



## University Food Pantry Increases Access to Healthy Foods for Food Insecure Students

### At a Glance

Through collaboration with the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD) on the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Food Pantry adopted and implemented a Nutrition Policy that ensures food insecure students, faculty and staff at UNLV have access to healthy foods and nutrition education.

### Public Health Challenge

UNLV is the one of the most racially and ethnically diverse campuses in America, with 61% of its 30,000 students representing minority populations. A recent survey of UNLV students found that 45% were food insecure. Food insecurity among college students is a growing problem in America. As tuition rates and cost of living continue to rise, students are struggling to pay for housing, tuition, food and other necessary college expenses. For low-income students, federal student aid typically does not cover all their college-related costs, and many college students are ineligible for federal food assistance programs such as SNAP. Food insecurity has been shown to negatively impact students' grades and impede their ability to complete college on time. On-campus food pantries bridge the gap by providing food and other resources to food insecure students. It is a crucial public health intervention to ensure that on-campus food pantries provide their clients access to healthy foods and nutrition education.

### Approach

The UNLV Food Pantry faced several challenges towards offering healthy foods to their clients. Their location contained no refrigerators or freezers and did not have consistent temperature control; therefore, they could only carry shelf-stable foods that were not temperature sensitive. Despite the high level of food insecurity among UNLV students, the UNLV Food Pantry was under-utilized due to lack of awareness of its off-campus location. A taskforce was created to address these issues and included participation from

members of UNLV Student Government, the UNLV Nutrition Department, the UNLV Community Garden, and the UNLV Libraries, which coordinates a “Food for Fines” food drive campaign for the UNLV Food Pantry. An assessment of the UNLV Food Pantry was performed, and input was sought from the local food bank on development of a nutrition policy to guide the UNLV Food Pantry in increasing their healthy food choices. After a draft policy was developed, it was shared with CDC subject matter experts and the policy was finalized.

## **Results**

Through collaboration with community and campus partners, the first ever “Farmers Market” produce giveaway event was held in Spring ’19 on the UNLV campus. Over 5,000 pounds of apples, oranges and sweet potatoes were given out to over 500 students. The event was held outside of the UNLV Student Union to raise awareness of the UNLV Food Pantry as well as provide students with information on SNAP eligibility and other campus financial assistance resources. A smaller mobile produce event was held in the Fall ’20, with more mobile produce events planned for the future. The UNLV Food Pantry Nutrition Policy was developed with input from the taskforce, adopted by the UNLV Nutrition Department in October 2019, implemented at the UNLV Food Pantry January 2020, and signed by the Dean of The School of Integrated Health Sciences in July 2020. The policy uses the Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) spotlight food ranking system and nutrition education for pantry clients.

## **For More Information**

You can learn more about food insecurity among college students by visiting Feeding America’s College Student Hunger Statistics and Research webpage: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/college-hunger-research>. Take action in your community by working with your local universities and colleges on establishing on-campus food pantries and expanding the ability of existing campus food pantries to offer healthy foods and nutrition education.

## **Sustaining Success**

The UNLV Food Pantry will continue to increase their capacity to offer healthy foods and nutrition education to their clients. In late 2020, the UNLV Food Pantry will move into a new, larger location that will allow them to offer a wider variety of healthy foods, including refrigerated and frozen foods. The UNLV Food Pantry is also a recipient of CARES Community Food Response funds and will use their funds to implement an online ordering system for their clients to safely distribute food during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The nutritional content of pantry foods will be available on the online ordering system, as well as healthy recipes and information about nutrition for chronic diseases.

## **Quote**

“The UNLV Food Pantry Nutrition Policy will ensure the longevity of the UNLV Food Pantry program and help guide current and future students and staff to a healthy and positive experience during their time at UNLV.” - Tanner Ellingsen, Director, UNLV Food Pantry

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