



## Helping Students Survive So They Can Succeed

A recent Wisconsin HOPE Lab report (Goldrick-Rab, Richards, Hernandez, 2017) surveyed 33,000 students at 70 community colleges in 24 states and found that half of the students had unstable housing and two-thirds of them had low food security. Students receiving Federal Pell Grants were more likely than non-Pell recipients to struggle with securing adequate nutritious food and safe, stable housing. Living in uncertain and scarce conditions causes stress among individuals and interferes with their ability to plan ahead.

At Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) in Reno, Nevada, we noticed that some of our students lacked basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. The following is a summary of our process and experiences at TMCC to establish a food pantry and emergency resource fund for students lacking basic necessities. It is our goal that by reading this Innovation Abstracts, you will consider ways your institution can address needs your students may have outside of the classroom.

### Who and What Do You Need to Get Started?

Starting a food pantry at your institution does not require an official committee or process. Based on our experience, all you need to begin the effort is a group of like-minded faculty and staff who are willing to help students. When determining who to ask to join the effort, consider those individuals who may be having similar conversations on campus about students in need. You can narrow down the group of potential faculty and staff participants by asking the following questions:

- Which individuals on campus allow their students turn work in late or make up a failed exam when they know their students are going through a difficult time?
- Are there faculty and staff members who keep food and snacks in their offices for students who are hungry?
- Are there faculty and staff members who regularly give their own money to students with emergency needs?

At TMCC, we have an ad hoc committee of 16 faculty and staff who represent various groups vital to the success of this effort at our college: Faculty, Student Services, Marketing and Communications, Foundation and Financial

Aid, and Student Government. Having representation from all of these areas helps to ensure the desired services can be provided to students.

### Where Can This Be Done?

When considering the question of where a food pantry can be located on campus, it's important to keep in mind that it can be located anywhere. It will be up to you and the committee to consider what space is available on campus, and if necessary, how to reach multiple campus locations. For example, at TMCC our primary food bank is located in our Counseling office, our monthly meetings are in the Student Government Association's office, and our second food pantry is in a former storage room at a separate campus location. The pantry locations should be easily accessible so students can easily obtain the services they need.

### Steps Towards a Food Pantry

Establishing a food pantry is a process that takes time. It helps to begin by identifying organizations on campus that are already providing resources to students. The TMCC food pantry was not operational until 2016, but in 2013 we created The Student Resource Fair, an event that brought community agencies to campus. The Student Resource Fair invited over 30 agencies to campus with the hopes of assisting students inside and outside of the classroom.

Hosting the fair once per semester produced great results; however, we determined that it needed a corresponding website that was always current with critical information. The website listed the various agencies, their services, and how to contact them.

After the resource web page was posted, we realized there were programs already at TMCC that addressed students' needs. Our next task was to connect with these various programs to gain an understanding of how they addressed students' needs. We were able to assemble a cross-collaborative group that consisted of our original committee and individuals from other campus organizations providing similar services to students. This group agreed that setting up a food pantry on our campus was the next step for our institution to help students be successful. Stemming from The Student Resource Fair, we opened our food pantry in 2016.

### Assembling a Food Pantry

When undertaking the task of setting up a food pantry on your campus, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. First, research and find agencies in your community that are already addressing the issue of food scarcity and that can

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act as a potential partner with your on-campus program. TMCC was able to partner with the Food Bank of Northern Nevada, establish food pantries on two campuses, and obtain a grant to purchase refrigerators for both pantries.

The food pantry committee will need to have an honest assessment of what your institution can commit to in terms of space, time, and people. Originally at TMCC, access to our pantry was by appointment only, but as we became more established, regular hours were scheduled with emergency appointments as needed. In the first year, we served over 150 students.

### Creating an Emergency Resource Fund (Emergency Fund Needs)

During our committee meetings, the idea of establishing a way to help students with money became a significant topic. We recognized that while many students lacked food, other students experience emergencies that require financial assistance. The decision was made to establish an emergency resource fund.

Again, we started by exploring existing resources on campus. We began our emergency fund in the fall of 2015 with \$50 from our Foundation Office's employee payroll deduction program. In 2016 we had over \$900 contributed directly from employees. To date, we have provided over \$6,000 in emergency funds for such issues as bus passes, medical expenses, childcare, tuition payments, bereavement/compassionate airfare, and emergency bill payments.

Because we didn't want the emergency fund to impact students' financial aid status, with the help of our Foundation and Financial Aid Offices, we were able to determine whether there were scholarships already available with the same purpose as our emergency fund. This example demonstrates why it's important that your committee is comprised of representatives from a variety of offices, including the Foundation and Financial Aid.

### Conclusion

As you consider ways in which you can better meet the needs of your students outside of the classroom, we want to leave you with important points to remember. First, meeting the needs of students will be a continually evolving process. Along the way, you will have successes and failures that will cause you to reevaluate how to maximize campus and community resources. For example, in the last year, here are some of the ways we have evolved:

- We realized we could not depend entirely on existing staff (who already had other assigned job duties) to make this work. We had to develop student worker positions and recruit volunteers. In addition, we realized we needed dedicated paid staff to support all the initiatives and help link students to community resources.
- Coordinating weekly food pick-ups was a challenge due to the need for a large vehicle.

However, we were able to secure a vehicle from our Facilities department for picking up donated food.

- We found the need to develop, refine, revise, and clarify our procedures many times for individuals working with the food pantry and the emergency resource fund. We developed a manual for workers in the food pantry and better policies for determining how to access and receive emergency funds.

There is no one way to meet the needs of students on campus. We have shared what TMCC did, and it is our hope that you can learn from us as you consider how to meet the needs of your students outside of the classroom.

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### Works Cited

Goldrick-Rab, S., & Hernandez, A. (2017, March). Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education [Scholarly project]. In Wisconsin HOPE Lab. Retrieved March, 2017, from <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf>