



Eastern Connecticut State University Junior Alex Perez is a volunteer at Shawn's cupboard on campus. Here, she shows a box made by volunteers for suggestions. Below, ECSU senior Shawn Dousis, who created 'Shawn's Cupboard,' puts away a box of donated potato chips. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

College kids also need help



Food insecurity is an issue for some students at ECSU

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WILLIMANTIC — Many think of college students as affluent youngsters with cash — usually their parents' — to spare.

However, a study conducted by Eastern Connecticut State University researchers proves many college students don't even have enough money to properly feed themselves.

A growing food pantry called "Shawn's Cupboard" on the Eastern campus hopes to reduce those needs.

Shawn Dousis, a senior elementary education student from East Lyme, is the pantry's namesake.

Dousis is the president of the Campus Ministry, the organization that jump-started the project.

The cupboard has actually existed on campus for several years, although it was under-advertised and underused.

Geography professor Patrick Vitale helped boost the cup-

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'Shawn's Cupboard' battles ECSU food insecurity

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board's prevalence on campus.

Vitale teaches a "Geography of Food" course. As part of the class, he investigated the prevalence of food insecurity at Eastern. "Many have an illusory idea of universities as ivory towers that are free from society's problems," Vitale said. "This has never been true and is very unhelpful for students, universities and society as a whole."

His students developed surveys, conducted interviews and utilized existing research to better understand the issue.

Their studies found 15 percent out of 842 Eastern students surveyed have what the U.S. Department of Agriculture defines as "very low" food security.

"Very low" food security means they have multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. Additionally, 13 percent taking the survey went an entire day without eating in the past year.

Vitale said it is likely the survey underrepresents food insecurity because students who are struggling to access food are also more likely to not be on campus to take the survey due to work and family commitments.

The studies and interviews also looked at how food insecurity affects academic performance.



The food pantry for Eastern Connecticut State University students is chock full of simple, easy breakfast items — some of the more popular food items food-insecure students enjoy. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

Food insecurity correlates with negative impacts on grades, graduation rates and participation in campus life.

"Patrick's class was key in finding the statistics we needed to prove our students suffered with food insecurity and grabbed the university's attention," Dousis said.

Since the study was completed, advertising around the university has increased and traffic into the cupboard has also picked up.

Father Larry Lapointe and Nancy Brennan of the Campus Ministry, as well as Kim Silcox, director of the Center for Community Engagement, also helped get the pantry off the ground.

The cupboard is located at the Knight House, 2 Windham St. Extension, and is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday; 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday; 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thursday; and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday.

Food donations are accepted at the cupboard during its operating hours or at the following locations: Newman Hall from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday; the Center for Community Engagement at 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; Webb Hall from 2:45 to 3:45 p.m. Tuesday; and 1:45 to 3:45 p.m. Thursday.

Shawn's Cupboard can also be reached on Facebook.

Follow Claire Galvin on Twitter - @CGalvinTC.