

Intercultural Training Program: Sac State Food Pantry

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The ASI Food Pantry at Sacramento State is a resource for students who feel they need assistance in securing food to eat. It provides some basic goods, but there seems to be limited resources that help students use the food they have access to. They do provide some assistance with recipe cards and a small library of food books. But these resources don't always line up with the food that is currently in stock. The goal of this program is to make the ASI Food Pantry an environment where food education is encouraged and promoted. This would hopefully give students clearer ideas for how to utilize the ingredients available to them, take some stress out of their already busy schedules, and give students the means to fulfill their basic needs and focus on their studies.

In order to build an intercultural training program for this organization, a needs assessment first needed to take place before putting any ideas into place. This was mainly done through observation of the organization. Observation information was collected through volunteering to get a behind-the-scenes look at what working at the organization looked like. Through this volunteer research method, discoveries about the culture and mindset of the ASI Food Pantry were able to be discovered. During this research period, there appeared to be a gap in what the food pantry was offering and what students needed. The food pantry offers food, but in order to meet basic physiological needs, students need to make and consume meals.

This discovery was made after noticing the products that the food pantry provides. The food pantry does accomplish one of its own goals, and that is to provide students with food and basic necessities to Sacramento State students at no extra cost. But all of the food that is provided is uncooked produce and canned or prepackaged items. There is a stark difference between the food that is provided and meals that can be created from that food. After observing the food the food pantry offers on a weekly basis, the food looks more like ingredients that can be used to make meals, not food that can be eaten as meals conveniently. Given the age of their target

demographic, this can prove to provide another challenge that faces students. The main challenge being that young adults are not the best at cooking. According to this journal article from the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, many young adults are able to cook convenient foods with confidence, but those in lower socio-economic groups were less likely to express confidence in preparing meals (Adams et al., 2015).

According to this journal article from the National Library of Medicine, many young adults in the United States primarily choose foods that have negative impacts on long-term health (Powell et al., 2019). These include caffeinated beverages, convenient foods and snacks. These food items were most popular among young adults as compared to fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods. The ASI Food Pantry does provide some snacks and convenient foods, but this is not the majority of their supply. The food pantry primarily stocks up on produce like fruits, vegetables and starches. They also provide canned and prepackaged foods like canned tomatoes, beans, rice, and vegetables. While these foods are the better alternative compared to most convenient and snack foods, younger adults have much less experience with these healthier foods. This lack of knowledge for how to utilize the foods that they are being offered adds another layer of complexity for the average student's day to day life. This can also lead to developing a new problem regarding food waste when these ingredients are not being used.

There are obviously students who have an understanding for cooking and what ingredients they want to use. But this basic level of knowledge cannot apply to everyone who visits this establishment. It is not difficult to imagine there are some students who have never needed to cook before or students who have never bought their own groceries before. Even if students possess some knowledge for basic cooking techniques and recipes, they could still struggle to properly utilize the ingredients they pick out with their busy class schedules and work/life balance. This disconnect between the food being provided and the food being

transformed into proper meals is how this training program can be useful. There should be more emphasis placed on food education for the staff so that they can relay that information to the students at the food pantry.

To overcome this gap between food provided and meals that can be created, this program will enforce two changes in the food pantry's operations. The first method of change will be getting Food Pantry employed staff properly trained with a certified nutrition education program. The point of this program would be to teach and reinforce knowledge of nutritious eating. This will give staff further insights on how to use the food they receive every week to create high quality meals. This information can then be forwarded to the students in order to assist them in creating meals. For example, the food pantry can provide recipes based on the food that is provided to them every week or two. The food pantry can also create social media posts with the recipe details so that students can easily access the recipes at any time.

The next method of change in the program would be to create a schedule with the Cove at the Sacramento State Wellness Center. Currently the food pantry partners with the Cove to do cooking demos. However, these demos don't take place on a regular basis. So there needs to be a schedule that will allow students to coordinate these events with their schedules. Having a demo once or twice a month would give students an opportunity to learn recipes and see them be made in person. Recipes could potentially contain vocabulary that is unfamiliar or require tools that students don't currently have. These cooking demos would be a great opportunity for students to ask questions about specific parts of recipes and what tools they might need to create those same meals at home.

The goal of this program is to make ASI Food Pantry staff and Sac State students more knowledgeable about how to utilize the food that the pantry provides. By educating food pantry

staff on proper nutrition and doing regularly scheduled cooking demos, this will give students who are struggling with food the knowledge they need to eat well. These changes can empower students to feel that they can create their own meals and feel empowered by the community. When people are at a low point in their lives, they can make rash decisions. Decisions that can lead them down a path of drug addiction or decision that can damage them financially just to feel a sense of peace. If students are properly feeding themselves and have the knowledge to push through this tough time in their lives, they can gain the will to push through the adversity.

Because students have responsibilities outside of feeding themselves as well. When these responsibilities pile on top of their need to eat, this gets in the way of their basic human need to eat nutritious meals. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, immediate physiological needs are the first and most important level of human motivation (Maslow, 2023). When people are not able to consume proper meals, this spells problems for the rest of their needs like security, sense of belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Students enroll in college so that they can create a better life for themselves and their family members. They study so that they can get high quality jobs that will give them the resources to survive in the modern world. If students can't even secure the first level of human need, this will only spell more problems for securing the other levels in their lives.

The food pantry is a resource for students at Sac State who may find themselves struggling with food security. It provides some basic produce and prepackaged goods, but it does not explicitly list out ways to utilize the food they currently have available. With this program, the goal is to create an environment that enforces and promotes food education with recipe suggestions and regular cooking demos. These resources will give students additional knowledge to properly utilize food pantry offerings in their own home. It will give students the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about how to prepare nutritious meals so that they can meet

some of their basic physiological needs. And with those basic needs met, students can focus on what they came to university to do, which is to study and secure a more promising future for themselves.

References

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