



UMB News

Pantry Helps UMB Fight Students' Food Insecurity

March 2, 2022 | By [Lou Cortina](#)

Students strolling through the [University of Maryland School of Nursing](#) (UMSON) lobby Feb. 23 were greeted with friendly hellos and the opportunity to pick up a free bag of food courtesy of the [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) (UMB) Student Food Pantry. The large eco-friendly bags donated by IKEA were filled with cans of tuna, crackers, boxes of raisins, water bottles, and fruit cups. Students could pick up an apple crisp snack or a box of cake mix if they wanted, too.



Jolé Ruff, left, and Beatriz Mendez, right, at a UMB Food Pantry pop-up pantry event on Feb. 23.

This pop-up event was the fifth of its kind since September 2021, when the UMB Student Food Pantry opened to combat food insecurity among students, a problem that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic factors such as inflation. The pop-ups, held at the SMC Campus Center and individual UMB school sites, are a way to provide supplies and spread awareness about the pantry and its resources.

Nivedita Hegdekar, MSL, of the [University of Maryland Graduate School](#) was among the students who stopped by the UMSON lobby, where 50 bags were distributed in one hour by **Jolé Ruff, MSW**, coordinator, Intercultural Leadership and Engagement, Division of Student Affairs; **Beatriz Mendez**, a [University of Maryland School of Social Work](#) student and UMB Student Food Pantry intern; and **Cailin Yasunaga, MEd**, program coordinator, Department of Family and Community Health, UMSON.

"The pantry is a really important thing because food insecurity is something that a lot of students are struggling with," said Hegdekar, a PhD candidate who is a former president of the University Student Government Association. "And we need it especially now during a pandemic and with food prices and

grocery bills going up because of inflation.

"I hope the University does more to provide food for students, because this is a really good initiative, and I enjoy taking advantage of it," she added.

Taking Requests

Students were directed to a flyer with a QR code that launched their smartphones to the [UMB Food Pantry request form](#), which allows students to pick out free items from categories such as oats and grains; soups, beans, and proteins; canned fruits and vegetables; pastas and sauces; sugar and spices; beverages; and grab-and-go snacks. The items are bagged, and students can pick up their orders Monday through Thursday at the SMC Campus Center. Lockers were recently installed that provide students with a confidential and convenient way to pick up their pantry requests during campus center operating hours, which includes evenings and weekends.

"The UMB Student Food Pantry is relatively new, so these pop-up events help us spread the word," Mendez said. "We want students to know that these food items are accessible to them. Let's say you forget your lunch, or if you just need a snack, then you can grab something from the pantry."

Said Ruff: "Sometimes students will say, 'There is someone else who needs this food more than I do,' so they might be hesitant to take a bag of food. But we really just want them to know that the pantry is for all students, regardless of need. When they hear that, they are more open to receiving the bags."

Combating Food Insecurity

Feeding America, a nonprofit that works with food banks to supply pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters, defines food insecurity as “an individual’s or group’s inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life.” In a fall 2020 survey of UMB students, 29 percent of respondents indicated they were worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more; 22 percent indicated the food they bought didn’t last and they didn’t have money to get more; and 33 percent indicated they couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.

Patty Alvarez, PhD, MS, assistant vice president, Student Affairs, says this data informed UMB’s efforts, which were focused on sharing information about food resources with students and creating the food pantry.

“Throughout the 2021-2022 academic year, the UMB Student Food Pantry has been supporting students through pop-up events held across UMB where meal kits are distributed,” Alvarez said. “In addition, since January 2022, over 100 student requests for food have been fulfilled, and students can use this confidential resource as often as they would like.

“Our partnership with the Maryland Food Bank, monetary gifts from individuals, financial support from UMB’s University Student Government Association, and in-kind contributions from local companies enable us to provide these food resources to our students,” she added. “The University wants to continue to address food insecurity to assist students in achieving their goals.”

The UMB Student Food Pantry works in collaboration with programs such as the Hungry Harvest and Baltimore Gift Economy markets at the UMB Community Engagement Center; the University of Maryland Medical Center Farmers Market; local Maryland Food Bank locations; and UMBconnect, a resource students can use to find events around campus in their area of interest and filter for ones that also provide food.

In addition to the Maryland Food Bank, the pantry, which is located in the Student Affairs suites on the third floor of the SMC Campus Center, is being stocked with the help of companies such as Pompeian, H&S Bakery, McCormick & Company, IKEA, and Domino Foods. At the Feb. 23 pop-up event, Ruff displayed some of the corporate donations including olive oil from Pompeian, sugar from Domino, and spices from McCormick.

Individuals have pitched in, too, making donations through the Office of Philanthropy’s [UMB Student Food Insecurity and Emergency Fund](#) . Donors can make a [one-time annual](#)  or [payroll deduction](#)  gift, ensuring that the University’s students can continue to fuel their bodies and minds.

Learn about UMB food access resources [at this link](#).

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