Miramar College Food Insecurity Report
Professor Laura T. González and Karina L. Parker
August 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Diego Miramar College hosts a small food pantry on campus geared toward emergency bagged meals for food insecure students. Although it is run by the EOPS program, it has met some challenges in the last few years that undermine its ability to support students successfully. In Spring 2016, Laura González' Honors Cultural Anthropology students undertook a study with full participation of EOPS staff to assess the current state of the food pantry and make recommendations towards its future sustained viability.

METHODS

Mixed methods were used, including interviews, surveys, group discussions, ethnographic data, and academic research. These were done among students, faculty, and staff at Miramar, other SDCCD campuses, and several colleges and universities. Researchers compiled data from over 130 participants over the course of the Spring semester 2016, including EOPS and Health Services staff.

KEY FINDINGS

- The Miramar College food pantry meets the needs of very few students on campus by providing emergency bagged meals (breakfast and lunch) upon request.
- The majority of students, faculty, and staff are unaware that the food pantry exists on campus.
- Of those students who regularly request food from the food pantry, several have taken advantage of the system leading to abuse of resources.
- EOPS staff find it challenging to manage the demands of handling the food pantry in addition to their regular workload and have had to temporarily discontinue the program due to an inability or unwillingness to maintain operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Miramar College's food pantry requires funding, oversight, and partnerships to become effective and sustainable. Specifically, results of this study indicate a need for
- consistent funding for operations in addition to donation requests
- compensated staff to manage and promote the food pantry
- a climate-controlled location with space for staff (students), shelving, and storage
- partnerships with a food bank or sponsors for a steady source of funding
- further research and support of housing displaced students, as food insecurity and housing displacement are correlated.

NARRATIVE

I.   **BACKGROUND**
     The issue of food insecurity among college students has recently been spotlighted by
     several major research studies. These studies show significant food insecurity (20-25%)
     among students from community colleges through universities in California.

   A. **Community College Campuses**
       The Wisconsin HOPE Lab Report from December 2015 surveyed 4,000
       community college students. Within the 10 community colleges studied (including
       SDCCD campuses), **20 percent of students are hungry** and 13 percent
       experience housing displacement. SDCCD represents 40 percent of the 10
       campuses participating in this study.
       Source: *Hungry to Learn: Addressing Food and Housing Insecurity Among
       Undergraduates*
       (http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin_hope_lab_hungry_to_learn.pdf)

   B. **CSU Campuses**
       In February 2015, CSU Chancellor Timothy White commissioned a study across
       CSU campuses on the topics of food and housing insecurity. Results indicate the
       average level of **food insecure students at 21 percent**, even with 11 campuses
       offering assistance of some kind. Many of Miramar's students go on to Cal State
       campuses. This research seems to underscore a need for more than emergency
       assistance, but also providing paths for students to help themselves as some of
       them may move on to transfer institutions.
       Source: *Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU*
       ([https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1487/cohome](https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1487/cohomelessstudy.pdf?10000)
       [lessstudy.pdf?10000](https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1487/cohomelessstudy.pdf?10000))

   C. **UC Campuses**
       Based on the results of a second major study of UC student food insecurity,
       Chancellor Janet Napolitano has allocated $151K to each UC campus each year
       for two years. This funding is in addition to the $75K distributed to each campus
       in 2014 after an initial study funded by the UC Global Food Initiative. Findings
       show that **19 percent of UC students reported "very low" food security**,
       indicating chronic hunger.
       Source: *UC Global Food Initiative: Student Food Access and Security Study*
       ([http://ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-](http://ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-food-access-and-security-study.pdf)
       [food-access-and-security-study.pdf](http://ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/best-practices/food-access-security/student-food-access-and-security-study.pdf))

D. California State Legislature

AB 1747 (Weber) is currently working its way through legislature to add Section 66025.93 to the Education Code, and to amend Sections 18904.3 and 18995 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to food assistance. If approved, it will require colleges, among other things, to improve coordination between campus food pantries and food banks within California.

Source: *AB-1747 Food assistance: higher education students.(2015-2016)* (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB1747)

II. **Reasons for conducting Food Insecurity Research at SD Miramar College**

The current food pantry is operated by staff members solely on a volunteer basis, but it has become burdensome. There is little time or energy within a workday to put towards infrastructure and logistics of the food pantry. Because of this, the food pantry program that is currently offered at Miramar College does not meet campus, staff, or student body needs.

The results of data taken in Spring 2016 show that faculty, staff, and student body on Miramar College's campus have little to no awareness of the growing issue of food insecurity. Many staff members are not aware of how prevalent food insecurity is on campus, and most students are not even aware that there is a food pantry and other services on campus to help them.

III. **Methods**

A. Student Honors research

In order to approach this issue, Professor Laura González tasked her Honors Cultural Anthropology students in the Spring semester of 2016 with assessing the state of the Miramar College Food Pantry. Each student chose a different approach in order to get a well-rounded picture. Of the five Honors students, Theron Page identified students who are most at risk for food insecurity at Miramar; Jacob McCain assessed the marketing and awareness of the food pantry among students and faculty on campus; Harrieth Sucaldito explored the links between food insecurity and student health; and Thaimae Le researched how four-year colleges and universities handle their student food pantries. Karina Parker, co-author of this report, focused on understanding the structure and functioning of the food pantry at Miramar, and how it compares with the pantries at City and Mesa Colleges. Each student used a combination of surveys, interviews, group discussions, ethnographic data, and academic research.

This report is a compilation of the research undertaken by the Honors Cultural Anthropology students, with further assessment and analysis by co-authors Karina Parker (Miramar College student) and Laura González (Miramar College

Anthropology Professor). Laura González was also one of the original founders of the food pantry on campus, formerly referred to as the Food Exchange.

IV. Background of the Miramar College Food Pantry

A. History

The Miramar College Food Pantry began formally in 2010 under the direction of the EOPS office. Prior to this time, EOPS technicians found they were regularly distributing food items such as fruit, Cup O'Noodles, and granola bars to hungry students. Kim Roser, an Adjunct EOPS Counselor, was asked to coordinate the pantry. Roser reached out to Health Services, who agreed to help distribute food from their office, and to Laura González, Facilities committee member and Food and Culture Club advisor, who helped identify a dry food storage room at the Fieldhouse (Room J-302).

At first on her own, and later with EOPS students completing EOPS projects, Roser organized and bagged emergency meals. The first year, the proceeds from one food drive around Thanksgiving lasted all year, as the program was little known. The second year, two drives helped sustain the pantry. A student questionnaire was also given out with bags to get more information about why students were needing to use the pantry. Information about further resources were also included with a card on each bag, such as how to apply for CalFresh.

With more awareness on campus of free meals, however, some repetitious and consistent use of the pantry was noted by staff. Certain students were misusing the resources intended to be emergency meals, and visiting both food distribution locations in one day (EOPS and Health Services). This misuse of the program became the main barrier to its successful operation, especially due to the lack of program oversight.

B. Current status

Prior to July 2016, the food pantry program was organized and operated by EOPS. Staff members and volunteer faculty member Laura González email faculty and staff for donations. EOPS staff bags individual meals to hand out upon student request at two locations: EOPS and Health Services. Student IDs are being entered into the campus system SARSGRID to help track data, but no policies have been implemented to alleviate abuse or address the lack of education or information on campus. In addition, EOPS staff often feel overburdened by the additional (non-compensated) responsibility of all food pantry duties.

Since July 2016, Miramar College Sociology professor, Dr. Laura Pecenco, and her student organization REACT has also chosen to look at Miramar's food pantry as their project of focus. REACT students hope to be part of the transition

to a more equitable and sustainable campus food pantry program. Karina Parker, Miramar student and co-author of this paper, is also working with REACT as they actively seek funding and more support from the college and/or district.

V. **Major Challenges for the Miramar College Food Pantry**
Through surveys and interviews, Honors Cultural Anthropology student researchers found several challenges that hinder the success of the Miramar College food pantry.

   A. **Non-paid positions**
   All EOPS and Health Services assistance regarding the food pantry has been voluntary, so staff members must squeeze in the time amidst an already demanding job. Because of this, the infrastructure necessary to manage a healthy and successful food pantry is at risk of being neglected and mismanaged. There are records that indicate the program has been discontinued temporarily one or more times due to lack of staff availability or willingness.

   B. **Little to no regulatory or organizational oversight**
   Because staff managing the daily food pantry duties have been tasked with this on top of their regular workload, none is able to provide the kind of oversight that is needed. Not only does this affect the requesting, receiving, and distribution of donations, but also severely limits the attention needed to educate and inform the faculty and student body of this important resource. This issue also leads to misuse of the system by students who learn to take advantage of the loopholes. The SARSGRID computerized tracking system was implemented in the past year to try to meet these challenges, but without the time needed for oversight, the system was of little use.

   C. **Little to no steady funding**
   Donations are solicited from campus community members for food and grocery gift cards. However, no other consistent source of funding exists. In 2015, EOPS received a one-time grant of $2000 from Student Equity funds under the management of Dean Howard Irvin (who has since left the district). Otherwise, EOPS relies on the generosity of the campus community for food items to distribute, and makes do with its available resources, which are already stretched thinly. There has been little to no monetary or other support from SDCCD, and it has hindered the capabilities of those trying to address this need.

VI. **How have other colleges and universities dealt with these challenges?**
One student researcher, Thaimae Le, sought information from colleges and universities external to SDCCD to see how their food banks were run. She found that several had benefited from the resources offered by organizations with shared goals, partnerships with local food banks, and consistent funding sources for operations.

A. **CUFBA**

The United States of America College and University Food Bank Alliance or CUFBA (http://www.cufba.org) aims to tackle food insecurity in college, but less than 6% of the 5,000+ colleges have joined. CUFBA offers resources such as research on best practices, a forum to communicate with other campuses, training, and support. It is free to join.

B. **Partnering with Local Food Banks**

Colleges that partnered with a local food bank were able to stretch their dollars and utilizing the resources and fact sheets provided by CUFBA, effectively gauging the amounts and types of food needed. González met with the director of programs at Feeding America San Diego in Fall 2015. She learned that with a 501.c.3 account, the Miramar food pantry would be able to purchase food from them online regularly at a cost of $.18 per pound, as other colleges do in the local area. This is a sustainable resource to keep the pantry stocked not only with non-perishables but also fresh fruits and vegetables in keeping with demand.

C. **Seeking Sustainable Funding**

In 2014, University of California campuses were awarded $75K each to implement a program to address food insecurity among UC students called the Global Food Initiative (http://www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative/). With the funds, UCSD's Associated Student Government (ASG) started a food pantry program which operates out of a dedicated space on campus. It is managed by ASG staff, interns, and volunteers, with continual support from campus and state levels. They also partner with their campus farm, local farms, food banks, and various organizations, both on campus and off, to provide food, information, and education to those who are experiencing food insecurity. The program has been in operation for almost 2 years, serve 220+ students a week, and are expanding to also address student homelessness.

VII. **District comparisons: Mesa and City College food pantries**

While both Mesa and City Colleges have food pantries for students, the pantries arose by grassroots efforts of individuals on each campus. City College's model has proved to be successful, managed as a 501.c.3 non-profit organization. Mesa College is currently reassessing its model, and now has funding to develop a more efficient pantry.

A. **San Diego Mesa College**

Mesa College's food pantry program was previously managed by the Associated Student Government, and operated ad hoc without much assistance or cooperation from Mesa campus, faculty, or staff. It consisted of mostly canned goods left on a designated table in the ASG office for needy students.

Fortunately, towards the end of Spring 2016 semester, Mesa College staff members identified this issue and the food pantry program is currently being reorganized thanks to funding awarded from the Student Equity fund.

B. San Diego City College

City College's food pantry is efficiently managed by the Business Department with daily operations handled by NANC (Short-term, Non-Classified) business interns. The food pantry is a 501.c.3, and SDCCD allows its employees to make automatic deductions from their paychecks. City College's food pantry also operates out of a dedicated space: a large room on campus with large bookshelves to store food, with a computer, tables and chairs. City College's food pantry is managed and run as a business, with students only able to access emergency meals once a week. Most importantly, because those who manage the food pantry are supported by SDCCD in various ways, it has enabled City College to serve 120+ unique students weekly.

VIII.   Recommendations

A. Paid staff

Oversight of Miramar College's food pantry program needs to be designated to one or more paid staff members from the staff or student community. This will ensure the food pantry program is effectively managed, operated, and marketed based upon research gained from various studies and food pantry programs. By designating someone to address food insecurity, this would free the current EOPS and Health Services employees from this uncompensated position. Having better management and consistent oversight will decrease the amount of abuse by students who are seeking to take advantage of the program. Payment can range from a paid part-time position, to ESUs (Educational Service Units) or overtime pay, to student internships for credit hours. Nonetheless, based on data, it is important that a district employee, not a student, has the oversight role.

B. Program Funding

Miramar College's food pantry infrastructure needs funding from the college or SDCCD to restructure and improve its services. With funding, it would be able to implement a successful food pantry program similar to UCSD and City College's programs. Program funding would be used to sustain the needs of food demands by allowing the pantry to purchase food when necessary from local food bank partners or supply college cafeteria gift cards. The food pantry should not be required to rely upon grant funding, as this needs to be a permanent source of student support on campus, and grants are temporary. Student Equity, the CFT Union, or Associated Student Government may be potential sources of funding.

C. Promotion

The food pantry program should incorporate fundraising events, campus programs, workshop events, and both internal and external partnerships to help further educate the campus community. However, promotion should only be done once an organized and well-managed system is in place, otherwise it could lead to on-going misuse by students. The program must be promoted as emergency assistance only, with additional resources provided for students who need long-term assistance.

D. Partnerships

With a 501.c.3 non-profit account, Miramar's food pantry would be able to take advantage of a sustaining partnership with Feeding America San Diego (http://feedingamericasd.org/programs/). Feeding America San Diego has additional resources that can be brought to campus, such as designated events in which their staff helps our students sign up for CalFresh or other programs.

E. Campus Facility

A dedicated space on campus to operate a food pantry is needed to store and operate from. The facility should be spacious enough for several staff members to organize food items and act as a distribution center. While the Fieldhouse storage room J-302, has been intermittently storing non-perishable goods, a larger, more central location on campus would give the food pantry room to improve their services. A larger office, conference room, or other space with air conditioning that is closer to student activities would be more appropriate.

F. Housing Insecurity

It is clear by looking at the HOPE Lab Study, CSU's *Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU,* and other reports, that food insecurity and housing displacement are strongly related. Therefore, guidelines and policies that result from this report must also take housing insecurity into account.

IX. Conclusions

Miramar College's food pantry infrastructure needs greater support from SDCCD either by hiring staff to oversee the management of logistics, or by giving greater authority to an individual or group so they can implement procedural change in response to the demands of food insecure students. Doing so would free the current EOPS and Health Services employees from this volunteer position and enable them to contribute in their own more specialized ways. With proper management, the new managers of the food pantry could streamline communications, help educate the staff and students on this resource, implement policies, and cultivate partnerships to generate more resources which would greatly enhance what time, effort, and money is already funneled toward this necessary resource.