Financial uncertainty is a hallmark of the college experience for many – if not most – students. Perhaps for this reason, hunger is a particularly resounding issue among them. With inexpensive Ramen noodles and mac-and-cheese as time-honored staples of the college student’s pantry, the call to share even meager resources among the estimated 615,000 people in Orange County who are at risk of hunger each month stirs many students to action. To meet this most fundamental and universal of human needs, Cal State Fullerton students engage with the community in a number of ways.

Like the parable of the hearty broth that results when first one, then many villagers contribute to a communal pot from their own humble stores of ingredients, our students’ contributions to local food banks generate significant cumulative effects that nourish the community. Not the least of these impacts is their own increased awareness of and compassionate response to the realities of hunger right here in Orange County. By organizing food drives, sorting and packing groceries at the two local food banks, serving at soup kitchens and homeless shelters, students become deeply conscious of human needs and of the power of engaging with others to address those needs.

COURSE-RELATED STRATEGIES

Another example of impact is the synergy that occurs when service-learning students are deployed to conduct team projects that relate to classroom studies. Business Writing Professor Breta Hedges received a Call to Service - Move to Action mini-grant from the Center for Internships & Community Engagement to support the ongoing partnership she has developed with Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. Hedges developed a service-learning component for her Business Writing class, Advanced Business Communication: A Case Analysis Approach, in spring 2011. Students work in teams to research and propose a solution to a business issue, while also completing 20 hours of service at the site. The ongoing partnership with Second Harvest provides students a living laboratory where they can practice the communication techniques they study in the classroom.

Some recent team projects have generated specific impact for Second Harvest and its clients.

**Backpack Outreach:** With demand for food donations always outstripping the supplies on hand, efficiency is critically important to the food bank operation. Even a simple detail such as how much peanut butter a family needs for their kids’ lunch bags can be crucial when multiplied across several clients and an entire school year. Business Writing students identified the need for client input and developed a client satisfaction survey. Second Harvest now regularly surveys their backpack outreach clients for feedback and incorporates this strategic feedback into their operations, increasing the program’s overall efficiency and ensuring that resources are used to maximum value.

**Safety:** Second Harvest more than doubled the size of its physical plant when it moved from a 52,000 square-foot orange packing warehouse in Orange to a 121,000 square-foot building at the former El Toro Marine Base. The organization’s safety committee asked Business Writing students to contribute to the transition by developing an appropriate evacuation plan. The team researched safety regulations and codes to produce a comprehensive evacuation plan for the warehouse facility along with recommendations such as adding eye wash stations and first aid kits. The results are the facility’s improved and compliant safety conditions.

Former CSUF intern Cristina St. Amant ’10 Health Sciences is now program services coordinator for Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County.

Students in Professor Breta Hedges’ Advanced Business Communication class researched OSHA standards and other policies to inform their development of an evacuation plan and safety procedures for Second Harvest Food Bank’s new warehouse.
**Social Media:** Like most charities, Second Harvest raises funds from individual donors who send in monthly or annual checks. Most of its promotional materials were aligned with this traditional model of philanthropy. The organization invited Business Writing students to focus on the fastest-growing trend in giving: ePhilanthropy. The team added features like blogs, a Facebook page and Twitter messaging to Second Harvest's webpage, and recruited interns as bloggers and tweeters to keep the material fresh. These updated strategies reap several key results, including generating more volunteers and donations; providing compelling anecdotes for readers to better understand hunger in Orange County; increased donations; and younger donors.

Students from other majors including communications, psychology, sociology, and health science complete 120-hour internships at Second Harvest. One of these is Cristina St. Amant, who first came to Second Harvest to complete an internship for her health science major. As a committed partner in engaging students, the organization was willing to invest Christina with considerable responsibility for its new food stamp outreach program. Fully engaged with the clients served by the program, she decided to stay in touch even after her internship was completed. When a position opened up, she applied. Now as Second Harvest's Program Services Coordinator, she sees the impact that service has on the interns who work with her at the food bank.

Project leaders from the Volunteer & Service Center gleaned 27 bags of ripe oranges from the grove at the entrance to campus and donated them to the Orange County Food Bank and Fullerton Interfaith Emergency Service to be included in grocery boxes and meals distributed to families in need.

"The Orange County Food Bank appreciates the generous support of CSUF students and staff who donated food to feed people's bodies, books to feed their imaginations, and their time by visiting the food bank and assembling food boxes for our neighbors at risk of going to bed hungry at night.”

– Mark Lowry, Director, Orange County Food Bank
Second Harvest received a 2011 Community Engagement Award for Stellar Support of Students in recognition of their outstanding partnership with service-learning students and faculty.

**VOLUNTEER STRATEGIES**

Another major ingredient in Cal State Fullerton’s stone soup is the voluntary service that students provide through the Volunteer & Service Center, various clubs, organizations, campus departments, and on their own. The VSC’s Hunger Coalition and other student-led food drives held throughout the year generate thousands of pounds of food for both Second Harvest and the Orange County Food Bank. Students also volunteer to glean local fields to reap fresh produce, sort and pack boxes of emergency groceries at food banks and serve at local soup kitchens. Both the students and the community are nourished by these wide-ranging efforts and by the lifelong lessons in humanity that flow from them.

Thanks to the faculty who integrate these experiences into their classrooms and into field experiences for their students; thanks to the coordinating efforts of Volunteer & Service Center project leaders, student volunteers and club members; and thanks to the partner agencies who are so willing to work with the campus; Cal State Fullerton is a true partner in Orange County’s efforts to alleviate hunger.

“Volunteer & Service Center volunteers come not because it is a job, but because they are socially conscious individuals who truly want to better themselves and serve those in need. And their intensity is evident as they packed more than 3,200 food boxes and collected nearly 3,000 food items this year alone.”

– Andre Gaithe, Food Bank Supervisor
Orange County Food Bank

Top and opposite page: The Volunteer & Service Center’s Hunger Coalition team members volunteer twice a semester to pack grocery boxes for distribution to Orange County’s hungry. Images: Mike Park