

Fuel Your Success: Transforming Student Nutrition

A Multi-Level Health Education Initiative to Improve Student Food and Nutrition Security

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Introduction

- Food insecurity** is defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire foods in socially acceptable ways (USDA, 2023).
- In the 2019–2020 academic year, 12.2% of graduate students (400,000) in the United States and Puerto Rico experienced food insecurity (Cameron et al., 2021).

Food insecurity negatively affects college students' physical health, mental health, and academic performance. (Loofbourrow & Scherr, 2023).

- A needs assessment among Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH) students, including a photomapping exercise and survey of 347 enrolled students, identified limited food availability, affordability and accessibility, as well as a need for greater nutrition education within the School.

Objectives

Contribute to the food and nutrition security of GSPH students through educational interventions.

Promote structural and institutional policy changes that support the food and nutrition security of GSPH students.

Practice Setting

- The supervised practice was conducted within the **Office of Student Affairs (OSA)** at the GSPH of the University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus.
- The OSA's mission is to contribute to students' holistic development through the planning, delivery, and systematic evaluation of high-quality student services.
- Its goal is to foster an academic and well-being environment that promotes students' adjustment to university life, personal development, and active participation in the university and society.
- The initiative primarily targeted GSPH students while also aiming to benefit faculty, staff, and the broader Medical Sciences Campus community.

References

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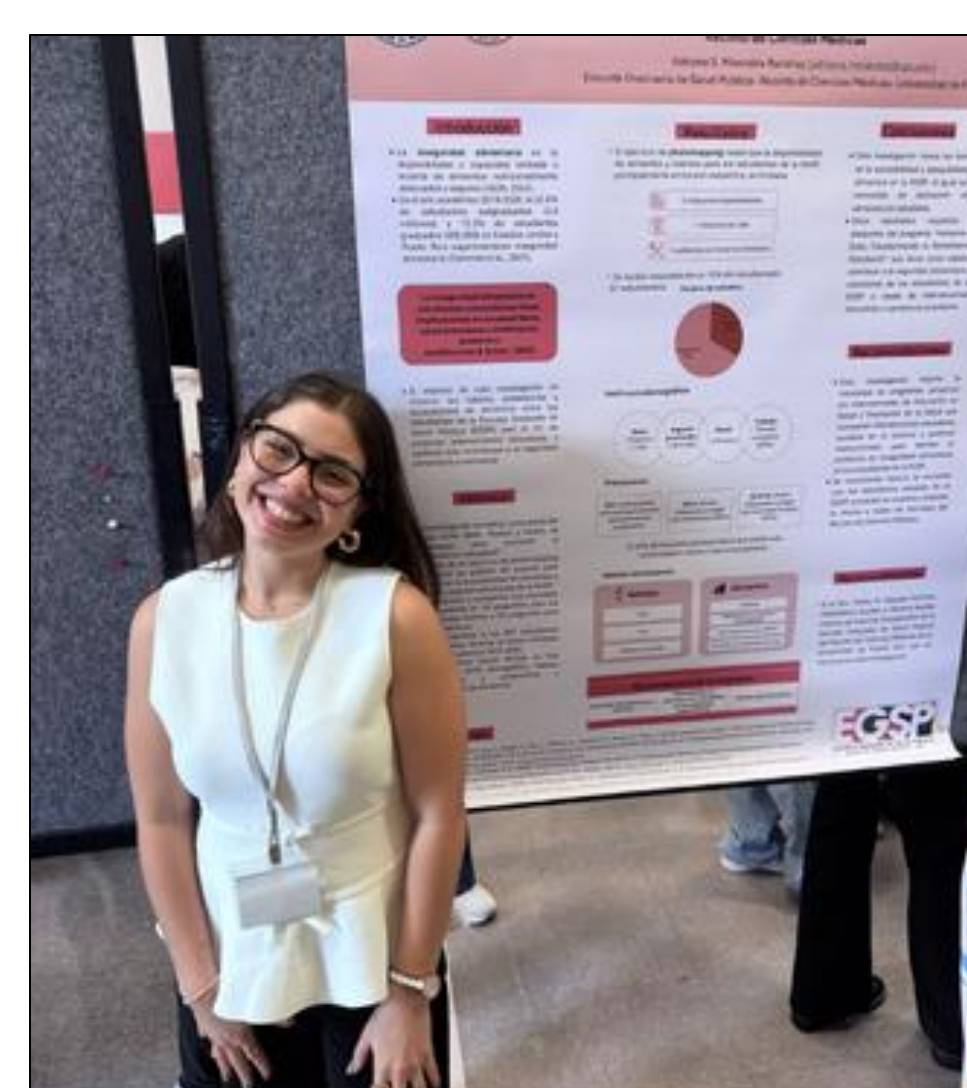
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Practicum Activities

- Health Communication Campaign:** A health communication campaign promoting healthy snacking was developed and disseminated through educational materials displayed on **posters, social media platforms, and institutional television screens**. The social media campaign reached **2,600 people within the first 36 hours** of publication.



- Community Mobilization Activities:** Community mobilization activities included a virtual community meeting with **16 participants** and the development of a written plan to guide future initiatives addressing food and nutrition insecurity and support project sustainability.
- Healthy Environments:** Food supplier contracts were reviewed to develop recommendations for improving **affordability, operating hours, and healthier options**. Collaboration with the vending machine provider resulted in healthier snack and beverage options being added to **at least 15 of 35 available spaces**.
- Research Dissemination:** Findings from the needs assessment were disseminated through a presentation at the **45th Annual Research and Education Forum** and a scientific abstract submitted to the **Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal**.



- Health Advocacy:** Activities included an **opinion column in a local newspaper** and a **radio interview on food insecurity among Puerto Rican college students**, extending the project's reach to broader audiences.



Key Takeaways

- Project strategies and activities **contributed to addressing food and nutrition insecurity** among GSPH students.
- The OSA provided a supportive setting for continuing the initiative and developing future Health Education and Health Promotion activities.
- Limited personnel, student turnover, and reliance on external partners were identified as challenges to long-term sustainability.
- The supervised practice experience demonstrated the value of **translating academic knowledge into community-based action** to address real-world challenges.
- Innovative and multifaceted approaches** are needed to advance Health Education and Health Promotion beyond conventional methods.

Recommendations

- Collaboration** among OSA, student organizations, faculty, staff, and alumni is essential to support continuity.
- Establishing a **dedicated committee or student support role** may strengthen program sustainability and implementation.

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