

Curbing Food Waste Through Development of a Student Kitchen

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Introduction

Food insecurity is prevalent UC-wide, which affects student performance, mental health, and overall well-being. At UC Riverside in particular, our food insecurity statistics demonstrate that about 62.5% of our students don't have reliable access to nutritious food.

The goal of this project was to open our campus' student kitchen for student use and to have it fully operational so we could:

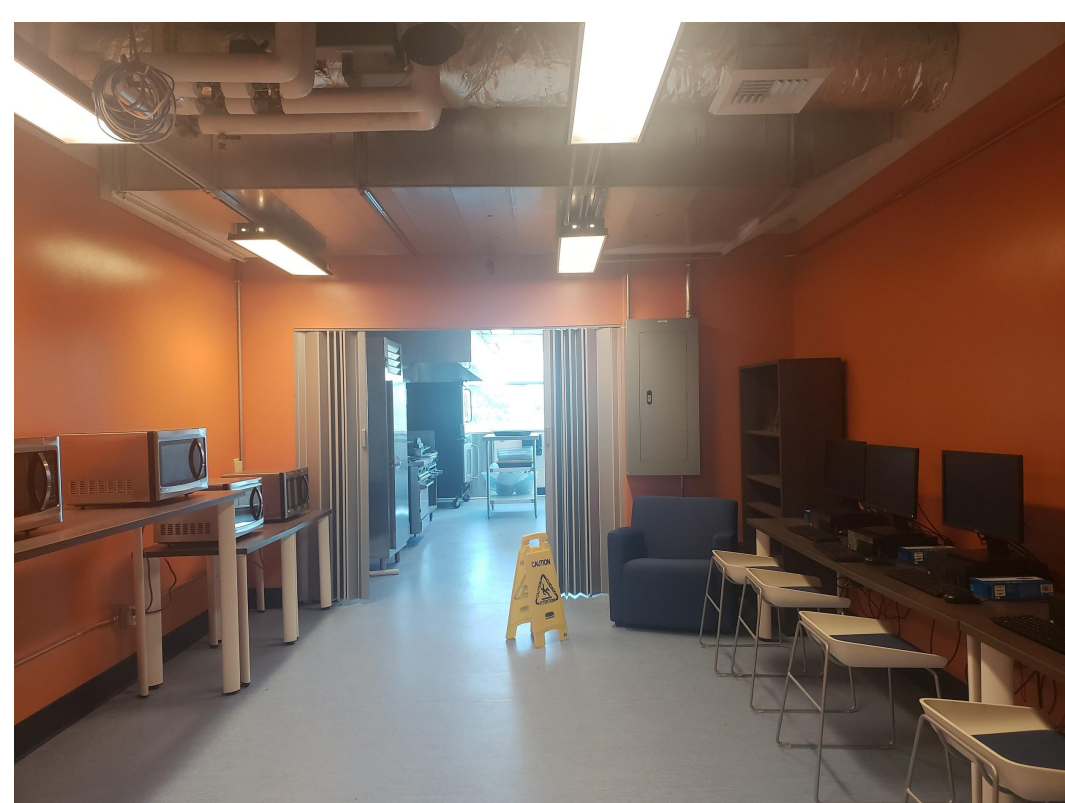
- recruit volunteers to assist with food collection and redistribution
- distribute hot meals to students
- host informational workshops about topics related to food insecurity/food waste (financial aid, composting, CalFresh, repurposing food)



Swipe Out Hunger collecting meal swipes at the Dining Halls



Shelving in the R'Kitchen lounge to feature cookbooks & campus resources



R'Kitchen Lounge with computer and microwave access



Project Goals

The idea of this student kitchen, R'Kitchen, is to create a space on campus for everyone interested in reducing food insecurity and to build community for students to find additional resources.

This kitchen would consist of two main sections:

1. Lounge area
 - CalFresh application workshops
 - Extra microwaves
 - Resource information workshops (Financial Aid, Composting)
 - Community dinners
2. Kitchen area
 - Food redistribution
 - Cooking space
 - Cooking demonstrations

Struggles/ Limitations

- Construction delays prevented us from fully operating within the kitchen.

Materials and Methods

- Outreached to student programs from Costo Hall and other on-campus service organizations to recruit support.
- Prepared for necessary training of future kitchen volunteers including ServSafe/kitchen protocols in collaboration with The WELL and Environmental Health & Safety.
- Met with Dining about developing procedures for food redistribution in the kitchen, including receiving untouched leftover food from dining halls and necessary transportation/refrigeration.
- Ordered sample food tupperware for potential food redistribution use.
- Worked with Swipe Out Hunger* to collect meal swipes during the end of the quarter. Donated swipes were then converted to a dollar amount through Dining services and saved for future kitchen purchases.
- Planned to offer kitchen's washer and dryer for personal use to students in case management as an emergency resource.

Results and Outcomes

- We were able to clean the kitchen, organize, order materials and take inventory of the supplies we had.
- Worked on building kitchen's lounge that includes 2 bulletin board for resource materials, a bookshelf for cookbooks and related literature, 5 microwaves, and 5 computers for CalFresh application use.
- Meal card distribution results:
Swipe Out Hunger Balance: \$7,331.50 (prior to purchasing meals)
Cost of Meals: \$7/meal
Total meal cards distributed: 209 (5-meal cards: \$7,315)
Cost of Cards: \$0.69/each: Card fees covered by The Well



Top Left: Kitchen hallway leading into kitchen space. Top Right: Kitchen equipment. Center: Kitchen's Laundry area. Bottom Left: Entrance of kitchen. Bottom Right: Kitchen's Refrigerator.

Conclusions

Although the R'Kitchen was not fully operational by the end of our GFI Fellowship, we were able to accomplish a lot of planning prior to the kitchen opening. We were able to gather information on what was possible and eliminate approaches that weren't feasible for this project as well.

We hope to leave behind a useful framework to transition to the kitchen's next leaders and encourage support for the R'Kitchen moving forward.

Future Goals

Despite our project being stalled by delays in construction, we hope the R'Kitchen will move forward and continue working to establish:

- Establishment of food safety protocols with UCR Environmental Health & Safety.
- Sustainable food redistribution (reusable tupperware, composting food scraps, etc.).
- Community dinners to have conversations about food insecurity & campus resources.
- Swipe Out Hunger collaboration to purchase meal cards for student use at dining halls.
- Gathering of additional data about food insecurity at UC Riverside and how many students are served through R'Kitchen.

References

"Food Insecurity." *Basic Needs*, 24 Feb. 2020, basicneeds.ucr.edu/food-insecurity.

"Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California." UC Global Food Initiative, Dec. 2017.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank...

- The WELL staff including: Daniel Lopez-Salas, Megan Harbert, & Devon Sakamoto
- Audrey M. Lim, former staff at The Well.
- Dining Services staff including: Robin Meribeth Hungerford, Robert W Getman & Cassie Taan
- Our project advisors: Professor Anne McKnight & Professor Dana Simmons
- Tamara Hedges & Amy O'Neil from GFI at UCR.



*: Swipe Out Hunger is an organization at UCR that focuses on reducing food insecurity by collecting extra meal swipes from our dining halls and donating to resources on campus