

JMU DEI & Social Justice Sustainability Submission

James Madison University

Essay:

Introduction

James Madison University Dining is proudly ranked among the top ten by the Princeton Review—a distinction earned through more than just high-quality food, exceptional service, and outstanding customer experiences. At JMU Dining, we prioritize amplifying the voices of our student community, ensuring their needs and concerns remain at the heart of everything we do.

In recent years, addressing food insecurity and minimizing food waste have emerged as pressing priorities for JMU students. A 2024 survey conducted by Swipe Out Hunger, found that more than 770,000 students accessed food support options on the 351 U.S. college and university campuses that participated in the survey. The JMU Dining team has actively worked to address these challenges. Our sustainability team, consisting of a full-time Sustainability Coordinator and two student interns, has spearheaded numerous initiatives to tackle these issues head-on. Through food donation programs, strategic partnerships, and student-focused outreach events, we are taking meaningful steps to combat food insecurity and reduce waste.

We believe this commitment presents a unique opportunity to create lasting social impact. We recognize that social justice and food insecurity are deeply interconnected and there is an imminent need to empower communities through ensuring

access to healthy food. By championing a sustainable approach to addressing food insecurity, JMU Dining strives to build a stronger, more resilient campus community.

The Strategy

JMU Dining has fostered a strong relationship with the University's Campus Food Pantry. The Campus Food Pantry conducts surveys and studies to identify the needs of students. Through the data-driven insight the Campus Pantry provides us, we are able to effectively respond to the needs of our students. This allows us to directly connect our programming to students' needs. JMU Dining provides the Campus Food Pantry with 2,000 meal vouchers each semester. The vouchers are then allocated to students that qualify for the vouchers through a screening questionnaire.

Throughout the academic semester, JMU Dining holds several swipe drive events through a program called Dukes Punch for Dukes. This acts as a gateway for students to donate extra meal swipes directly to the Campus Food Pantry. In a similar fashion to the other meal voucher donations, the Campus Food Pantry allocates the punches to students facing food insecurity.

Students are also able to donate meal swipes any time at check-out registers at three locations on campus. Cashiers at Mr. Chips, Market 64, and Festival work with students who want to donate swipes to the Campus Food Pantry by allowing students to swipe their JMU JACards at the register. These donations are totaled and given to the Pantry to disperse.

One Dining location on campus also provides the Campus Food Pantry with weekly produce donations. Through another location, the Pantry is given an allowance by JMU Dining to order frozen meals and hygiene products.

Our Panera Bread location on campus facilitates a program called "End of Day Dough-Nations." This program requires surplus bread to be made each day so that several different community partners can receive donations. Aligning our initiatives to simultaneously support the local community is always something we try to prioritize as data indicates that 18.4 percent of Harrisonburg residents are food insecure (VCE 2022). Supported charities in the Harrisonburg area include Sentara Rockingham Emergency Department, The Pantry at JMU, JMU's pantry located at the Music Building, and several local churches.

Once a semester, JMU Dining hosts a promotional cooking class in collaboration with The Campus Pantry. Our Innovation and Education Chef conducts a demonstration of how to cook Pantry staples. Through this event, we are able to effectively educate on cooking best practices while also highlighting the various offerings associated with The Campus Food Pantry.

At the start of the 2024 Fall semester, one of our two residential dining halls (E-Hall) partnered with the student-led Food Recovery Network chapter on campus to begin weekly food recoveries. This program utilizes student volunteers to conduct recoveries and deliveries of surplus food.

In addition to recovering food on a weekly basis, all JMU Dining locations across campus contribute a large donation to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank at the end of each semester.

Overall Impact of Program

Evidence of Environmental Sustainability:

The initiatives undertaken by JMU Dining emphasize a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. Key evidence includes:

Food Recovery Efforts: The partnership with the Food Recovery Network has enabled weekly food recoveries at E-Hall, resulting in the diversion of food getting wasted. This effort significantly reduces the environmental impact of food waste and ensures that surplus food is redirected to those in need.

Donations to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank: At the end of Fall Semester 2024, JMU Dining donated 2,661 pounds of fresh food, equivalent to 2,217 meals, to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. This substantial contribution demonstrates the program's effectiveness in reducing food waste and supporting community food security.

Evidence of Social Responsibility:

JMU Dining's initiatives reflect a deep sense of social responsibility, with tangible benefits for the campus community and beyond.

Student Engagement and Education: The promotional cooking classes, held in collaboration with The Campus Food Pantry, educate on cooking best practices and the nutritional value of Pantry staples. These classes empower students with valuable skills and knowledge, fostering self-sufficiency and nutritional awareness.

Community Support: The strong relationship with the Campus Food Pantry and the active involvement of students in donation swipe drives and volunteer efforts highlight the program's commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive campus community. By addressing food insecurity and promoting sustainability, JMU Dining contributes to the overall well-being of students and the broader community.

Creativity and Innovation

Being able to facilitate robust programming would not be possible without our connections across campus and our volunteer network. By teaming up with The Campus Pantry and Food Recovery Network chapter on campus, we have tapped into a source of creativity and expertise from a diverse group of stakeholders. These partnerships have allowed us to create and implement stable and innovative initiatives to address food insecurity. We rely on student volunteers to conduct our weekly food recoveries. The greater Harrisonburg community also plays an integral role in our initiatives, as many community volunteers serve as a vital connector to community members facing food insecurity.

Low Start-Up Resource Costs, High Return

JMU Dining's programming to address food insecurity is designed to be both cost-effective and highly impactful. By strategically leveraging surplus food from locations across campus, we can implement these initiatives with minimal start-up resources. This approach not only reduces food waste but also maximizes the utility of existing resources, ensuring that efforts contribute significantly to addressing food insecurity.

Utilizing Surplus Food: Our commitment to utilizing surplus food as a primary resource in our programming allows us to make a substantial impact without incurring additional costs. This efficient use of resources ensures that nutritional meals are made accessible to those facing food insecurity, while simultaneously minimizing waste.

The high return on investment for our programming is evident in several key areas:

Increased Support for Students: The allocation of meal vouchers each semester provides direct support to students experiencing food insecurity, ensuring they have access to essential meals without additional financial strain.

Enhanced Sustainability: By repurposing surplus food, we effectively reduce waste and promote sustainability aligning with our broader environmental goals.

Community Engagement: The low-cost, high-impact nature of our initiatives encourages greater student participation and community involvement. Programs like Dukes Punch for Dukes empower students to contribute to the cause, fostering a sense of collective responsibility.

Educational Outreach: The promotional cooking classes, conducted in collaboration with The Campus Pantry, offer valuable education on cooking with Pantry staples, further enhancing the return on investment by equipping students with lifelong skills and knowledge.

By utilizing surplus food and maintaining low start-up costs, JMU Dining's programming achieves significant social and environmental impact, demonstrating that meaningful change can be both resource-efficient and highly effective.

Applicability of Initiative

JMU Dining's initiatives are designed to be highly applicable and adaptable across various settings. A key aspect of our approach is the recognition that food surplus is inevitable in all operations. By putting robust systems in place to allocate surplus food to people as the top priority, we can address food insecurity effectively while promoting sustainability.

Leveraging Surplus Food:

Food surplus is a common occurrence in dining operations, and JMU Dining has harnessed this reality to create impactful initiatives. By redirecting surplus food from our dining facilities, we ensure that excess food is utilized to its fullest potential. This approach not only minimizes food waste but also aligns with our commitment to social responsibility.

Implementing Systems for Surplus Allocation:

Our programming includes several systems that effectively allocate surplus food:

Meal Voucher Distribution: By providing 2,000 meal vouchers each semester, we ensure that surplus food is directed to students facing food insecurity. This system allows us to make the most of available resources while addressing critical needs within our campus community.

Dukes Punch for Dukes: This program enables students to donate their extra meal swipes to the Campus Food Pantry, further utilizing surplus food to support peers in need. The simplicity and accessibility of this system encourages widespread participation and amplifies the program's impact.

Weekly Food Recoveries: The partnership with the Food Recovery Network facilitates weekly food recoveries at E-Hall, ensuring that surplus food is consistently redirected to those who need it most. This systematic approach not only reduces waste but also provides a reliable source of food for students facing food insecurity.

Creating a Replicable Model:

The effectiveness and low start-up costs of our programming make it highly replicable in other settings. By focusing on the allocation of surplus food, JMU Dining has developed a model that can be easily adapted by other institutions and organizations seeking to address food insecurity and practice social responsibility.

Maximizing Social Impact:

By prioritizing the allocation of surplus food to people, JMU Dining's programming creates a significant social impact. Our initiatives not only provide essential support to students in need but also foster a culture of sustainability and social responsibility within our campus community.

Effectiveness of Measurement

Our initiatives are measured using spreadsheet software and historical data. We keep our records online, so that we may compare data points in the future. These resources allow us to evaluate the utilization and need of our programs. This helps us recognize trends and decipher if there may be a need to expand an initiative.

Education, Outreach, and Marketing/Communications

We utilize various forms of outreach collateral to communicate our initiatives that address food insecurity. We keep a sustainability page up to date on our website to showcase our initiatives. Utilizing our social media platforms is another effective way to reach our student population and obtain feedback. Our communications department makes an effort to network with the Student Government Association on campus to deliver information and provide a space for student voice. Throughout our locations on campus, digital screens, flyers, signs, and banners serve as impactful promotional material to increase student awareness of initiatives. By combining online outreach and on-the-ground visibility, we can facilitate an informed and involved experience among our population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our strong commitment to prioritize food security is complemented by effective programming that prioritizes surplus food for human consumption before composting. While we strive to limit surplus food, we have established initiatives to combat food insecurity both on campus and within the local community. Additionally, our ongoing collaboration with the Campus Food Pantry and other partners provides valuable insights into the needs of students and the broader community, ensuring that our efforts are informed by data-driven strategies and regular assessments. Research suggests that food insecurity among college students may result in higher stress, depression, lack of focus, poor sleep quality, and lower grade point averages, among other negative effects. This means that we have a real opportunity to make a social impact and create a more inclusive community.

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