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## **Implementing a Food Pantry at Butler University**

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# **Implementing a Food Pantry at Butler University**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Communication and Media Studies

College of Communication

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Brooke Blevins

21 April 2021

## **Introduction**

More than one third of college students experience food insecurity and it is directly impacting both their mental and physical health, which in turn influences their academic success (El Zein, 2018). With over 600 colleges and universities across the country offering a food pantry as a resource for students, Butler University was falling behind in supporting students who are experiencing food insecurity (McArthur, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic served as an additional motivating factor to implement a food pantry on campus to offer students free, non-perishable food to supplement their diets. Incorporating a food pantry on campus allows students to have consistent access to food and also offers a direct chance for students, faculty, staff, and alumni to support students who may be struggling by donating food items and money.

## **Thesis Objective**

This thesis documents the semester-long effort of implementing, opening, and managing a food pantry on Butler University's campus to offer free food to students who may be experiencing food insecurity. My role as an intern for the Department of Student Involvement and Leadership has allowed me to have hands-on experience in working through all of the logistical measures needed to run a university food pantry. The objective of this thesis is to show why a food pantry on campus is needed, explain the specific needs of Butler University and the Indianapolis community in regards to Butler students experiencing food insecurity, and present the process and details involved in opening and operating the pantry throughout the spring 2021 semester.

## Literature Review

The rising cost of a college education in the United States paired with the high demand from employers for young professionals to have a college degree is forcing many college aged Americans to put the financial priority of college above their basic needs. In 1990 the average cost for one year at a public institution covering all tuition and fees was just over \$5,000 but by 2012 the cost had risen to over \$22,000 (Twill, 2016). This spike in tuition prices has put an even heavier burden on low-income students who want to earn a degree but struggle to meet their basic needs of survival in the first place. A 2020 study reported that “more than half (51.8%) of college students living off-campus and away from their families live below the poverty line” and that 40.8% of college students at a medium-sized four-year university “reported that they had cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money to buy food” (Waity, 2020). Poverty and food insecurity are directly connected which puts college students at risk of being unsuccessful in their academic endeavors due to a lack of healthy and nutritious food options (Keith-Jennings, 2019). “Food insecurity, or limited consistent access to nutritionally adequate and safe food, has become a serious public health problem affecting college students in the United States” with an average of 42% of college students struggling (El Zein, 2018). There are many college students facing struggles like food insecurity as a result of having a low income who are not seeking help which can impact more than just a student’s physical health. To cope with food insecurity, “the most common strategies students reported using sometimes or often to obtain food were buying cheap, processed foods (91.7%), eating less healthy meals to eat more food (81.7%), attending on-campus or community functions that provided free food (81.1%),

stretching food to make it last longer (89.2%), borrowing money from family or friends (81.9%), and holding one or more part-time or full-time jobs (84.2%)” (Waity, 2020).

Supporting the academic success of Butler students is another key reason for starting an on-campus food pantry. The relationship between being well nourished and academically successful is another important motivator behind Butler’s need to offer resources to combat food insecurity among students. A 2018 study discovered that “students that experience food insecurity have a 22% lower likelihood of having a 3.5–4.0 grade point average than their food secure counterparts” (Cady, 2018). Beyond academics, food insecurity has substantial impacts on mental health as well. A 2015 study discovered that “when students in the highest GPA category (3.5–4.0) were compared to students in a lower GPA category (2.0–2.49), there was a significant relationship between food insecurity and student GPA for the students in the sample” (Marato, 2015). Pairing this finding with Butler University’s commitment to academic success and the institution’s commitment “to supporting and guiding students as they strive to reach the highest standards of academic excellence” it would be deemed necessary to offer a food pantry program that is going to give all students a fair and equal opportunity for academic excellence in regards to their food security. Creating this free resource is an important effort that helps Butler achieve its goals of making educational opportunities accessible to a diverse population of students.

With a heightened awareness and focus on inclusivity being projected across different university media, prioritizing students of varying income levels is also necessary. The different levels of diversity that exist are a complex system that range from race and gender to socioeconomic status and more (Page, 2010). While there has

most recently been an emphasis on diversifying entities through racial equality, Butler has constructed a strategic plan that highlights an experience that will “contribute to students’ overall development and prioritizes their well-being” which will include support for students who may be struggling financially (Butler University, n.d.). Food insecurity is not equally distributed among racial and ethnic groups, in 2015, it was reported that both black and Latino people experienced food insecurity at higher than that for the nation at 12.7% (Myers, 2017). In the last fifty years many grocery store chains have sought suburban locations, avoiding low-income areas altogether and many large chains like Safeway began to close stores outside of serene suburb areas in the late twentieth century reducing food access for low-income and minority people (Akron, 2011). Additionally, the inequalities that exist systemically among race and class “produce insufficient nutrition and increase food-related disease” (Akron, 2011). A food pantry will help us to both empower students in lower socio-economic situations, and, at the same time, it will help improve access for students from racially diverse backgrounds.

Butler University’s long-standing dedication to diversity and inclusion offers an additional motivation for opening a food pantry. In the diversity, equity, and inclusion section of Butler University’s website the mission states that Butler is “fostering a place where all members of the Butler community have a sense of belonging, enhancing the learning of oneself and others, and the development of intercultural competence” (Butler University, n.d.). However, without offering resources to help students combat food insecurity in order to be healthy and reach their full academic success, Butler is unable to effectively level the playing field and empower all members of the community to find a sense of belonging. As an institution that people of varying backgrounds call home, there

needs to be steps taken in order to make students who are diverse in the resources available to them feel accepted and supported.

A letter distributed to all students in the summer of 2020 from university President James Danko states, “the historic legacy of Butler University has its origins in its founding mission of 1855. Five years before the outbreak of civil war that divided our nation over issues of slavery and succession, Ovid Butler and community leaders established North Western Christian University, the forbearer of today’s Butler University. Central to its unwavering sense of purpose was the fundamental belief that education should be available to all” (Danko, 2020). While the recent events of summer 2020 have the image of diversity focused on race, there are many levels to what inclusivity can encompass. One of those levels being socioeconomic and the structures and patterns that put limits on people of differing financial backgrounds (Page, 2010). The historic nature of attending a four-year university is one that comes with great privilege financially as tuition costs and fees have been placed in ranges of thousands of dollars for decades (Twill, 2016). With Butler’s consistent expression of a strong commitment to creating an inclusive environment for all students, action regarding support for students who are not privileged financially has offered support for opening the Butler University Food Pantry.

In October of 2020 President James Danko released a statement to the Butler community outlining diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the university’s strategic plan for the future. In this statement Danko explained that Butler University “must solve the challenge of recruiting, retaining, and cultivating students, faculty, and staff from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds and identities” (Danko, 2020). Having a



successful, well known food pantry established on campus will serve as a key piece of this strategic plan in creating an additional level of acceptance and support for potential new students who are coming from diverse financial backgrounds. President Danko stated that “we must seek to advance inclusion in all that we do, both inside and outside of the classroom” (Danko, 2020). The Butler University Food Pantry offers advancement of inclusivity efforts outside of the classroom that will directly impact students’ abilities to be successful in the classroom. The pantry not only serves as a resource for students who may be struggling with food insecurity, but also as a means to bring the Butler community together to fundraise and donate to offer support to keep the pantry up and running. Opening a food pantry on campus has also created a great platform to bring conversations about food insecurity to Butler’s campus as an educational initiative.

It has been found that food insecurity among college students increases towards the end of each semester as a result of stress and inability to engage in healthy physical activity which is putting an added stress on students around the time of final exams (El Zein, 2018). Food insecurity can look different for different individuals and their specific needs. Among college students it is common to classify food insecurity under a lack of fruit and vegetable intake, rarely eating breakfast, and higher levels of stress and anxiety (El Zein, 2018). There are many college students who may not classify themselves as food insecure if they are able to somewhat regularly purchase food. However, food insecurity is characterized under concerns much more broad than simply not being able to afford food. “Characteristics of food insecurity include being worried about running out of food, being unable to afford a balanced meal, reducing the size of a meal or skipping it, and being hungry, but not eating” (Twill, 2016).

The preconceived notion that students who are attending a four-year institution come from affluent families is harmful in spreading awareness about food insecurity among college students. In a 2015 study it was found that 43% of all full-time college students “were working to help defray the cost of tuition, rent, food, and other expenses” (Waity, 2020). While many students coming from less wealthy families may receive some form of financial aid or scholarship, this money rarely contributes to covering the cost of needs outside of tuition, textbooks, and room and board which leaves many students without proper funding to buy nutritious foods on a consistent basis outside of what dining services may be covered by their financial aid or scholarship. In the 2018-2019 school year 96% of all Butler students were receiving some form of financial aid (Butler University, (n.d.). Beyond just food insecurity, it has been found that college students even sacrifice utilities like heating and water usage in order to save money to pay for things like their phone bills or car payments (Fincher, 2018). Additionally, “seventy-three percent of students reporting low or very low levels of food security also reported housing insecurity, and 23% reported being homeless” (Cady, 2018).

While Indianapolis has numerous food banks and food pantries in the surrounding areas, many require qualifications for service that cannot be met by full time students. Regardless of local options for aiding people who struggle with food insecurity, having an accessible on campus option is necessary for the health and wellbeing of all students regardless of their socio-economic status to ensure they have access to nutritious foods even if they are unable to afford them. Many “students on college campuses may be an underserved population by the traditional pantry system. Community pantry protocols such as requiring an entire household to be served together, or establishment of

permanent residence by producing a utility bill may be difficult for students residing in dorms" (Twill, 2016). Even if their city does have a pantry that serves college students, that community food pantry may not be in a location that is easily accessible to students without a means of free transportation (Twill, 2016). Having a food pantry on campus that is entirely separate from the traditional food pantry system that serves the local community will allow students to be supported without facing the restrictions of community pantry protocols. While there are federal food programs available, many of these programs are meant to support families which would leave a single college student who does not claim any dependents on the lower end of receiving benefits that their situation demands (Twill, 2016). There is also a negative bias existing around using programs such as SNAP, "people on assistance are often criticized for buying food not believed to be healthy or appropriate for low-income households" (Shepherd, 2019). "Low-income Americans who rely on public assistance have been found to suffer from low self-esteem, and the stigma associated with programs like SNAP can negatively affect enrollment, hurting the program's effectiveness" (Shepherd, 2019). Having a pantry on campus would help students feel more comfortable and safer in utilizing this service no differently than utilizing other free university services such as the library or fitness center.

Furthermore, many students living on campus are required to pay for a meal plan that could fail to meet their needs given their financial situation, thus leaving students in more financial hardship because the university forces them into the meal plan regardless of their preferences and needs. The difficulty with many requirements of college first-year students living on campus and purchasing a meal plan is that "if a student does not

use all of the meals provided by their meal plan, the remaining meals are forfeited” (Van, 2019). Offering a food pantry to help supplement these meal plans would give struggling students access to foods that would be easy to prepare in their dormitories and non-perishable to help give them some options to fall back on when the meal plan falls short. It is understandable that universities have to put some type of limit on how much food can come with a basic meal plan, and for financially stable students the current plans are probably sufficient for someone who has the ability to grocery shop off campus or eat out a couple times a week. However, financially unstable students need another on-campus option that offers consistent food for them to have access to in their residence as a weekly, or bi-weekly supply that will not be restricted by requirements that exist in local and federal food insecurity support. There are likely numerous solutions for addressing this challenge and fighting food insecurity among college students, but this thesis is focusing on how a food pantry serves as a solution.

### **Implementing a Food Pantry at Butler University**

The implementation of a food pantry on Butler University’s campus has been a collaborative and ongoing effort that was expedited as a result of COVID-19 and the financial difficulties that the pandemic has had on students. To best implement the initiative, the Department of Student Involvement and Leadership (SIL) partnered with the student-run office of the university Volunteer Center (VC) to begin the planning process. The goal was to implement the food pantry during the spring 2021 semester to help accommodate students who are facing challenges. The first step in this process was determining who, in the early stages of execution, the food pantry would serve. As a starting point it was decided that the pantry would serve any Butler student of any age

and income level. Rather than requiring students to qualify for the services of the food pantry as many community pantries or local services would, the university food pantry would willingly serve any student without asking for information about their financial situation. This decision was made to put an emphasis on inclusivity, but also not restrict students who may have complex situations regarding their financial stability from getting the extra support that they need.

Additionally, it was the hope of the Volunteer Center and Department of Student Involvement and Leadership that making the pantry accessible to all students would help to reduce any negative connotations about students who use the services that the pantry offers. One of the key goals of the Volunteer Center is to create an atmosphere of acceptance and trust for students who need to use the food pantry and this would be done through intentional marketing about what food insecurity is to outline who the food pantry serves. Rather than presenting the food pantry as a resource only meant to help students who are struggling financially, it would be presented as a common resource that any student can use without being questioned. As time goes on and the details of the food pantry are fine-tuned, it is the hope of the SIL and VC staff that the pantry will eventually be able to serve all members of the Butler community beyond just current students. Offering support to Butler faculty and staff is the next step and then eventually being able to reach out further into the Indianapolis community to support alumni and even the families of current students, faculty and staff. Students were chosen as a starting point due to the reality that nearly 23% of all college students skip meals due to financial circumstances (Twill, 2016).

## **Food Insecurity in Indianapolis**

While the Indianapolis area has numerous non-profit organizations that help support those who are struggling with food insecurity, there is still a considerable number of Indianapolis citizens who are struggling with food insecurity. While not all of these numbers are representative of Butler University and food insecurity among Butler students, the location of Butler's campus being in the heart of a city that is identified as a food desert has an impact on the levels of accessible resources for people living in Indianapolis and experiencing food insecurity. Simply put, a food desert is an area with limited access to nutritious and affordable food from grocery stores or supermarkets (Klein, 2014). In a 2014 food desert report, Indianapolis was listed as the worst city in the country for food access, meaning only 3% of Indianapolis residents live within a five minute walk of a grocery store (Klein, 2014). With Butler's campus being placed in Indianapolis, students living on campus are also Indianapolis residents and may experience challenges accessing affordable food without a means of transportation.

In 2020 Cynthia Lewis of Indy Hunger Network reported that while there are 185 active food pantry locations in the city of Indianapolis, pantries are only able to provide a "percent of total food assistance, and typically provide only a few days of food per visit, one or two times per month...it would not be expected that food pantry use alone would change food security scores" (Lewis, 2020). The Butler University Food Pantry (BUFP) offers similar services of only being able to provide limited quantities of food a few times per month; however, the BUFP is meant to act as a supplement to student meal plans and access to other resources in the Indianapolis area. The Boulevard Place Food Pantry is the closest community resource to Butler's campus, only 0.7 miles away and also open on

Saturdays. It is the hope of the Student Involvement and Leadership staff that with the additional support of community resources like Boulevard Place Food Pantry that will be advertised through the on-campus food pantry that students will be able to access the necessary support to help maintain a consistent and nutritious diet. The Volunteer Center and Department of Student Involvement and Leadership recognizes that at this stage we will not be able to be a student's sole source of food but with the additional resources available in the Indianapolis community we are working to combat food insecurity among Butler students.

### **Application**

The research previously outlined establishes that there is a considerable need for college students to have access to on campus resources that combat food insecurity. My initial research shows that there are many important factors that need to be considered when opening and operating an on-campus food pantry. This thesis will focus specifically on the logistics of staffing the pantry, stocking the food, distribution of pre-packaged meal kits, and effective marketing strategies. Much of the research that shaped the logistical details of the Butler University Food Pantry came from analyzing the best practices outlined by other universities who have food pantries on their campuses. The University of North Georgia explained in a September 2020 press release that their new pantry is “available to students... [and] is open during normal school hours or after hours by appointment. It is located in the Student Success Center, which is home to academic and support services” (Devine, 2020). Similarly, the Butler food pantry is also running during normal school hours and will be flexible for off hour appointments as needed. The

Butler food pantry is also located in the union building which is centrally located on campus and serves as a social hub for students.

George Washington University opened a food pantry in 2016 and adopted a model that prioritizes confidentiality; “the school's food pantry is unmarked. Students fill out forms that list their email addresses and student ID numbers, but they do not have to give their names or discuss their finances” (NPR Staff, 2016). This practice is identical to Butler’s food pantry intake form system, allowing for any student to qualify regardless of their financial status and to maintain confidentiality no names are used for orders. Stony Brook University in Long Island, New York has expressed their emphasis on how their campus food pantry brings the campus community together. “Food banks like this one not only feed a population in need, organizers say, but empower students by giving them an opportunity to help their peers through donation and service” (Stony Brook University, 2018). Donation initiatives for the Butler food pantry will be vital to keeping the pantry stocked and creating an increased awareness of the pantry’s presence and services. The following sections will outline the timeline and logistics of implementing and operating the Butler University Food Pantry.



### Timeline

Week Number and Date	Tasks
1. January 18-23, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop food pantry mission statement</li> <li>● Determine semester long hours of operation and distribution dates</li> <li>● Research food pantry feedback forms</li> <li>● Review CUFBA toolkit</li> <li>● Construct staffing distribution schedule</li> <li>● Begin building order intake form</li> <li>● Set goal for first day of distribution (February 17)</li> </ul>
2. January 25-29, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clean and organize food pantry space</li> <li>● Update staff members on their roles and responsibilities</li> <li>● Attend Universities Fighting World Hunger roundtable and network with other university food pantry leaders</li> <li>● Develop a shopping list for items to stock the pantry</li> <li>● Purchase shelving units for the pantry</li> </ul>
3. February 1-6, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create feedback form</li> <li>● Look into PantrySoft and other possible inventory tracking systems</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Set announcement date (February 8) to launch food pantry on Volunteer Center social media and listserv</li> <li>● Reach out to SGA Marketing and Communications board about collaboration on a promotional video</li> <li>● Develop frequently asked questions flyer for marketing</li> <li>● Develop inventory tracking system using Excel</li> <li>● Finalize order intake form</li> <li>● Create a flyer to include in all orders with additional resources and a QR code to the feedback form</li> <li>● Develop staff training program on packing, distributing, and tracking inventory</li> </ul>
4. February 8-13, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Launch date pushed back until March 3rd - pending university cabinet</li> <li>● Build and label shelves</li> </ul>
5. February 15-20, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalize marketing plan and accessibility: link tree, create flyers of different resources</li> <li>● Determine quantities for each type of bag offered and alterations for dietary needs</li> </ul>
6. February 22-27, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalize inventory tracking system</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Purchase food and enter into the inventory system</li> <li>● Organize food and packing supplies on shelves</li> <li>● University approval for launch granted</li> <li>● Finalize marketing launch plan with Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA)</li> <li>● Collaborate with VPSA on promotional efforts through student affairs social media</li> <li>● Collaborate with Butler marketing and communications to publish a story announcing the pantry</li> <li>● Film promotional <a href="#">video</a> with student government</li> <li>● Launch food pantry announcement via listserv and social media, begin taking orders</li> </ul>
7. March 1-6, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Butler University campus wide announcement distributed to students, faculty, and staff</li> <li>● First round of orders accounted for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Purchase additional food needed to fulfill all orders</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Release promotional video</li> <li>● Distribution on Wednesday and Friday</li> <li>● Begin to develop donation drive plan</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews with Butler marketing and communication, The Collegian</li> </ul>
8. March 8-13, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Draft donation drive communications to be shared with student leaders, faculty offices, and staff departments</li> <li>● Re-organize inventory system</li> <li>● Begin taking orders for next distribution week</li> <li>● Purchase food for next distribution week</li> </ul>
9. March 15-20, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews with <a href="#">Fox59</a>, <a href="#">WRTV</a> and <a href="#">Indianapolis Business Journal</a></li> <li>● Orders accounted for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Purchase additional food needed to fulfill all orders</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Launch Slam Dunk on Hunger Donation Drive and start collecting donations in academic buildings</li> </ul>

## Staffing

The Butler University Volunteer Center is the only student run office on campus and will serve as the home to the food pantry. The Volunteer Center's mission states that the office "is committed to deepening the education of students and making a significant contribution of service to Indianapolis and the larger community." Utilizing the student staff who already have a passion for social justice and are committed to serving the community around them offered the perfect fit for staffing the food pantry. The staff is made up of six positions, each with a unique role in implementing the pantry on campus during a semester where COVID-19 has caused an inevitable shift in the operations of the university. The Technology Coordinator is responsible for building and maintaining the food pantry's website to offer accessible information about what the food pantry has to offer and additional resources in the areas surrounding campus, as well as building an inventory tracking system for the food items in the pantry. The Media Coordinator works to promote that pantry through social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter while also composing a weekly newsletter to be sent to over one thousand students, faculty, and staff. The Events Coordinator is in charge of developing different initiatives to stock the food pantry through donation drives and other programs that can get different people on campus involved in supporting the pantry's mission. The Education and Advocacy Coordinator works closely with student organizations on campus who also have a focus on sustainability and food insecurity to help align all of the work being done to alleviate hunger through educational events and collaboration. The Volunteer Projects Coordinator has had a shift in responsibilities due to the restrictions of the pandemic and rather than planning in person service projects, works to gather important educational information

and community resources to help support students who may be struggling with food insecurity or other injustices. Lastly, the Student Director oversees the staff of six in their efforts and serves as the liaison between the Volunteer Center and the university through communication and collaboration.

Outside of the student staff in the Volunteer Center that will work to package and distribute the food pantry's orders, the Executive Director of Student Involvement and Leadership who advises the VC also plays a key role in the execution of the food pantry. This staff member works with university administration to gain approval on the efforts of the food pantry. Additionally, through the support of other campus staff, the food pantry will receive campus-wide promotion through the Marketing and Communications department. The Vice President of Student Affairs will also work to offer the pantry a platform on their communications to campus through social media.

### **Stocking the Pantry**

The initial stocking of items in the food pantry will come from a large bulk purchase rather than through collecting donations. After determining what types of food are most effective in serving the needs of students, the Volunteer Center staff will work towards organizing donation initiatives throughout campus. In the spring 2021 semester to coincide with the NCAA March Madness tournament being hosted in Indianapolis, the staff plans to gather different campus groups from academic departments to Greek houses to participate in a bracket-like competition to donate the most food for the food pantry. The "Slam Dunk on Hunger" Donation Drive lines up with the March Madness schedule and is enticing on campus organizations, offices, and departments as well as individuals to donate nonperishable foods to help in stocking the pantry. This friendly competition is

meant to involve as many members of the campus community as possible in spreading awareness and bringing in donations to combat food insecurity on campus.

Another initiative to involve the campus community with providing the pantry with food is the “sponsor-a-shelf” program. This will allow different groups around campus to sponsor one of the food pantry shelves for a designated period of time. Sponsoring a shelf would entail providing two weeks or a month's worth of one type of food, for example pasta and pasta sauce, to the pantry. Sponsoring a shelf would earn a department or organization a public thank you from the food pantry’s marketing platforms such as social media and the Volunteer Center weekly listserv email.

### **Food Offered**

To offer support to students with differing housing and meal plan situations, the pantry will offer a choice of three different types of pre-packaged boxes during times of COVID-19 safety restrictions. The first is a week box which will consist of five to seven days worth of food to cook multiple full meals including pasta, bread, pancake mix, and other food items with minimal skill or preparation required. It is likely that students living off campus or in the university apartments with access to a full kitchen would utilize this type of box. The second type is a weekend box which will contain similar items as the week box, but two to three days worth of food. This type of box would be most useful for students living in Butler University Greek housing since Greek meal plans do not offer meals throughout the weekend, this type of box could help to supplement their dietary needs. Lastly, the snack box option will contain items such as granola bars, fruit cups, popcorn and other similar food that does not require a kitchen to prepare. This type of box would likely supplement a first or second-year student living in

a residence hall who is required to have a full meal plan but may face challenges when it comes to purchasing additional food for when the dining halls are closed.

### **Distribution**

The most important element of the distribution process is the element of confidentiality. To help maintain the privacy of all students choosing to utilize the food pantry's services, all Volunteer Center staff members signed a confidentiality agreement ensuring that they will only be using student identification numbers to identify any student who comes to use the pantry. In order to maintain appropriate safety measures in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the spring 2021 semester the pantry will be distributing food to students in pre-packaged bags based on whatever size of bag they ordered while accommodating any dietary needs. Volunteer Center staff package orders in the days leading up to distribution based on what comes in on the order form. Orders are packaged in reusable grocery bags and organized by type of bag (week, weekend, snack) on shelves in the Volunteer Center and labeled for pick up.

The distribution schedule was determined before the official launch of the pantry to offer pick up on Wednesday and Friday afternoons every other week starting the first week of March in the spring 2021 semester. Volunteer Center staff indicated their availability during these distribution times at the start of the semester and are responsible for ensuring that bags are distributed safely and efficiently while providing a positive experience for all students who are utilizing the pantry's services. Pick up dates are chosen by the students utilizing the pantry based on the predetermined distribution schedule. As indicated on the order form, students will arrive at the Volunteer Center to pick up their bag during their chosen pick-up time where a staff member will ask for their



student ID number and then find the bag of food that they ordered. Students are required to present their daily health screening to ensure that they are not at risk of spreading COVID-19, wear a mask, and practice social distancing at all times throughout the distribution process. Before leaving the pantry, students will fill out a form to collect demographic information that will also remain confidential. The distribution process of pre-packaged food bags to students will be undergoing developmental adjustments as circumstances continue to change regarding the pandemic. The goal is to eventually shift to a shopping model once it is safe to do so. This will allow students to look through the shelves and pick out the food items that they most want or need utilizing a system that will offer a certain quantity of items for each food type; proteins, grains, and fruits and vegetables. This will not only give students more variety over the food they receive from the pantry, but will also empower them to have a choice in the food they are eating. However, until the majority of campus is reopened at normal capacity and operations, the pre-packaged model is the safest and most effective form of distribution.

### **Marketing**

Properly marketing the food pantry as a free resource for students is essential to the food pantry's success. The goal is to adequately promote the food pantry in a way that was not going to offer a negative connotation about the challenges that someone using the food pantry might be facing. When thinking about someone using a community pantry it is easy to jump to conclusions about their financial situation and assume that they are struggling financially and therefore might be facing other hardships such as homelessness. We need to market the food pantry in a way that is going to make students feel safe and comfortable with utilizing the service while also communicating to food

secure students that food insecurity is not something to be ashamed of. In doing this there are many different ways to present the possible different reasons that a student would use the pantry and since the usage of the pantry is established as a “no questions asked” policy, meaning any student can use it because there are no qualifications, there is a lot of room for flexibility. However, the challenge was presenting the pantry in a way that did not shame students who need it while not offering the service as a factor of convenience. The most effective way that we determined how to do this was through promoting the facts and statistics previously mentioned about the existence of food insecurity on college campuses. The goal was that sharing statistics about food insecurity would offer comfort for students who are struggling to know that they are not alone, while also being able to share the true purpose of the pantry so that it is not misused as a method of convenience by students who do not need it.

The existing online social media and web platforms of the Volunteer Center is where the food pantry information and promotional materials are accessible. While the Volunteer Center has a decent following with social media accounts of around 700 followers and a weekly newsletter reaching over 1,000 students, faculty, and staff there was no way to ensure that the announcement of the food pantry was reaching the target student population. The Division of Student Affairs was able to offer support with this by working with us to craft an all-campus announcement to send to every student, faculty, and staff member. The process for this was more complex than I had envisioned and took the work of multiple students and staff to effectively craft an email that would simply and concisely explain how the pantry works, who the pantry is meant to help, and what services the pantry offers. This process proved to be challenging because of the

importance of the information being shared and the goal to present it in a way that would not create a negative connotation around the university needing a food pantry at all. This message was sent nearly one week after the Volunteer Center's official announcement and undoubtedly had an impact in the number of orders that the pantry received. Beyond the all-campus email, the Vice President of Student Affairs offered continued support and promotion throughout the first weeks of promoting the pantry through his social media channels. This effort was paired with a live stream question and answer session following the pantry's first week of distribution.

Another key component of marketing the food pantry was incorporating Butler University's BU Be Well model. This model was introduced in 2018 as a strategic commitment meant to "foster a positive environment that helps students, faculty, and staff grow, learn, and be the best version of themselves" (Butler University, n.d.). Within the model are eight dimensions of focus and of the eight dimensions, seven can be directly related to the mission of the food pantry and key marketing components. 1. "Mind and body: Identifying and caring for physical and emotional needs, and the awareness of influences that impact overall health" (Butler University, n.d.). The food pantry is an added resource that can offer additional support for students who struggle to have consistent access to nutritious food as a physical need. Offering free food on campus will help students' overall health. 2. "Diversity and inclusion: Understanding one's own background and identities and how they might differ from others in our multicultural world. Learning about and respecting diverse cultures and supporting an environment where everyone is welcome" (Butler University, n.d.). As previously mentioned, diversity is a complex system that goes beyond gender, race, and sexuality. It also

includes diversity in financial stability and access to resources and by offering a necessary resource like food for students who are faced with financial challenges, Butler is creating a more inclusive environment. By offering a resource like the food pantry Butler is recognizing the intersectionality that may exist among students who identify with multiple levels within the system of diversity.

3. “Intellectual: Promoting wellbeing through personal growth in academics, lifelong learning, and engaging new ideas” (Butler University, n.d.). As previously mentioned, food insecurity has extremely negative effects on students’ performance in the classroom and is a contributing factor to students receiving lower grades than food secure students (Marato, 2015). 4. “Social: Creating harmony in one’s relationships with others, demonstrating effective communication skills, developing the capacity for health intimacy, and cultivating a support network of caring friends” (Butler University, n.d.). According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, without meeting the basic needs of food, water, and shelter human beings are unable to progress on the hierarchy to experience feelings of love and belonging in their relationships (Pichère, 2015). 5. “Service and community: Strengthening community through service and shared interests, both within Butler and the greater Indianapolis area” (Butler University, n.d.). The Volunteer Center is committed to deepening the education of students and making a significant contribution of service to Indianapolis and the larger community, starting on campus and educating our own students, faculty, and staff about food insecurity is an important starting point. As the food pantry program progresses and grows there will be more opportunities for Butler students, faculty, and staff to actively participate in serving those in need of the pantry’s resources through volunteering and donating.

6. “Meaning and purpose: Reflecting on one’s values and beliefs, intentionally discerning goals and contributions, and exploring meaningful steps toward actualizing one’s future” (Butler University, n.d.). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs explains that without meeting the basic physiological needs of food, water, and shelter human beings are unable to reach self-actualization and achieve their full potential (Pichère, 2015). 7. “Sustainability: Cultivating a healthy space for learning through shared interests in protecting the environment, caring for campus, and advancing Butler’s future in sustainable ways” (Butler University, n.d.). The food pantry not only offers an added resource to contribute to a health learning space but also has created numerous opportunities for organizations like Food Recovery Network and the Patachou Foundation to collaborate with the Volunteer Center to progress on a like-minded goal of food security and sustainability.

Another important piece of the marketing efforts of the pantry was building a trust between the students and staff working behind the scenes and the students utilizing the services of the pantry. This was communicated to students in marketing materials by explaining that everyone has signed a confidentiality agreement and that all communication between students and the Volunteer Center would remain confidential. Additionally, a key component of following up on this was removing student names from the process entirely and only collecting information via student identification numbers. This was meant to help students feel more comfortable about the true confidentiality of the entire process.

The final and most important piece of the marketing process was creating a platform where all food pantry information could be accessible and organized. This was

done through the Volunteer Center Link Tree which allowed us to organize a list of links all under one uniform resource locator or URL. Within the Link Tree was all of the necessary information for the different audiences that our marketing materials were reaching. The order form and frequently asked questions information in the link are included as resources for the students who are experiencing food insecurity and need to utilize the pantry's services. There is also educational information about on and off campus resources available to these students in case they need additional support that the resources available in the pantry do not offer. This link also houses an educational flyer about food insecurity on college campuses and the reasoning behind Butler's decision to open a pantry on campus. This information is meant to serve as a resource to students, faculty, and staff who are not using the food pantry services but want to know more about the reasoning behind its existence.

### **Conclusion**

There were many areas of this initiative that have potential for growth as a result of the lessons learned from the initial opening of the food pantry in the spring 2021 semester. One of the most important areas for growth that came as a challenge this semester was the limited space available for housing the food pantry. As the pantry continues to grow and develop there will hopefully be additional space to house overflow inventory of non-perishable foods and eventually refrigeration space to be able to offer students dairy and produce. Additionally, as we look forward to a future where campus is not navigating the impacts of COVID-19 it would be ideal that the pantry could shift into a shopping model rather than pre-ordered bags. This would allow for the space to maintain better organization, give the pantry the ability to offer a wider variety of food

options outside of the standard bag type, and empower students to make choices about the food that they want to receive from the pantry. This semester we were challenged to build a consistent pre-packaged bag that did not offer students a lot of variety in food from week to week.

The first month of food distribution allowed the pantry to serve over 75 Butler students over the course of three different distribution weeks. The first week of distribution had the highest number of orders and as the semester progressed the order numbers from week to week remained consistent at serving between 10 and 20 students. In the fall semester there will be a greater potential to extend the services of the pantry in multiple ways. First and foremost, it is a hope that in the near future the pantry will be able to offer more fresh food and options like eggs and dairy products. Additionally, being able to offer services to other members of the Butler community like faculty and staff is a goal that will be more attainable after having a summer to prepare and reimagine what pantry operations will look like on a post-pandemic campus. Another possibility to grow the services of the pantry is by offering school supplies, clothing, and hygiene and toiletry products. The Butler Diversity Center currently has a Wellness Pantry that collects hygiene products and as we move forward, we hope to be able to collaborate with the Diversity Center to offer these types of products to people utilizing the pantry. There is a great potential in the future to partner with multiple other campus offices like dining services to expand the growth and reach of what the food pantry is able to offer. Finally, another initiative that the Volunteer Center staff is looking into implementing at Butler is a meal swipe donation program. This would allow students with a meal plan to donate

their leftover meal swipes to students who are experiencing food insecurity to give them the ability to access the dining hall even without meal swipes of their own.

The Butler University Food Pantry is not a solution for food insecurity among Butler students; however, it is a powerful step in the right direction to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment at Butler for students facing challenges that lead to food insecurity. As the pantry continues to grow and develop and further feedback from pantry users is gathered upon completion of the semester the Volunteer Center staff will have a stronger understanding of the countless ways in which the pantry can improve for future semesters. For the time being we feel privileged to be able to support any Butler student who is experiencing the hardships paired with food insecurity to hopefully give them the opportunity to enjoy and embrace their college experience.



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