

# CREATING A LONGSTANDING FOOD & SUPPLY PANTRY LED BY STUDENTS OF COLOR

By: Jaeda Nelson, Megan Verrall, Andrea Guillen-Hernandez, Bianca Sanchez, Kenia Morales, and Matthew Braganza

President's United to Solve Hunger (PUSH) is an international initiative across several university campuses. A chapter is started when the President (hence the name) of the university signs a commitment to prioritizing food and nutrition security.

## WHAT IS PUSH

Ethan Bergman, Health Sciences Department Chair, helped bring PUSH to campus in 2015. Normally, faculty & staff spearhead food insecurity initiatives at their chapter schools—many with their own centers and dedicated staff. At CWU; however, PUSH is student-run and student-initiated. Our PUSH committee is made up of professors, student officers, and several faculty/staff from different offices. These meetings are to inform them of our progress and brainstorm solutions (Dining, SLICE, ASCWU, Career Services, Case Management, and more). Contact us to be invited to our meetings!

## WILDCAT PANTRY

The Wildcat Pantry serves as an opportunity for CWU members to get groceries on a daily basis. This resource **does not** require an application. We do not measure peoples "worthiness" of accessing this resource because **we believe food, hygiene products, and other basic needs is a right everyone is deserving of.**

The pantry is **staffed by student volunteers**. Student volunteers attend a 45 minute training facilitated by a PUSH officer(s). Volunteers have the opportunity to become a **Wildcat Pantry Lead**. Leads take on a supervisor role to help transition newer volunteers. We hold quarterly trainings and are open to scheduling 1:1s— message us on Instagram or email wildcatpantry@cwu.edu.

When guests enter the pantry, volunteers ask for a CWU ID number. This number is **ONLY** to track **how many** people enter the pantry. An ID number is identifiable enough for us to know the rate of **reoccurring guests** without accessing personal information. We will not deny anyone if they aren't comfortable signing in, but this data helps us get access to funding and increase awareness on campus.

Before opening the centralized pantry in the Library, students were responsible for maintaining 8 pantries all over campus on a weekly basis in addition to club meetings, campus wide events, participation in national conferences, and so on. This was not a sustainable practice for many reasons. **PUSH is a student club, yet this work has become a project beyond our capacity and responsibilities as full-time students (especially unpaid and during our free time).** To focus our efforts on the new library location, PUSH only maintains the Library and Black Hall locations. Some faculty/staff in other locations (such as ASCWU and Shaw) have been kind enough to take on this task and continue the pantry resource in their building.

## MISSIONS & VALUES

Due to the challenges of covid and a more diversified team, the missions and values of PUSH needed to be reimaged.

**Much of our work is rooted in justice, activism, and advocacy.**

## EDUCATIONAL FINDINGS

- 41% of four-year students identified as food insecure (Stebleton, 2020)
- 10% of college students have gone without eating (1 in 10) (Stebleton, 2020)
- Students of color report higher rates of food insecurity compared to white students (Stebleton, 2020)
- Students who are food insecure experience **significantly higher rates** of depression, loneliness, and anxiety. They have lower self-esteem and lower grade-point averages and are more likely to withdraw from the university before earning their degrees (Stringer 2020).

## A LOOK INTO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Manage and Oversee the Pantries** (Library & Black Hall)
  - Recruit volunteers
  - Train volunteers
  - Inventory, restocking
  - Create signage and marketing
  - Develop procedures and practices
- **Organize Drives & Collaborations**
  - Campus-wide events, Dining donation bins
  - Increase funding
- **Maintain Club status**
  - Host events, acquire members
  - Attend ICA meetings
- **Create Awareness**
  - Email outreach, social media
  - SOURCE
  - Faculty/staff meetings

## OUR PROGRESS

In 106 days of being open...

- 665 guests have used this resource
- 6,578 items have been taken
- 53 trained student volunteers

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### STRENGTHS

- Non-invasive resource
- Provides daily volunteer opportunities
- Building a sense of belonging and inclusivity on campus
- Community-wide drives & fundraising
- Progress student officers made with having to take sole ownership over pantry management
- Student officers have autonomy and agency to build and manage the Library pantry
- Instagram platform increased PUSH's social presence
- Innovative solutions and problem-solving
- Dining "Wildcat Harvest" collaboration provides meals to the Black Hall & Library Pantry locations Monday-Thursday

### CHALLENGES

- Staffing issues— lack of coverage, a small percent of trained students volunteer
- Demand is higher than supply— lack of variety and constant low inventory
- Negative perception due to lack of stock, limited hours, and general stigma
- Relying on donations
- Barriers to accessing the foundation account to purchase items for the pantry
- The existing workload is too high— persistent burnout among the officer team
- Finding two advisors for the 2022-2023 academic year
- CWU Staff and faculty limited capacity to contribute regularly

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Hiring a full-time pantry coordinator
- Support and buy-in from the off-campus community
- The Library pantry becomes a resource hub— bridging initiatives together (SNAP applications, reducing utility expenses, etc.)
- Increasing awareness and involvement among faculty, staff, and administration
- Major donor programs and applying for grants
- Up to date website, Central Today, and monthly newsletters
- Communication networks between student officers and CWU faculty, staff, and office partners

### THREATS

- Continuous dependence on volunteers— student capacity varies throughout the year (midterms, holiday breaks, finals, extracurriculars, personal life, and so on) and academic obligations should come first
- Confusion and lack of awareness regarding PUSH as a club, the pantries, and how it is led
- The community may not be as interested as needed
- Student officers balancing student club requirements, university life, and pantry duties

## CONCLUSION

The PUSH officers have been privileged enough to earn the trust of faculty, staff, and administration to spearhead this initiative. As students we can put the student experience at the forefront of what we do— methods that resonate with the current culture and values of the student body. AND there comes a time when our voices and efforts as students are limited. The several challenges we face are beyond our authority and capacity. This slows our progress, and our effectiveness, and minimizes our impact. The Wildcat Pantry is a resource that needs the support and involvement of everyone. We hope SOURCE can be a call to action. A call to action to reduce the labor on students and increase the contributions of faculty, staff, and administrators on a consistent and long-term level.

Food insecurity has been linked to lower GPAs, poor health, and housing instability as well as poor performance in school putting students who are food insecure at a higher risk of not completing their studies (Payne- Sturges, Et al, 2018). Investing in non-invasive food and supply pantries at CWU acts as a direct resource for students to combat the difficult transition of university life; thus, improving their well-being and sense of belonging. In addition, positioning them so they may get the most out of their CWU experience professionally, and personally.

On April 22nd, University President Jim Wohlpart sent a mass email to all individuals of the CWU community containing an update on the **"Vision and Mission Statements"** of the University as a whole. As outlined in the message, CWU seeks to act as a model for equity and belonging and to nurture culturally sustaining practices for students. Our work in PUSH, and more particularly in the Wildcat Pantry, adds to this, in a way that adjoins all the efforts of all those in the campus community. By continually providing a welcoming space for individuals to access, we as a team can help foster a more equitable learning environment, and in turn, create an elevated sense of belonging. The partnerships across the University that we've built and sustained in our efforts will continue to help us in our initiatives, and also coincides with the Mission of fostering authenticity in our partnerships. While the Vision and Mission Statement of the University have yet to be solidified, it can be assured that the goodwill of our efforts will align with it, for a welcoming and equitable institution of higher education.

internal

external

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- **10%** of college students have gone without eating (1 in 10) (Stebbleton, 2020)
- Students of color report higher rates of food insecurity compared to white students (Stebbleton, 2020)
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