

Food Pantry Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity has been a rising concern for many students at the University of California, Irvine (UC Irvine) in the recent years. Our project focuses on establishing a food pantry at UC Irvine to end food insecurity on campus. In a survey that was conducted by UC Irvine Student Affairs in June 2014, 27% of the 833 participated students reported that they were facing food insecurity issues. Usages and applications for the UC Irvine Campus Food Voucher Program, a welfare program that provides free food vouchers for students to eat on campus, have also been increasing. This initiative was established by the fellows to establish a food pantry on campus and work with UC Irvine administration to provide feasible solutions in combating food insecurity among the students.



The fellows working with a UC Irvine student to prepare for a program in raising awareness about food insecurity in April 2015.

TIMELINE AND METHODOLOGY

The fellows worked with their advisor, Dr. Graciela Fernandez of the UC Irvine Student Outreach and Retention (SOAR) Center, for the entirety of this fellowship. While the initial goal for this initiative was to establish a food pantry at the SOAR Center to feed hungry students, UC Irvine administration was reluctant on approving this project due to risk and liability issues.

In January 2015, the fellows and Dr. Fernandez attended the Inaugural California Higher Education Food Summit (CAHEFS) held at UC Santa Barbara. At the conference, the four represented UC Irvine at the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) Campus Food Access and Security Subcommittee and contributed in obtaining \$75,000 of funding from University of California Office of the President (UCOP) for each UC campus to combat food insecurity.

The ideas of food justice and campus stigma around food insecurity were introduced to the fellows, thus contributing to the fellows' idea of hosting the Student Food Access and Insecurity Awareness Week in April 2015. During the week, nutrition workshops and gardening programs were held for the students to attend. As a method of gathering campus support, the fellows introduced a petition for the need of a food pantry at UC Irvine, where a total of 1,025 signatures were collected in five days. This petition was introduced to UC Irvine's administrators immediately after the awareness week.

PROJECT GOALS

The project goals of this initiative included:

- Establishing a food pantry at the UC Irvine Student Outreach and Retention (SOAR) Center by the end of 2015
- Raising awareness about food insecurity at UC Irvine
- Providing a sustainable plan for this initiative after 2015

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

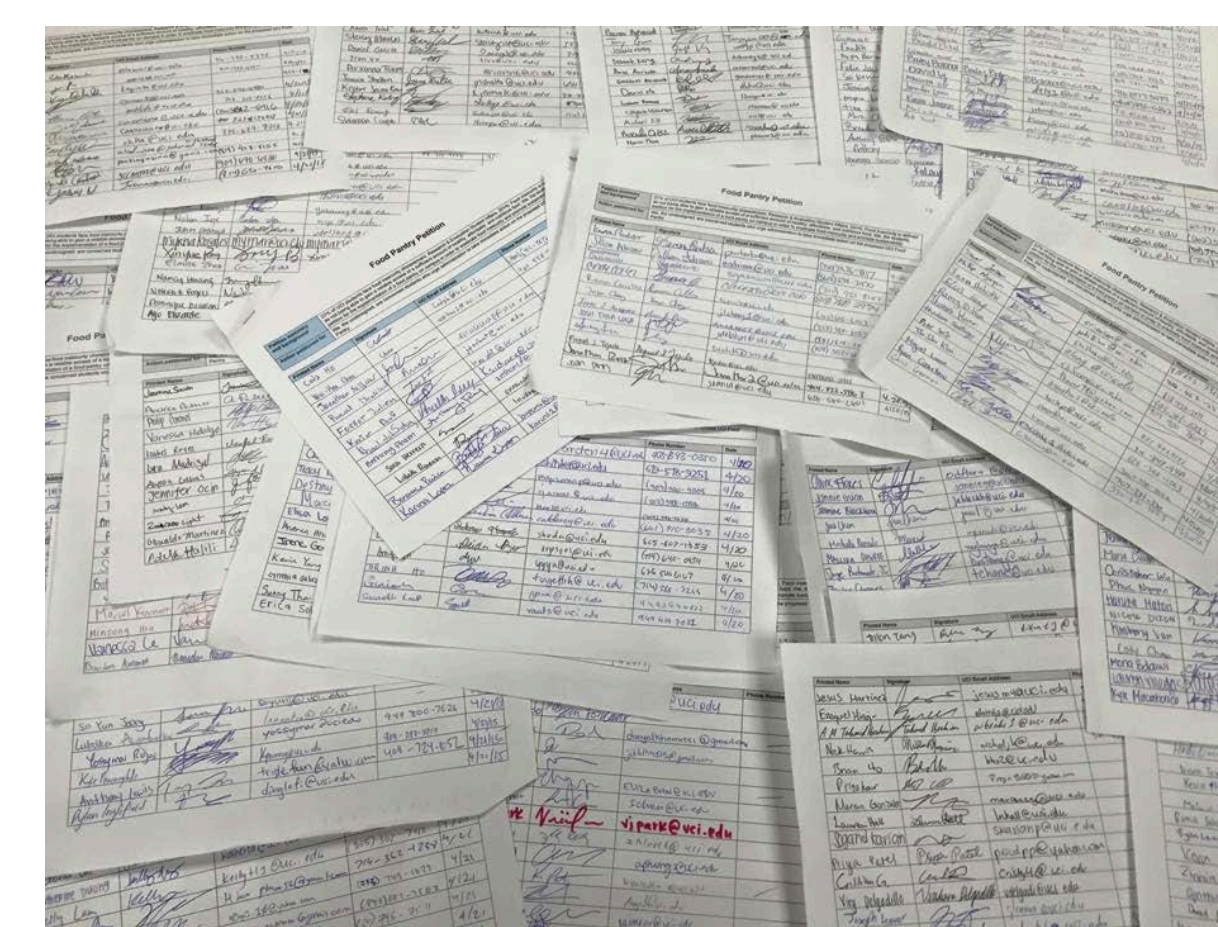
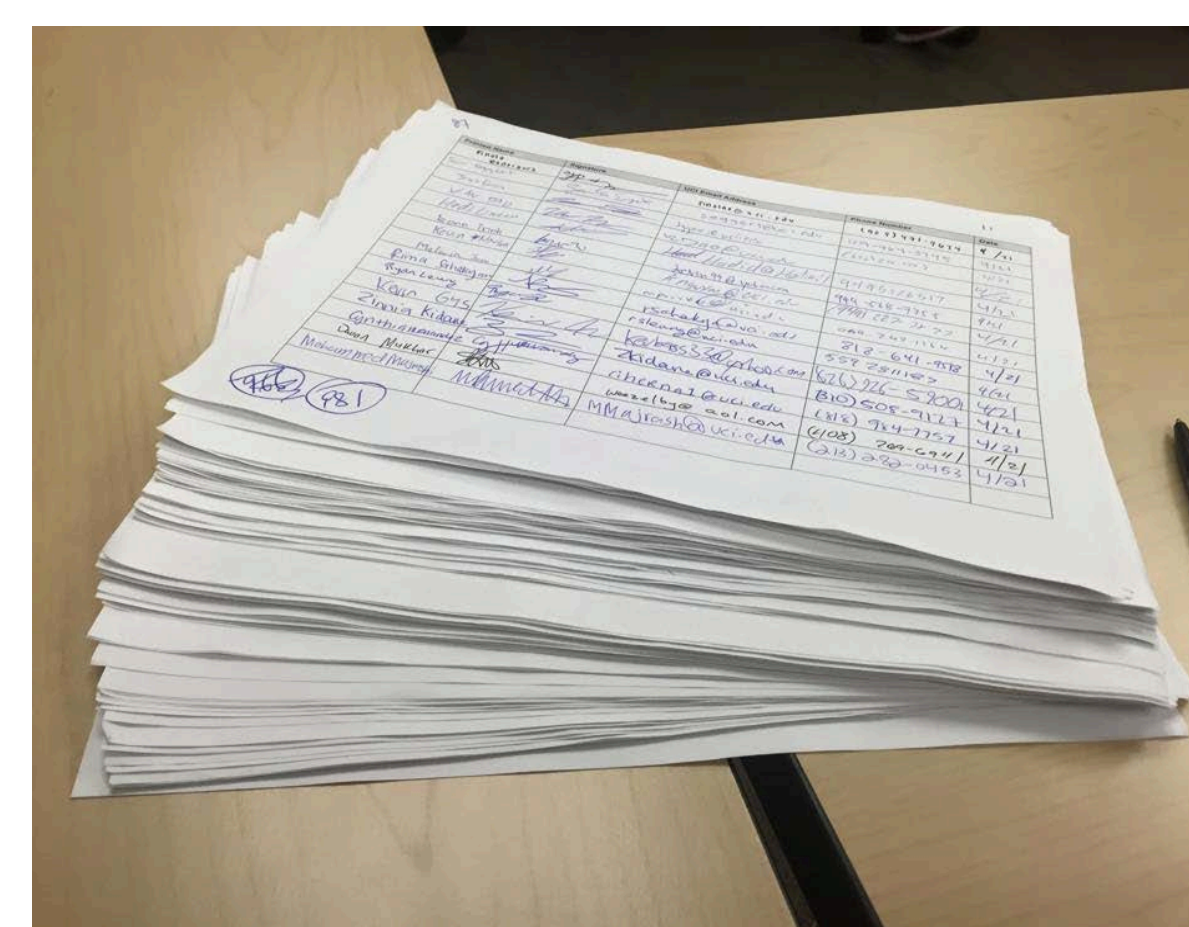
After observing the wide campus support from the petition, UC Irvine administration approved the establishment of a food pantry at the SOAR Center and the distribution of non-perishable food items at the pantry. The food pantry, which will be supplied by the Orange County Food Bank, will be opened in the summer of 2015.

The fellows also acknowledged that establishing a food pantry is not the only solution to eradicating food insecurity at UC Irvine. Solution suggestions such as increasing funding for the campus food voucher program, establishing a mobile food pantry at the Graduate Student Housing Communities, conducting further research on food insecurity at UC Irvine, and hiring full-time employees to focus on food insecurity issues were brought up by allies and involved students in the Food Pantry Initiative.

In the recent undergraduate student government (Associated Students of the University of California, Irvine – ASUCI) elections, one of the fellows, Alexander Fung, was elected as the Administrative Affairs Vice President. Under his executive office, Alexander established a Food Security Commission to assist the SOAR Center with operating the food pantry and raise awareness about hunger and food insecurity. A group of 10 students had been recruited in dedicating their time and energy to expand this initiative for the 2015-2016 academic year.

ASUCI will also be partnering up with the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) to conduct research on food insecurity issues at UC Irvine. A team of undergraduate students will be partnered up with a faculty member for this project and will be presenting their findings at the UROP Symposium in May 2016.

Earlier in spring, the fellows submitted a proposal for UC Irvine to host the Second Annual California Higher Education Food Summit (CAHEFS). Hosting this summit will introduce the idea of food justice and the severity of food insecurity issues to UC Irvine students and its surrounding community. Fortunately, the selection committee approved the proposal. This summit will now be held at UC Irvine in January 2016.



A total of 1,025 individuals signed to support the establishment of a food pantry at UC Irvine and urge the administration to provide additional resources to solve food insecurity issues.

FUTURE GOALS

Future goals of this initiative include:

- Obtaining sustainable and/or permanent funding for the development and expansion of this initiative via the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) or a student fee referendum
 - Fund a mobile food pantry for the Graduate Student Housing Communities to address food insecurity amongst graduate students
 - Increase the funding for campus food voucher programs to provide more resources for hungry students
 - Hiring a full-time employee to direct the operations of the food pantry along with its programs
- Establishing a Student Food Development Center at UC Irvine by 2020
- Building a stronger coalition with surrounding food banks and food organizations
- Obtaining the permission of distributing fresh produce and healthy perishables to students at the SOAR food pantry

CONCLUSION

Our initiative proved that there needs to be a heavier emphasis on solving food insecurity issues among UC Irvine students, for both undergraduate and graduate students. Therefore, additional funding must be acquired to expand this initiative.

The fellows were able to achieve the project goals by obtaining the approval of establishing a food pantry at the SOAR Center, hosting the Student Food Access and Insecurity Awareness Week, and establishing a Food Security Commission under ASUCI. Further research, through the partnership between ASUCI and UROP will assist administration in choosing the most effective solution to eradicate food insecurity issues at UC Irvine. In addition, hosting the CAHEFS at UC Irvine would be able to further introduce the idea of food insecurity to UC Irvine students and faculty members.

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