

Brain Food Project with EASe at the Center for Academic Support

A Proposal for a Pilot and Implementation

In the Center for Academic Support

At Los Medanos College

by

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In order to ensure equity by making certain that students, regardless of income or level of food security, have access to the same support and opportunities for success, we propose this project, which is designed 1) to help increase awareness and use of the support services available to students in the Center for Academic Support, 2) to increase the number of students served in the Center, and 3) ultimately to help the growing number of students at LMC who are experiencing food insecurities.

We intend to meet these goals of increased usage and reduced food insecurity through the Brain Food with EASe program, which will be implemented by the staff at the Center for Academic Support.

Rationale

Food and housing insecurity among community college students threatens their academic achievement and success. A 2015 report in *Hungry and Homeless in College* indicated that about half of community college students were food insecure; however, a later report found that two in three students are food insecureⁱ.

For our purposes, the following definitions of “food insecurity” run from *marginal food security* through *low food security* and *very low food security*.

- *Marginal food insecurity* includes “anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house [with] little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.”ⁱⁱ
- *Low food security* includes “reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet [with] little or no indication of reduced food intake.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- *Very low food security* includes “reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.”^{iv}

Research shows that those students who face insecurities are more likely to receive a lower GPA and are more likely to fail in classes, suggesting that food insecurity can ultimately impede a student’s academic progress. A study completed at CUNY found that 21.8% of students who reported any health or social problems also confirmed that the problem affected their academic achievement,^v and of students who reported an effect on their college education, 81% indicated that hunger or housing problems resulted in poor performance in their courses. As a result, 55% did not buy textbooks; 53% reported missing a class; and, most notably, 54% missed study sessions.^{vi}

In line with the CUNY study, a survey conducted by the Hope Survey Board found that 55% of 4CD students are food insecure and that the populations most affected are African-American students, students ages 21-25, and students with children.^{vii} In considering the findings of the CUNY study, the likelihood that food insecure students at LMC struggle to achieve academic success is certain, so reducing that insecurity will ensure greater equity and academic success among diverse, at-risk populations.

The Center for Academic Support is an ideal place to implement the Brain Food with EASe program because it is already a comfortable, welcoming space that focuses on community and supporting LMC students' academic success through access to computers, peer tutors for multiple subjects, and reading and writing consultants who help reinforce students' reading and writing skills. Coupling this support with regular access to nutritional food items for all students will allow them to stay on campus and study longer without being distracted by hunger or leaving the Center to find something to eat, which would interrupt their time to study with peer tutors or consultants. We already see evidence of this phenomenon during the Study Slams held in the Center before Finals Week. During the course of each Study Slam, the Center provides pizza (and other food) and snacks throughout the evening while students work with peer tutors and reading and writing consultants. Of 130 individual students who use the services during the Study Slam, 90% stay for a total length of 3 hours, thus increasing their chance of success during finals.

Student Life recognizes the significant impact that food insecurity has on students' lives and educational success, and while proud of the initial efforts to address this challenge, more work is required to fully address this significant need.

The Food Pantry at LMC opened in March, 2017 and since then has served 110 individuals over nearly 500 cumulative visits. However, the LMC Food Pantry currently has limited hours, being open three days and two evenings per week, for a total of just 16 hours. Therefore, expanding operating hours is a prime need for the LMC pantry. To that end, the Food Pantry is committed to finding opportunities to make food more accessible to students through "pop-ups" in the quad and partnerships with centers and programs on campus. The Food Pantry believes these additional efforts will expand awareness of the resource for students and reduce the stigma that exists for many students in accessing the pantry. Collaborating with the Brain Food Project will provide the opportunity for the Food Pantry to partner with the Center for Academic Support in piloting the regular delivery of food to students in a facility other than the Food Pantry office.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of the Center for Academic Support in the equity work that we do on campus. If the Center can provide comprehensive wraparound services that include the Brain Food project, this will only increase students' incentives to use high impact campus services that truly work to increase student success.

Method

The Brain Food Project™ (BFP) is defined as a holistic implementation that provides food (or other needs-based items, such as school supplies) to students during learning assistance sessions and is supported by a training system called EASe (Empathy, Awareness, & Sensitivity for equity). The Brain Food Project with EASe is specifically designed for use in learning assistance programs, like the ones offered through the Center for Academic Support, thus making it a positive addition to campuses with or without food pantries. EASe is the

training methodology that supports the implementation of the BFP and student equity by training tutors, supplemental instruction (SI) leaders, faculty, staff, and administration to successfully interact with students. However, the BFP with EASe works differently in that it provides prepackaged food items such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, string cheese, drinkable yogurt, apple chips, fresh fruit, crackers, and the like, which are to be eaten in the Center while students are learning. Using the Brain Food with EASe program can significantly improve attendance for tutoring and supplemental instruction.

One of the more significant features of EASe training is its holistic approach to offering food to students in a way that reduces the stigma of accepting it. Instead of students accepting a handout, they will be accepting something that has been integrated into the culture of the Center for Academic Support. This aligns with Los Medanos's Community of Respect campaign by creating an environment of inclusion through compassion and empathy. The EASe training will ensure that when students are offered food, they will not feel singled out, which will make it easier for them to accept and should lead to them spending more time in the Center, using resources that will improve their chances of academic success.

Pilot Study and Implementation

The information provided qualifies the need for the BFP on campus. Thus this proposal seeks funding for implementation of the Brain Food Project (BFP) in the Center and subsequent funding for the certification and training provided by BFP with EASe (Empathy, Awareness & Sensitivity for equity) certification and training. For Spring 2018, if funded, we will conduct a pilot study to provide packaged food items such as yogurts, fresh and dried fruit, cheese, etc., to be eaten while working with a tutor or studying in the Center. The pilot will help us determine the most effective way to integrate BFP with current Center operations and allow us to study the impact of the project by:

- determining any increase in the number of students using our services
- collecting data on use how many students accept food
- observing time frame and duration of visits to see if students visit more often and study longer

Information garnered from the pilot will provide data that will give us a better picture of cost and needs so that hopefully we can expand to full implementation in Fall 2018. Eventually, this project could be expanded to other interested areas on campus, such as the math lab.

The success of the pilot and full project will be bolstered by training which will be provided by the EASe methodology. This training will help ensure that all staff members, faculty, tutors, and front desk staff successfully interact with students using culturally inclusive practices to create equity and uplift lives while demonstrating compassion and empathy.

The two costs to begin this program are the BFP w/EASe training and food items for one semester.

I. Training

- a. Funding for BFP with EASe provided by the founders of the program, which includes 5 to 7 hours of face-to-face training at LMC and ongoing training, will cost approximately \$2,400, which includes certification.
- b. Costs for initial training for key faculty, staff, and tutors will be approximately \$2,300.

II. Cost of food

- a. Until more information is gathered from the pilot, it is difficult to know the real cost of food. The founders of the BFP recommend \$4,000 per 2,000 unduplicated students. In Spring 2017, the Center reported 2,088 unduplicated students. However, by partnering with the Food Pantry to purchase food items at a lower cost, we anticipate our initial food cost to be approximately \$3,000.

III. Institutionalizing Support

- a. As the program gets underway, we will expand awareness regarding food insecurity and campus resources throughout student services and faculty through crossover between the Center and Food Pantry, as well as through additional awareness campaigns to be designed and implemented during the course of the pilot.
- b. During the pilot, we will collect data and research the impact of food insecurity and student success as we use the BFP with EASe. The mechanism for doing this is part of the training and follow-up with the BFP.
- c. We will explore additional grants and institutional funding to move the program from a pilot to an institutionalized campus effort among other learning centers.

Since using the Brain Food Project with EASe will enhance staff and faculty's ability to use inclusive practices with learning strategy pedagogy, funding for the initial pilot and long-term sustainability for this initiative can be made possible through strategic partnerships with the Food Pantry; Foundation; and the Equity, BSI, and 3SP committees. Addressing the food insecurity on campus in this way will allow us to better serve all our students and continue the tradition of excellence, access, and equity that have been part of the Center since we opened in 2000.

ⁱ Wisconsin Hope Lab (2017). (<http://www.wihopelab.com/publications/Hungry-and-Homeless-in-College-Report.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ "Definitions of Food Security," *USDA.gov* (2017). (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid

^v Mercado, V. (2017) *Food and Housing Insecurity among Students at a Community College District*, p. 26.
(<http://sfsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/196520/AS352017EDDM47.pdf?sequence=3>)

^{vi} Ibid, p.27.

^{vii} Hope Survey Board presentation (2017), p. 5.

This request seeks funds to implement the Brain Food Project (BFP) in the Center for Academic Support (CAS). If granted, funds will be used to purchase prepackaged nutritional food items to provide to students while studying.

The CAS is an ideal place to implement this project because it is already a comfortable, welcoming space that focuses on community and supporting LMC students' academic success through access to computers, peer tutors for multiple subjects, and reading and writing consultants who help reinforce students' reading and writing skills. Coupling this support with regular access to nutritional food items will allow students to stay on campus and study longer without being distracted by hunger or leaving the Center to find something to eat, which would interrupt their time to study with peer tutors or consultants. Research shows that those students who face food insecurities are more likely to receive a lower GPA and are more likely to fail in classes, suggesting that food insecurity can impede a student's academic progress. Considering the findings, the likelihood that food insecure students at LMC struggle to achieve academic success is certain, so reducing this will ensure greater equity and academic success among diverse, at-risk populations.

The BFP is supported by a training system called EASe (Empathy, Awareness, & Sensitivity for equity), and is specifically designed for use in learning assistance programs. The BFP with EASe works by providing food items such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, string cheese, drinkable yogurt, apple chips, fresh fruit, the BFP can significantly improve attendance for tutoring and supplemental instruction ultimately improving students' chances of success.

One of the more significant features of EASe training is its holistic approach to offering food to students in a way that reduces the stigma of accepting it. Instead of students accepting a handout, they will be accepting something that has been integrated into the culture of the Center for Academic Support. This aligns with the colleges' Community of Respect campaign and the Foundation's mission of supporting student success by connecting students with a resource that supports both academic and nutritional needs.