

UC SANTA BARBARA

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George Foulsham

UCSB's Associated Students to Launch Campus's First Food Bank

A second-year student faces a difficult decision: buying a textbook required for class, or buying food for dinner. Her budget's so tight right now, she can't afford both.

Unfortunately, this scenario is becoming too common at UC Santa Barbara, according to Associated Students (AS), the governing body for students. So, AS leaders are addressing the issue by launching the campus's first Food Bank. Starting in mid-April, undergraduate and graduate students will be able to pick up nonperishable food and other items on the third floor of the campus's University Center

"It's hard to believe that some of our students are in such circumstances that they lack basic necessities, but it is an unfortunate reality," said Michael Young, UCSB's vice chancellor for student affairs. "These are very difficult times -- even for UCSB students. The Associated Students Food Bank is a much-needed service and just another example of how caring UCSB students are. They watch out for one another and support one another. We have a strong sense of community here at UCSB that inspires students to be generous to one another, as well as generous to people across the world and at home."

Paul Monge-Rodriguez, AS president, said it's not just a coincidence that AS is starting the Food Bank now. "This is closely tied to the budgetary circumstances with UC and the state," Monge-Rodriguez said.

Early in the 2010-11 academic year, AS leaders examined which issues were affecting the well-being of the student body. They had heard about isolated incidents on campus in which students were approaching counselors and advisers about their struggles to provide for their own basic needs, especially food.

"Once we started to see that this was a campuswide trend, we decided to do a survey," said Monge-Rodriguez. "We wanted to assess the degree of hunger UCSB students are facing. About 2,000 students participated in the survey, far more than usual for our surveys. Students were responding in the hundreds that they were skipping meals on a daily basis to be able to afford school expenses."

AS's student services program acted quickly to address the issue. "With student fee increases and budget cuts, some students can't even afford books," said Guadalupe Cruz, AS commissioner of student services. "We realized that there was something that student services could do to help. We had seen food banks starting up at UCLA and UC Davis. We decided it would be appropriate to have one here."

Students who provide valid UCSB identification will be able to shop anonymously for nonperishable items such as canned vegetables, soup, pasta, cereal, and canned meats. "We're also accepting donations of things like toiletries -- shampoo, toothpaste, mouthwash -- essentials that students need every day," Cruz said.

There will be two distribution days each week -- Tuesday and Wednesday, from 7:30 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. The Food Bank will be staffed initially by volunteers, though AS eventually hopes to have enough funding to hire two part-time students to handle inventory. "Not only will we be providing services for students, we also will be creating jobs for the student body," Cruz said.

The students have placed collection bins at high-traffic areas around campus, and the response from faculty, staff, and other students has been very good. Long-term, however, the goal is to apply to be a member of the Santa Barbara Food Bank, which gathers food from various grocery outlets around Santa Barbara.

"That would give us access to the food options they provide," Monge-Rodriguez said. "The university recommended that we begin this way, with nonperishable items."

Once we have an efficient distribution system in place, they will consider letting us distribute items such as fresh produce, fruits, and dairy. That's the goal -- to move to the fresh goods."

Anyone from the Santa Barbara area who is interested in making financial contributions to the Food Bank can do so online, via a PayPal account, at <https://foodbank.as.ucsb.edu/>.

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† Top photo: Paul Monge-Rodriguez and Guadalupe Cruz of Associated Students display some of the canned goods collected for the AS Food Bank.

Photo: George Foulsham, Office of Public Affairs, UCSB

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draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.