to nutritious food and improve health among the region’s disadvantaged populations and communities. A key component of this project is 35 in-depth interviews and focus groups with residents in an area identified by the USDA as a “food desert” in Suffolk County (the Mastics and Shirley). Food deserts are defined as geographic areas where people have difficulty accessing healthy, affordable food offerings. According to the USDA, virtually all of the food deserts on Long Island exist in Suffolk County.

Food deserts have been a hot target of healthy eating efforts, including Michelle Obama’s Let's Move campaign. However, Dr. Eichberg says that the food desert concept is problematic and not well measured. By capturing rich qualitative data, the study helps identify who’s really at risk and what can be done to improve access to affordable and healthy food. It addresses questions such as: how are decisions made about where people purchase/access food?; why do they access food where they do?; what do they do when they have no money for food?; and what barriers to accessing food exist in the community? While most food insecurity/food desert research has focused on geographic barriers to food, the Adelphi study finds that other barriers are of greater significance.

The report is driven by the perspectives of research participants, whose narratives highlight the manner in which economic insecurity and community issues intersect to affect experiences with food. It is also punctuated with nearly 30 telling photographs taken by participants to show what it looks and feels like to be food poor (about 10 will be exhibited the day of the forum). The project was made possible by iSoRCE funding from Cathy Nelkin Miller and Patrick Smalley. The sole author of the study is Sarah Eichberg, Ph.D., director of community research at Adelphi. Jacqueline Hart, Ph.D., vice president for strategic learning, research and evaluation at the American Jewish World Service served as a research consultant for this project.

BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FINDINGS:

EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 9, 2013
Low-income participants shared three main worries around food:
- Having enough food to survive
- Having the “right” food to eat
- Having the ability to access food in socially acceptable way

When individuals were unable to successfully manage these stressors, they were at risk for both physical and mental health issues. Mental health challenges—anxiety and depression—actually are more detrimental to overall well-being than physical sensations or impacts of hunger. Most public health studies on food insecurity look at...
physical health effects and overlook mental health outcomes. How people manage stress/stigma has profound implications for health, as the Adelphi research has shown.

The report also found that the “affordable housing desert” needs to be addressed. Virtually, all study participants reported experiencing severe housing cost burden, paying more than 50% of their income toward housing costs. In fact, in some cases, their net incomes did not meet monthly costs. Until the lack of low-cost housing in the region is addressed (particularly rental housing) and/or rental assistance is intensified by the counties, food poverty will persist for many low-income and middle class families who must choose between paying for rents and other necessities like food.

Analysis showed reframing the conversation about health messaging and mental health is important. The strain of living in food poverty is compounded by the language of public health/nutrition, which holds individuals accountable for failing to meet mainstream dietary standards. The result is that poor and near poor people experience stigma when they cannot match expert expectations around “healthy” or “proper” food or food practices. The issue of stigma is often greater for women who assume the job of “feeding the family” and feel the pressure to live up to modern ideals of “good mothering.”

WHEN:
Tuesday, April 9, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

WHERE:
Adelphi University, Alumni House, 154 Cambridge Avenue, Garden City, NY
http://www.adelphi.edu/visitors/alumnihouse.php

PROGRAM SCHEDULE:

Welcome
9:00 a.m.
Dr. Robert A. Scott, President, Adelphi University

The Truth and the Facts: Food Inequality on Long Island
Presentation of findings
9:10 a.m.
Dr. Sarah Eichberg, Director of Community Research, Adelphi University
Dr. Jacqueline Hart, Vice President, American Jewish World Service

Response
9:45 a.m.
Dr. Amy Bentley, Associate Professor of Food Studies, New York University

Panel Responses
10:00 a.m.
Jackie Silverstein, Research participant, Mastic Beach
Diane Visti, Research participant, Mastic Beach
Yvonne Vivar, Research participant, Shirley

Audience Discussion
Moderated by Robert Corman, President, Applied Concepts
10:30 a.m.

BACKGROUND:
About iSoRCE: The mission of the Institute for Social Research and Community Engagement is to generate actionable knowledge through collaborative social research and to use that knowledge to better understand and address Long Island’s critical and enduring social issues. Both the research process as well as the information it generates bolster local capacity to improve the health, environment, social, economic, and cultural conditions of communities across Long Island. iSoRCE, part of Adelphi’s Center for Health Innovation (CHI), is currently concentrating its activities and research in the areas of food, nutrition, and health.

About CHI: The Center for Health Innovation (CHI) brings together many professional and academic backgrounds to create and foster practitioner-focused, interdisciplinary academic programming, healthcare research, community partnerships and leadership—all with the goal of meeting current and emergent healthcare needs. CHI is a progressive collaboration of schools and disciplines within Adelphi University. It establishes a single point of reference for all healthcare programs and services, thereby creating a collective identity, increasing efficiency, and expanding Adelphi’s regional influence in healthcare. Interdisciplinary groups monitor our programs, and their work is supported through consultation with the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee. For more information about CHI, visit adelphi.edu/chi.

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