



### Maverick Pantry Internship

#### Intervention summary statement

The University of Texas at Arlington offers students with educational opportunities. UTA also provides resources for students to be healthy and perform well throughout their academic journey. The dean of students oversees the Maverick Pantry and other student emergency and support services found on campus. The Maverick Pantry project began in August 2021 and is now open to all UTA students. Food insecurity (FI) is a priority concern for UTA. Poor nutrition harms student health and educational performance. Without the necessary nutrition, students are more likely to feel stressed and are less likely to graduate. The purpose of the Mav Pantry is to feed students' success by ensuring students have equitable access to nutritional needs and essential items. It was discovered on the UTA campus that 51.6% of students surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity. In addition to other college stressors, food insecurity affects a student's academic performance. To reduce food insecurity within our UTA community, the Mav Pantry focuses on three objectives, education, support, and advocacy. The Mav Pantry promotes education and increases awareness of food insecurity among college students. They provide support and referral services to students. They advocate for students affected by food insecurity through campus-wide initiatives and support services. They host events on campus to reach more students and spread awareness about food insecurity and the Maverick Pantry's efforts to combat it. To increase student education about food insecurity, they do presentations in introductory courses and do tabling events around campus. They will use technological tools to connect, interact, and share information with students (through social media platforms such as Instagram). They also support students struggling financially, emotionally, mentally, and physically by referring them to the appropriate services. The goal of the food pantry is to eliminate food insecurity in the UTA community. The Mav Pantry will create partnerships with community members such as Kroger and Tarrant County Food Bank to maintain consistent inventory.

#### Community analysis

The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), located in the center of Dallas-Fort Worth, is the largest university in North Texas and the second largest in The University of Texas Network, challenging the students to connect with people from all over the world and create life-changing relationships. The 420-acre campus is home to more than 100 facilities. The division of student affairs provides a variety of resources for students. A newly added student resource is the UTA Maverick Pantry. The goals of the

Mav Pantry support UTA's mission to advance student excellence. UTA college students are the primary community that the Mav pantry offers its services. A study with the UTA campus discovered that 51.6% of students surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity. Without a nutritious diet, students struggle to perform well and are more likely to become unhappy. UTA serves over 40,000 students, 35,064 undergraduate and 13,008 graduate students. The number of students that are women almost doubles the number of students that are males. There are over 30,000 women and over 17,000 men that attend UTA. Previous studies have shown that male students experience greater rates of food insecurity than female students. Over 15,000 UTA students are white, 12,000 students are Hispanic or Latino, over 6,000 are African American, over 5,000 are Asian and about 6,000 are international students. UTA has more than 6,000 international students from over 100 countries in any given academic year. International students experience unique financial burdens compared to American students due to their citizenship status. Food insecurity impacts vulnerable populations such as minorities greatly. UTA is home to a diverse community, so it is important that UTA provides equitable access to resources that give minority students the same opportunity to educational success.

## Problem analysis

Food insecurity exists in every county in America. Minorities experience higher rates of food insecurity because of systematic racism and other social determinants. Food insecurity affects 1 in 3 college students in the U.S. 58% are low-income students, 40% are working-class students, 38% are international students, 37% are African American students, and 34% are Hispanic or Latino. On the UTA campus, 51.6% of students surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity. Experiencing food insecurity is closely associated with systematic racial injustice and discrimination. There are levels of food insecurity varying from mild, moderate, to severe. Mild food insecurity occurs when a student worries about their ability to obtain food. If a student compromises the quality of food or reduce their meals, they are experiencing moderate food insecurity. Experiencing hunger means the student faces severe food insecurity. Hunger is an uncomfortable physical sensation when the body is not receiving the appropriate nutrients. Ever since the pandemic, the problem has only increased because of job layoffs, inflation, quarantine etc. According to USDA data, the number of food-insecure households in the United States fell to a 20-year low of 10.5 percent in 2019. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic began, this number increased to 20%. Food insecurity affects 13 percent of Texas households, or one in every eight Texans. This translates to 1.4 million Texas families and roughly 4 million people. Texas is one of the nine states where food insecurity is higher than the national average. So just imagine the food insecurity rates for students who are struggling to pay tuition and then having to pay for food, housing, clothes, and other necessities. Multiple studies researching student health and food insecurity follow a common trend, the high prevalence rates of food insecurity span across many universities around the world. Nutrition affects a student's thinking skills, behaviour, and health. Inadequate macro-and micro-nutrients interfere with the student's learning process and concentration. Without the ability to concentrate, it is more difficult for students to focus, understand assignments, and stay on track with schedules. The lack of nutrition impairs a student's learning abilities, resulting in poor academic performance. Studies with the most representative samples of the college student population found that minimal intake of healthy foods and higher intakes of unhealthy foods were prominent in food-insecure students. The physiological outcomes of consuming poor-quality food and stressing when you will eat next take a toll on how a student function and thinks. Many students become more irritable from the lack of food. Changes in mood and physical health can lead to mental health problems such as depression. A change in mood can hinder students from doing their best in class. Students who deal with FI are more likely to experience poor performance in college. Food deprivation is reflected in a student's low GPA and is associated with higher chances of dropping out and not continuing school. Without on-campus resources, students would find it difficult to adjust to the new college environment. It is important that college students are introduced and supported by a safe and healthy college environment so that they adopt healthy behaviours that they can continue after college.

## Stakeholder analysis

The main stakeholder in my action plan is college students. UTA college students are the target group the Mav Pantry is interested in. More than half of the students surveyed have experienced any type of food insecurity. Students' goal in college is to graduate and prepare for their future careers. To help students reach their academic goals, the on-campus Mav Pantry provides equitable access to a food pantry providing free food and essential items. Students without reliable transportation no longer have to worry about far distances from nutritious food. The pantry is run by students who advocate for their peers, building unity within the community. Because many students are on social media, the Mav Pantry created an Instagram where students can stay up to date on the Mav Pantry efforts and the resources they provide. They also host events on campus to encourage students to use the Pantry or support it. Most first-time college students are starting a new chapter in their life and on their own for the first time as well. College can be very expensive with assisted funding like grants, scholarships, and loans. Most of the time, students' full tuition does not get covered and they must come out of pocket. Therefore, paying for school, a place to live, transportation, and food can be a lot. Unfortunately, some students just don't have enough for food and sometimes sacrifice eating for other necessities. With the use of technology becoming more modern, the use of social media to engage with students may be effective in increasing utilization of the pantry. Students may be motivated to use the pantry because they are able to get the food they need for free. By making items free, the pantry alleviates some of the student's financial stress. Student parents also have the benefit of getting free items they need for their child.

## Determinant Analysis

Determinants that hinder students from getting the nutrition they need are lack of time, low-income or poor financial status, familial responsibilities, the location of fresh food and other groceries, no transportation, stress from school, and many more factors. Systematic racial injustice is a significant social factor resulting in higher rates of food insecurity within minority populations. Inadequate nutrition intake is associated with poorer academic performance, poor mental health, and a lower likelihood of graduating. Food insecurity, like many other social determinants of health, is a multi-faceted source of numerous causes. Food insecurity is influenced not only by poverty, but also by overlapping challenges such as affordable housing, social withdrawal, location, and chronic health conditions. Households with low resources are frequently forced to make uncomfortable compromises among food and other requirements. Also, access to healthy foods can be difficult in low-income or rural areas. But food insecurity isn't always caused by poverty, there are above the poverty line who are struggling with food insecurity as well. This is because local circumstances such as high cost of living, high levels of unemployment, housing instability, and high-income tax burdens have a significant impact on food security. Which can make purchasing food as a last resort for some people like college students. A variety of social and environmental determinants influence a person's experience with FI. Students who are more likely to undergo FI include low-income families, male students, and those who do not live with their parents. Students with financial aid are more likely to become food insecure. This problem could be due to rising tuition, insufficient financial aid, and a high cost of living. In addition to the changing economic climate, financial problems faced by the students worsen their FI conditions as they cannot afford to purchase the right amounts of nutritious foods to live healthily and do well in their studies. Many students will forgo the quality and variety of food because of time restraints, far distance from grocery stores, and financial responsibilities. Students sometimes feel that they do not have enough time to get a healthy meal between classes. Living far away from a grocery store is a significant problem for those without transportation and disabilities. Some students prioritize financial responsibilities such as rent and bills before the quality of food they consume. International students experience unique financial burdens compared to American students. Following the U.S Citizenship and Immigration policies, international students seeking to study in the United States must go through a process that

evaluates financial ability to attain an F-1 or M-1 Student Visa and are required to have adequate finances to support them for the duration of their program of study. The increasing cost of tuition and other necessary expenses create financial burdens for international students, mainly because of limited job opportunities outside of a work-study with the university. Financial hardships, living in a new environment, and being away from parents only intensify the severity of food insecurity for students.

## **Mandates for action**

Since the pantry is fairly new, there hasn't been many mandates put in place but there is a few. The first would be Kroger donating \$250,000 to the UTA Mav Pantry. This was a huge step for the pantry because this was going to kick off the things needed for the pantry regarding shelves, tables, desks, supplies etc. The donation from Kroger could also lead to a partnership with them since they do have the resources for the pantry and could become a reliable source for donations. Another mandate would be partnering up with the Tarrant Food Bank. They have been a great contribution to the Maverick Pantry because of all the donations they have received from them. Whenever Tarrant County has a food drive, they have several pounds of donations left over and aren't able to store it at their facility. So, all of the left-over donations are brought to the Maverick Pantry. The last mandate put in place would be having a food drive during public health week. Every year during the first full week of April, APHA brings communities around the country together to celebrate National Public Health Week as a time to acknowledge the accomplishments of public health and to emphasize problems that are critical to our country's improvement. UTA contributes by hosting events involving public health issues that the community is currently experiencing. The Maverick Pantry takes advantage of this time because it is an amazing opportunity to promote the pantry and shine a light on what they stand for. It is also a great opportunity to promote food drives and donations.

## **Existing capacity for action**

The Mav Pantry needs a delivery service for donated goods and purchased goods to the pantry site. It is difficult for only two members of the Mav Pantry to leave the pantry and pick up donations or goods from the store. There is only so much two people can fit in one car and it is not an efficient strategy for the long run as the pantry evolves. A better delivery system is needed to be more effective. Delivery and transportation of goods is an extra resource the pantry is willing to invest in. If the pantry were to partner with Tarrant County Food Bank or Kroger, they could be used as a source of transportation. Both organizations can provide trucks to transport donated and purchased goods to the pantry site. Another gap that has developed in the pantry is the limited waiting area for student shoppers. There are only two chairs for students in the waiting area, which can fill up fast on a busy day. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the pantry was only able to have a few people in the pantry at a time which was working in the fall semester of 2021. But as the world is healing of COVID-19 and less restrictions are being needed due to vaccinations being issued, there is going to be more people coming into the pantry. With having appointments for cap and gown rentals, professional development closet, and in-store shoppers, there needs to be bigger waiting area, so students aren't having to wait outside or stand inside. By adding a few more chairs to the waiting area could make a huge difference in the students' experience at the pantry.

## **Project partners and governance**

There are two people in charge of the Maverick Pantry and they are Jessica Sanchez and Alexis Perez. These two women have helped create an amazing organization from scratch and will continue to build the pantry to be the best it can be. They have accumulated numerous supporters and partners for the pantry. Alexis and Jessica saw that there was an issue on campus regarding food insecurities and knew

that there needed to be resource for students to have access to on campus. In order to do so, they had to get the UTA board to agree and provide the funding. They decided to put together a survey for UTA students to take and the results showed that 51.6% of students were experiencing food insecurity. That is over half of the student population, and this stood out the UTA board. They knew that this could affect the students academically which would look discouraging on their part and the students. Jessica and Alexis were able to get the pantry approved and now it is up and running on the UTA campus. They have been able to reach the Arlington community for help with donations which is amazing thing to see the people of the community helping the students of UTA. Residents stop by nearly every day with donations and express how great of a place it is for students. Alexis and Jessica will be a great asset in helping to decrease food insecurities in the UTA community.

## Goal & Objectives

The Mav Pantry's goal is to alleviate food insecurity within the UTA Maverick community. Their objectives focus on education support and advocacy. The objectives partially follow the SMART goal outline. The Mav Pantry goals target a specific target group, with the capabilities to track and measure usage, the plan is achievable with supporting data from other campaigns and interventions and is relevant to the objective.

Currently, the main objectives of the Mav Pantry are to increase the diversity of the clients visiting the pantry. They plan to contact different ethnic associations in UTA to increase awareness about the Pantry and food insecurity. Another objective is to gain access to the grant by Kroger and to purchase fresh produce. They are also waiting on Tarrant County Food Bank to send fresh produce to stock the Pantry. These objectives are feasible, acceptable, and fit with their mission and goal.

## Intervention research

There were previous interventions similar to the Pantry but initiated by a religiously affiliated organization. Student feedback showed reluctance to interact with them due to their affiliation, even when they provide weekly warm lunches to all visitors with no cost to the visitors. They are also sustained by local support and donations to continue providing lunches. This information was used to convince the creation of the Mav Pantry because of its non- religious affiliation, and to garner the mutual support of other local organizations like Mission Arlington and Tarrant County Food Bank. There was not a noticeable tracking system or action plan from the religious organization towards food insecurity, so the Mav Pantry utilized google sheets to track visitors and be used by all staff. It has also been observed that population education and support has been a protective factor against rising food insecurity.

## Strategy mix

The Pantry's strategy mix is summarized by their mission statement of Advocacy Educate and Support. The Mav Pantry caters to the UTA student population, who are known to be avid social media users on platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. They created and maintained an Instagram page to showcase and inform followers about the Pantry, their products and services, and other informative posts. They also use it inform followers about different dishes they can make with the products from the Pantry. The Pantry regularly interact with the local community in the form of tabling events, community outreach and education, and attending different panels and conferences. By having an active presence in the community, they increased awareness and garner support from organization leaders and participants. The interactions also help notify the Pantry of potential events to support and continue spreading awareness.

We believe that they have merit because the target population (college students) are the more likely population to experience food insecurity, especially those who come from low- income families, are minorities, and international students. UTA is a commuter school, with historically lower tuition fees compared to other 4-year colleges in the DFW metroplex, have one of the most diverse student populations, and have many international students. These factors can be inferred a significant portion of the student population comes from economically lower income families, are people of colour, and or have little to no external financial support. By creating a food pantry with no religious ties, specific to only UTA students, and educating the student population that it is free to them to use, it will decrease the social barriers that would prevent students experiencing food insecurity from seeking them. Their strategies are supported by previous research and has potential to grow and serve all students experiencing food insecurity. They also have the capabilities to refer students to job opportunities to financially support themselves.



## Activity planning

Activity/Task	Method	Who	When
National Nutrition campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using technological tools such as Adobe to create flyers for campaign</li> <li>- Using Instagram and social media platforms to share flyers</li> </ul>	Iris	March
Pump up the Food Pantry event- raising 1,000lbs of donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing flyers throughout campus</li> <li>- Organizing and collecting donations</li> </ul>	Anthony	February
Community outreach and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tabling events</li> <li>- In-classroom education bringing awareness to food insecurity</li> <li>- Social media presence</li> </ul>	Iris, Anthony, Araya	January- April
Serving students who seek pantry services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referring students to appropriate student affair resources</li> <li>- Providing cap and gown rental services</li> <li>- Providing nutritious foods and essential products</li> </ul>	Iris, Anthony, Araya	January- April

## Project Schedule- timelines

Strategy/Activity	Accountable Officer/s	Duration	Months (adjust timeframe as necessary)											
			Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Project strategy implementation / finalisation activities</b>														
Tabling events	Anthony, Araya, Iris	2x a month	X	X	X	X								
In-classroom education	Anthony	Once			X									
National Nutrition Month Campaign	Iris	2 months		X	X									
Pump up the Food Pantry event	Anthony, Araya, Iris	2 months			X	X								
Earth Day Thrifting event	Iris	1 month				X								
Organizing donations & student information	Anthony, Araya, Iris	Everyday	X	X	X	X	X							
Managing social media account	Anthony, Araya, Iris	Everyday	X	X	X	X	X							
Serving students	Anthony, Araya, Iris	Everyday	X	X	X	X	X							



